

# **DRAFT**

## **Agenda**

**Bay Consortium Workforce Development Board XIII**  
**Labor Market Committee**  
**January 6, 2021**  
**11:00 AM**

- I. Call to Order
- II. Roll Call
- III. Public Input
- IV. Approval of October 15, 2020 Minutes
- V. New Business
  - A. Eligible Training Provider – Cyber Bytes Academy
- VI. Old Business
  - A. Strategic Plan
- VII. Other topics for discussion
- VIII. Adjournment

**Bay Consortium Workforce Development Board, Inc.**  
**Labor Market Committee Meeting**  
**Draft Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, October 15, 2020**  
**2:00 p.m.**

The Labor Market Committee met Thursday, October 15, 2020 via Zoom.

**Call to Order:** Melvin Carter called the Labor Market meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

**Roll Call:** Present was Melvin Carter, Meg Bohmke, and Jean Fraysse. Not present was David Mann, Greg Moon, and Louis Belcher. In addition, was present Jackie Davis, Steven Golas, and Katlyn Moss. A quorum was present.

**Approval of Minutes:** The minutes from the January 8, 2020 meeting were tabled.

**Public Input:** There was no public input.

**New Business:** Katlyn Moss presented members with MAB Institute for the Eligible Training Provider List. Jean Fraysse asked if the Board ever received feedback on the training providers, and Jackie Davis stated that case managers received all feedback on the training providers and passed it along to staff. A motion was made to approve MAB Institute and send to the full Board for approval, which was seconded and approved. Steven Golas reviewed the Incumbent Worker Policy with members. He noted that it had been updated to realign definitions with the state policy. Jean Fraysse asked questions about employee eligibility criteria. A motion was made to approve the Incumbent Worker Policy and send to the Board for approval, which was seconded and approved. Steven Golas reviewed the Individual Training Account Policy with members, noting that the timelines and employment increase had been updated, as well as the O-Net link. A motion was made to approve the Individual Training Account Policy and send to the Board for approval, which was seconded and approved. Steven Golas reviewed the Unlikely to Return to Previous Occupation or Industry Policy with members. He noted that it was updated to include revisions due to COVID-19. A motion was made to approve the Unlikely to Return to Previous Occupation or Industry Policy and send to the Board for approval, which was seconded and approved. Jackie Davis also discussed Chair and Vice Chair nominations with members. Jean Fraysse was elected Chair and Melvin Carter was nominated as Vice-Chair.

**Old Business:** Jackie Davis went over the strategic priorities. Jean Fraysse discussed having a meeting with a few Board members and partners to create a common message and marketing materials. Meg Bohmke suggested reaching out to areas who are similar in size to find out how they handle funding and area management.

**Other Topics:** Jackie Davis mentioned that the next Board meeting would take place on November 4, 2020 at 11 a.m. via Zoom. She noted that the State would like a new local plan created and would be providing money for a new strategic plan to be created, in which they had contracted with Lori Strumpf to write. Meg Bohmke asked how Lori Strumpf had been procured and how much money was budgeted. Jackie Davis let her know that \$12,000 was budgeted for

the creation of the plans, and another workforce area had procured Lori Strumpf and they were using the same procurement.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Katlyn Moss

***STRATEGIC PLAN  
JANUARY 2021 THROUGH JUNE 2022***

***DRAFT FOR REVIEW***



**VIRGINIA  
CAREER WORKS**

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BAY CONSORTIUM REGION

Developed by the Bay Consortium Workforce Development Board's  
Strategic Planning Team

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## PLANNING TEAM MEMBERS

Lamont Brown  
President, Great Fredericksburg Black Chamber of Commerce

Jackie Davis  
Director, Bay Consortium WDB

Jean Fraysse  
WDB Labor Market Committee Chair

Angela Freeman  
Fredericksburg Business Development Manager, CLEO

Josh Gemerek  
Bay Aging Senior Vice President, Housing, WDB Development Committee Chair

Steve Goodall  
Westrock HR Manager, WDB Performance & Accountability Committee Chair

Charles Kolakowski,  
Northampton County Administrator, CLEO

Ken Knull,  
WDB Vice Chair, Yankee Point Marina

Lewis Lawrence  
Executive Director, Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission

Kevin Marshall  
Spotsylvania County Business Development Manager, CLEO

Dennis Parsons  
WDB Chair

Morgan Quicke  
Richmond County Administrator, CLEO Chair

Lori Strumpf, Facilitator  
Strumpf Associates: Center for Strategic Change

## *INTRODUCTION*

This document is the dynamic blueprint for the sustainability and growth of the region's talent pipeline. It is the product of intensive discussions by the Workforce Development Board's (WDB), Strategic Planning Committee members and feedback from staff, partners, and stakeholders. This plan lays the foundation for the organization's business plan, which will outline key actions and resources required to execute the objectives and strategies found in this plan.

During the latter part of 2020, the Bay WDB began the process of developing this strategic plan. With the shifting environment due to the pandemic of 2020, the board decided that developing a new set of goals and strategies for the next 3-years would not maintain relevancy. Instead, this plan has a time horizon of eighteen months, through June of 2022. The planning process included a Strategic Planning Committee made up of WDB members and other key community members. The Committee met four times to examine current labor market data that would inform strategic challenges over the next 18 months. Focus groups of businesses, WDB board members, partners, and job seekers were conducted to solicit their perceptions of what the workforce system's challenges might be over the next 15 to 18 months.

The Planning Committee is to be commended for their imagination, dedication, and perseverance throughout this process. We have a vision of where we want to be, an assessment of where we are now and a set of criteria to measure our progress. We have defined the values that describe how we do business and developed strategies and priorities to move us from where we are to where we want to be.

The strategic direction, goals and strategies included in this plan are a response to our understanding of what our customers value most about the workforce system, and current opportunities and challenges for offering a high-quality system of talent development to the area's businesses.

In response to stay-at-home orders across Virginia, our organization had to quickly shift to virtual operations and deal with other challenges to our capacity. We made the shift quickly and staff rapidly adapted and learned. With a fresh perspective on our mission, understanding of what we do well, and the environment in which we operate, the Bay WDB will pursue the following strategic priorities:

- Coalesce regionally to align workforce development with economic development efforts in each subregion.<sup>1</sup>
- Develop and deliver services to individuals to expand the talent pipeline of youth and adults.
- Develop and promote career pathways as a framework for moving individuals to sustainable wages.

A plan is of little value by itself. The strategic plan is a broad road map and there is still much to be determined relative to implementation. This document is the framework to continue our

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<sup>1</sup> The economic development system is designed to encourage business and job growth, while the workforce development system works to ensure individuals have the education, skills, and training needed to obtain jobs.

growth and ensure the sustainability of our high-performance, customer-focused organization that continues to benefit all stakeholders –our customers, our partners, and the community.



## ***DATA SNAPSHOTS***

The following data describes the area and is key to setting the context for the strategy contained in this plan.

**[to be inserted]**

## **ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW VISION, MISSION AND VALUES**

**VISION:** Ensure that LWDA13 has a viable and qualified workforce that is capable of sustaining existing businesses and enticing new businesses by meeting the needs of a vibrant and expanding employment base. [current]

**MISSION:** To achieve the purpose of WIOA and Virginia's strategic and operational vision and goals by providing comprehensive, customer-driven workforce services that connect employers, education providers, job seekers, workers, and youth.  
[current]

### **VALUE**

**PROPOSITION:** For discussion whether to create one. A value proposition refers to the value a company promises to deliver to customers should they choose to 'buy/receive' their product/services.

**CUSTOMERS:** Still in discussion. From our last meeting:  
Our **primary external customers are.....?**

Our primary *internal customer* is ....?

**ROLE:** These were not discussed specifically; Lori has crafted them based on discussions at the meetings. A role is a part the WDB wishes to play as an influencer. For discussion:

The Workforce Development Board will play several roles in furtherance of our vision and mission:

- We **lead and oversee** the workforce development system.
- We seek to **catalyze change** in the community to build effective partnerships.
- We will **strategically invest** in program innovation.
- We **act as a convener** of business and industry.

**ORGANIZATIONAL  
CORE VALUES [Lori did not see any current organizational values. Shall we develop  
them?]**

Our Common Values:

We believe in the following shared principles, beliefs and priorities:

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND GOALS**  
*Strategy 2021*

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES for January 2021 through June 2022**

- Coalesce regionally to align workforce development with economic development efforts in each subregion.<sup>2</sup>
- Develop and deliver services to individuals to expand the talent pipeline of youth and adults.
- Develop and promote career pathways as a framework for moving individuals to sustainable wages.

**STRATEGIC GOALS and KEY OBJECTIVES**

The following goals and objectives support the Bay WDB in accomplishing the priorities set for the next eighteen months.

**STRATEGIC GOAL 1: Tailor programs to the geographic diversity of the region to meet workforce needs**

**Key Strategies:**

- 1.1 Focus efforts to understand and provide solutions to businesses workforce needs for both small and large businesses.
- 1.2 Examine current targeted industry sectors<sup>3</sup> within the context of those identified by GoVA for alignment.
- 1.3 Work with a collection of businesses within the WDB's targeted industries to identify sustainable jobs that need an ongoing pipeline of qualified talent and jointly develop recruitment and training solutions.
- 1.4 Examine the Northern Neck Workforce Feasibility Study recommendations, prioritize and implement.
- 1.5 Take the lead in developing the process to submit a GoVA planning grant that then may lead to an implementation grant.

**Outcome(s):**

- GoVa Planning Grant submitted, and implementation grant awarded.
- 2 industry sector groups within the WDBs targeted industries have been convened and strategies to increase the talent pipeline are underway.

**STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Create, Support and Sustain a Talent Pipeline for the Bay WDB's Targeted Industries**

**Key Strategies:**

- 2.1 Develop and promote career pathways in targeted industries.

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<sup>2</sup> The economic development system is designed to encourage business and job growth, while the workforce development system works to ensure individuals have the education, skills, and training needed to obtain jobs.

<sup>3</sup> WDB's current targeted sectors are health care, IT, and logistics

- 2.2 Create a program for area high school students and their parents where businesses provide labor market information about jobs and careers available that do not require a 4-year college degree. Target existing pathway programs.
- 2.3 Design methods to reach out to underserved and underemployed<sup>4</sup> populations and to individuals in sectors with job losses to promote new training and job opportunities.
- 2.4 Articulate for businesses the paradigm shifts that are taking place about how people work and the workplace (i.e, support services for workers; longer term retention strategies; managing telework; work/life balance expectations of younger workers).
- 2.5 Maximize the efforts to collaborate and coordinate across the region.

***Outcome(s):***

- Increase the number of individuals obtaining jobs within the targeted industries.
- Increase the number of businesses that report that the workforce system consistently supplies the talent they need.
- Increase customer satisfaction.

**STRATEGIC GOAL 3: Sustain efforts to regularly forecast the talent needs of companies coming to the area and forthcoming openings in existing companies.**

***Key Strategies:***

- 3.1 Meet regularly with individuals in the region who are responsible for economic development to align the region’s economic development efforts with the workforce development system.
- 3.2 Continue to build strong linkages with post-secondary institutions to align programming with career pathways and future labor market demand.
- 3.3 Develop programs designed to train individuals for jobs that are 15 to 24 months out to ensure that employers have access to a skilled workforce that enables growth and increased productivity.
- 3.4 Create a campaign that markets the new training opportunities.

***Outcome(s):***

- Economic development forecasts have been identified for the region and for the sub-regions and have been prioritized.
- Partners have been convened and 2 new training programs have been developed to meet the forecasted needs.

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this plan, the underemployed are defined as the Virginia 2020 ALICE Report defines them: an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE represents ‘the growing number of households in our communities that do not earn enough to afford basic necessities’.

***OPERATING PRINCIPLES*** [For discussion. Lori has crafted these based on the discussions at the meetings]

**The following principles define the way the organization operates regarding the goals and strategies identified. The core processes employed by the organization to accomplish the goals will operate in the following fashion:**

- We collaborate to build strategic alliances around our goals, strategies, and tasks in which we are engaged.
- We align and maximize all resources required to carry out the strategic initiatives and seek to increase resources as required to achieve our mission.
- We deliver service excellence through our products, processes, and services.
- We challenge each other to achieve excellence.
- We hold ourselves accountable to each other and our customers.
- We create value by continuously assessing the outcomes and appropriateness of our programs and delivery systems.
- We continuously strengthen organizational effectiveness and build capacity.

**CURRENT Strategic Priorities [Discussion will be to decide if any of the objectives need to be folded into the new goals and strategies?]**

**Strategic Priority Number One: Funding – Performance and Accountability**

**Goal: Maximize funding opportunities to support strategic priorities**

Objectives:

1. Diversify streams of revenue to support the strategic priorities
2. Support professional grant writing to supplement existing revenue
3. Monitor funds for correlation with goals
4. Evaluation – Review Quarterly reports, annual budgets, and grant revenue

**Strategic Priority Number Two: Program Development and Implementation – One Stop**

**Goal: Lead workforce system of partners to provide comprehensive programs and services**

Objectives:

1. Provide responsive and innovative employer services
2. Provide responsive and innovative training and support services for jobseekers
3. Ensure WIOA compliance through technical assistance, tracking and documentation
4. Evaluation – Review quantity and quality of services provided to job seekers and employers

**Strategic Priority Number Three: Business and Community Engagement –Board Development**

**Goal: Enhance outreach and connectivity to business and community partners**

Objectives:

1. Enhance connections with regional employers through ongoing outreach and resource promotion
2. Enhance communication and collaboration with local elected officials
3. Coordinate and collaborate with community partners to promote and align resources of all stakeholders without duplicating services
4. Evaluation – Track business and community outreach by WDB

members and staff

**Strategic Priority Number Four: Marketing – Labor Market**

**Goal: Enhance visibility and viability of WDB as an important key community resource**

Objectives:

1. Align WDB marketing activities with VA Career Works initiative to support strategic priorities
2. Pursue sponsorships and partnerships to support program initiatives
3. Build rapport with industry and business community through ongoing needs assessment, resource promotion, and service enhancement
4. Evaluation – Institute feedback methods to capture community opinion and usage of workforce services

**SWOT Analysis**  
**BAY WIB STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**  
 As of 12.1.20

<b>Organizational/Workforce System Challenges</b>	<b>Organizational Strengths (to meeting the challenge)</b>	<b>Organizational Weaknesses (that create a barrier to addressing the challenge)</b>	<b>Opportunities (in addressing the challenge)</b>	<b>Threats (posed to the organization if the challenge is not addressed)</b>
<p>1. The challenge that the region's geographic diversity brings, requiring different strategies for each subarea that are under one umbrella to coalesce into a regional approach</p>	<p>Diversity is a strength</p>	<p>- Lack of resources to customize approaches to address regional and socio-economic diversity in the sub areas and then bring them together in a regional approach.</p> <p><b>The 2 weaknesses below apply to each of the 3 challenges identified in this SWOT:</b></p> <p>-Capacity with regard to staff, there is not enough operating funds to expand staff</p> <p>-Reliance on WIOA resources only, limiting what the money can be used for and limiting some innovation</p>	<p>-Identify different workforce needs of each subregion.</p> <p>-Rethink/add to the current targeted industries – health care, logistics, IT that applies more to the subregions</p> <p><b>The following opportunities applies to all of the challenges:</b></p> <p>-Diversify funding from localities, pursue grant opportunities, align ideas to funding sources already out there</p> <p>-Get more people 'on the bus'</p> <p>– Create more business/industry engagement (influencers)</p> <p>-Evaluate if training in the region is aligned to the certifications/skills required that employers need/value</p> <p>-Hire a staff person focused on businesses – make real connections to understand needs, current and future; map pathways in targeted</p>	
<p>2. Underemployment and how to envision 'promising jobs' to skill up a critical mass to then be attractive to bringing business to the region</p>	<p>Current relationships with economic development in parts of the region.</p>			



**SWOT Analysis**  
**BAY WIB STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**  
 As of 12.1.20

<p>3. The challenge of creating, supporting and training a talent pipeline to:        --make the area attractive to live and work, especially for professionals        --find new ways to think about career pathways        --address shifting demographics, including the outmigration pattern happening in some sub-areas of the region (people leaving permanently).        --retain and retrain workers losing jobs for other fields.</p>	<p>Training infrastructure is established</p>	<p>-Lack of connectivity between training – anticipated needs for growth in the region – and jobs to careers        -Lack of funding to build awareness among businesses and jobseekers of the resources available        - Not enough work-based learning opportunities</p>	<p>occupations; build awareness of resources        Strengthen connections to economic development        -Create methods to make the connection between jobs, careers and pathways more evident/transparent        -Map career pathways/mentor people along the way        -Serve less people more intensely        -Develop a sustainable entrepreneurship program that connects to capital        -Exam the racial inequalities/inequities as it applies workforce issues inclusive of socioeconomic.</p>	
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**REPORT  
To  
STRATEGIC PLANNING TEAM**

***FOCUS GROUP RESULTS***  
Of Business, JobSeekers, and Staff



**VIRGINIA  
CAREER WORKS**

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BAY CONSORTIUM REGION

*Conducted on:  
December 1, 2020*

Conducted by and Report Prepared by  
*Strumpf Associates: Center for Strategic Change*  
Washington, DC  
*Report Date: December 2, 2020*



## INTRODUCTION

On December 1, 2020, Strumpf Associates moderated three (3) focus groups. One consisted of business, one of jobseekers and one of partner staff collocated in centers. The focus groups were conducted as part of a comprehensive strategic planning process that the Workforce Development Board (WDB) began in November 2020. The agency has a Strategic Planning Team made up of staff, board members, and community partners charged with developing a strategic action plan meant to position the organization to thrive. Part of the process is to conduct an environmental analysis. Data for the environmental analysis includes feedback from customers on their experience with the organization. The Workforce Development Board and their Strategic Planning Team is committed to listening to the voice of partners, jobseekers, and businesses to capture customer's expectations and preferences.

Focus groups are a qualitative research methodology used to collect information. The method allows for more in-depth reporting by participants than a paper and pencil survey. Focus groups are not designed to reach a consensus among the participants. They are designed to collect information from each participant to identify trends.

## COMPOSITION AND PROCESS

The WDB Director invited individuals to the focus groups based on criteria provided by Strumpf Associates. An email letter of invitation was sent to each identified participant. **One (1) businessperson** participated in the business focus group, **two (2) jobseekers** participated in the jobseeker focus group and seven **(7) individuals representing five different partner agencies** participated in the staff focus group. Lori Strumpf facilitated the focus groups.

Individuals in the jobseeker focus group were provided a 25-dollar virtual gift certificate as appreciation for their participation.

The facilitator explained to all participants that their responses would remain anonymous. Participants were asked to agree not to repeat what others said in the focus group once the focus group was over. Participants were encouraged to be honest and forthright. Each focus group was conducted virtually and lasted between one hour and one and one-half hours.

The facilitator led participants through a formal and sequenced set of questions. In each focus groups the purpose was to identify what participants thought worked well with the workforce system and what opportunities there were to improve. In addition, the business and staff focus group participants were asked to address workforce challenges over the next 15 to 24 months.

The facilitator used probes around each question to clarify what each participant was saying. Their opinions provide insights on key areas that might be addressed strategically by the organization. This summary includes items that had general agreement (not necessarily a consensus) within the focus group. Throughout this report direct participant quotes are represented in *italics*.

## **SUMMARY FINDINGS**

### **BUSINESS FOCUS GROUP**

The participating business was a small business from Essex County. The business was a start-up that had opened in June. After introductions, the facilitator asked, *'what has worked well with your experience in the workforce system; what might be improved? Finally, as a business, what challenges are you facing over the next 12 to 24 for month?'* A summary of the responses is below.

#### ***WHAT WORKED ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE?***

- *Stephen has been very helpful. He has done amazing for me and helped me partner with everyone as I am new to the area.*
- *Being able to get an intern, an individual for work experience. It has not happened yet due to COVID, but it will. This is different than my experience in Hampton Roads where they did not have work experience in all areas of the region, and you had to pay 2,000 dollars for one. This area is miles ahead of Hampton Roads.*

#### ***WHAT HAS NOT WORKED AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT***

- *I have not been recognized as a new business here. There has been no formal welcome, no welcome packet. I got no recognition until I reached out to the Deputy County Executive.*
- *There are 13 new businesses here that opened during COVID. They are finally starting a Main Street Initiative but there still has not been a ribbon cutting or recognition for any of us.*
- *This is not something that did not work exactly. The person who was doing the prescreening for me for the Job Fair was very good, she was willing to work with me and got all my criteria. However, I went on Indeed myself and got 6-10 hits for my job opening and she got none from her efforts. Not sure if it was how the job description was written or what the issue was.*

#### **WORKFORCE CHALLENGES**

- *I am trying and ready to grow, to grow with equipment and employees. I am looking for some of the COVID resources that have been provided for businesses. I do not need a lot. They do not seem to be available to me because I started during COVID, not before.*

The facilitator asked a final question, *what is one thing the WDB could do for you as a business?*

- *Not for me so much, but I advocate for young people. So, I think they should have a committee of young people, especially young people interested in entrepreneurship. The facilitator then asked if he would talk to young adults about entrepreneurship and he said absolutely.*

### **JOBSEEKER FOCUS GROUP**

One of the focus group participants was an adult and one was a young adult. The adult had received resume assistance, help with their cover letter, and had been sent some job openings.



The young adult was enrolled in WIOA and received a work experience. The facilitator asked how they found out about the services. One was referred from another agency and the young adult met someone who worked in the programs and was referred.

### ***WHAT WORKS AND WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?***

After introductions, the facilitator the asked, *‘what worked well for you in the services you received?’* A summary of the responses is below.

- *I got a lot of experience during my work experience. The company offered me a job once I finish my school this Spring.*
- *It was good to have someone present while I worked on my resume. An actual person who I could ask if something sounded right, or how to write something.*
- *When I was in the program (youth), they got the participants together to share experiences and I liked that. I learned what other people were doing and that was interesting.*

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

Both participants reported having good experiences and that they found the services they received very helpful. A summary of improvement ideas is below.

- *The DSS program I am in requires that I participate at the center for 35 hours a week. That is a lot of time.*
- *Because of the pandemic, it is difficult to look for a job or work full time. I have kids at home doing remote learning and other concerns. This is not the fault of the program; it just is the environment we are in right now.*
- *I am looking to change careers so something that helps people reorient their careers and focuses on careers not just jobs.* The facilitator asked if anyone at the center had offered any career coaching or had a class on how to reinvent your career. The answer was no to both.
- *I have very few references, so even some volunteer work to build up references and to build a network would be helpful. Even if it doesn't bring in money, the references could be worth the time.*
- *The Center I went to does not have technological capability. I had a virtual interview one day and my computer had crashed. The center I used does not have zoom or a camera or microphones so I could not go there as a backup.*

### **PARTNER STAFF FOCUS GROUP**

#### ***WHAT WORKS AND WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?***

After introductions, the facilitator the asked, *‘what works well for you as a collocated staff person in the center and what could be improved?’* A summary of the responses is below.

#### ***What Works***

- *Strategic partnerships that are built at the center that let me better connect to business that can use the funds I have to offer.*

- Overall collaborate efforts and spirit of the people here.
- Getting referrals for Wagner Peyser services.
- It is a pleasure to work her with all the resources available to me and my clients.

### **Opportunities for Improvement**

- We need more partners here under one roof. I am looking forward to Social Services being here.
- The flyers in the resource room are not always up to date and not always stocked.
- One focus group participant was new and reported that there had been very little onboarding. I was just kind of thrown in with no time made for me to sit with staff from all the departments to get to know what they do. If there was better communication about the different departments, I would have a better idea of who to send customers to.
- A discussion ensued about how more and more people are coming to the system facing housing and food insecurity as well as other issues such as childcare. As one participant stated, we all need to be well versed in what other agencies do. But not only to refer people, but to help them to navigate, show them how to get to and use the service; help them fill out the application online if there is one. Things like that. As another participant said, we need to establish a clear path to help people get to them. (i.e., meaning get to another agency).
- One participant reported being on a variety of different groups that serve businesses. This participant reported that more and more businesses are understanding that some work will continue to be done remotely even after the pandemic is over. The focus group participant stated, many businesses do not know how to manage people remotely. We need to create something that helps them learn skills like how to manage people's time, productivity, etc. when they are working from home.
- We need to work on and strengthen relationships and outreach to businesses.

### **Challenges to the Workforce System**

The facilitator started this part of the discussion by stating, *there are many businesses with openings and many people unemployed. What do you think is the challenge in getting the talent supply to the right opening?* Responses included:

- Some people are scared to go to work because of the pandemic.
- Some people are waiting until their unemployment runs out. The facilitator asked if that was a lot of people. This participant stated: *I see this a lot in individuals who are under 25, may be living with parents and without a lot of urgency to get a job. And then those over 60, who have worked a long time and are on the fence about getting back to work and are enjoying being at home. The middle group mostly wants to find work.*
- Some people register in the system but do not put in their resume or past jobs, so it is really hard for me to know the right job match for them.
- Employers now want a skills list. They want to see what skills and certifications a person has right up front. They used to focus on soft skills. But in the last 6-months I have seen much more focus on wanting to know the technical skills and job-related skills an applicant has.

- One person stated, *I have helped people redo their resume to put their skills list at the top.* The facilitator asked if all case managers know to do this. The response was *I do not know.*

The discussion continued around other challenges that individuals and businesses are facing.

- *Childcare is also a big barrier with getting people into training right now as is transportation.*
- The topic of entrepreneurship came up. As one participant stated, *entrepreneurship can be an option and should always be on the table as an option. However, we need to change the definition so that individuals understand more about running the business, not just being a tradesperson, as example, on their own. And not everyone can be an entrepreneur. Not everyone can qualify for the loans available.* The facilitator asked focus group participants that currently interact with jobseekers if they were seeing individuals who were expressing interest in being an entrepreneur. The answer from those who see jobseekers was *not a lot.*
- A discussion ensued about what individuals need to be able to work from home, such as a computer and internet. The facilitator asked if employers are supplying those things. One focus group participant stated *it depends. If you are a 1099 worker then probably not. If you are a full-time employee, then possibly.* This led to a discussion of how job seekers do not understand the difference between the responsibilities of a 1099 worker and an employee. Almost everyone agreed with this statement. One suggestion was to create a pamphlet that explains the differences and the responsibilities of a 1099/Gig worker.
- *Access to the Internet and having devices is a problem.* A discussion ensued about other states and localities that have brought Internet access to all areas in a state or in a county and the need to do that in this region.
- *People have a lot of mental health issues right now. I was in the resource room working with someone and he started to cry, and then I started to cry. We need some resources to help us address these issues.* The facilitator provided an example of other centers that have been accepted as internship sites for University Schools of Social Work and then placed master's degree level individuals at the center for 20 hours or more. She asked if this would be a good idea. All agreed it would be and that individual could also help with testing, like Myers Briggs, that would then also help in career counseling.
- *People are really angry when they come into the center. They haven't gotten their benefits and they need to talk to someone.* This comment led another person to say, *We make people use the computer to sign in, which sometimes doesn't work, and when it does work people do not want to put what they need onto the form so they just say resource room.* Another stated, *Individuals may not always know what they need, like help with stress, or they do not want to disclose it on the form. The need to talk to somebody, a person, who can then get them to disclose what they may really need, such as food, in addition to a job.*

The Strategic Planning Team will use the information provided in this focus group to inform opportunities for improvement as part of the strategic plan.

**REPORT  
To  
STRATEGIC PLANNING TEAM**

***FOCUS GROUP RESULTS***  
Of Board Members and Partners



**VIRGINIA  
CAREER WORKS**

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BAY CONSORTIUM REGION

*Conducted on:  
November 16 and November 23, 2020*

Conducted by and Report Prepared by  
*Strumpf Associates: Center for Strategic Change  
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## INTRODUCTION

On November 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, Strumpf Associates moderated a focus group consisting of WDB members not on the Strategic Planning Team (Nov. 16<sup>th</sup>) and partners of the Bay Consortium Region's workforce system (23<sup>rd</sup>). The focus groups were conducted as part of a comprehensive strategic planning process that the Workforce Development Board (WDB) began in November 2020. The agency has a Strategic Planning Team made up of staff, board members, and community partners charged with developing a strategic action plan meant to position the organization to thrive. Part of the process is to conduct an environmental analysis. Data for the environmental analysis includes feedback from customers on their experience with the organization. The Workforce Development Board and their Strategic Planning Team is committed to listening to the voice of partners, jobseekers, and businesses to capture customer's expectations and preferences.

Focus groups are a qualitative research methodology used to collect information. The method allows for more in-depth reporting by participants than a paper and pencil survey. Focus groups are not designed to reach a consensus among the participants. They are designed to collect information from each participant to identify trends.

## COMPOSITION AND PROCESS

The WDB Director invited individuals to the focus groups based on criteria provided by Strumpf Associates. An email letter of invitation was sent to each identified participant. **Seven (7) board members** participated in their focus group and **nine (9) individuals representing nine different entities** participated in the partner focus group. Lori Strumpf facilitated the focus groups.

The facilitator explained to all participants that their responses would remain anonymous. Participants were asked to agree not to repeat what others said in the focus group once the focus group was over. Participants were encouraged to be honest and forthright. Each focus group was conducted virtually and lasted for one and one-half hours.

The facilitator led participants through a formal and sequenced set of questions. In both focus groups the purpose was to identify what they saw as the strategic challenges for the workforce system over the next few years. In addition, the partner focus group participants were asked what opportunities they saw for improving the partnership and the system. The key focus questions included:

### ***Board Members***

- What are the strategic challenges you see for the workforce system over the next two years?
- What strategic issues/challenges do you think the board faces over the next two years?

### ***Partners***

- What is working and what are the opportunities for improvement about how the partnership and/or the workforce system works?
- What are the strategic challenges you see for the workforce system over the next two

years?

The facilitator used probes around each question to clarify what each participant was saying. Their opinions provide insights on key areas that might be addressed strategically by the organization. This summary includes items that had general agreement (not necessarily a consensus) within the focus group. Throughout this report direct participant quotes are represented in *italics*.

## SUMMARY FINDINGS

### WDB MEMBERS FOCUS GROUP

After introductions, the facilitator asked, *‘what are the strategic challenges you see over the next 12 to 24 for months for the workforce system and the board?’* A summary of the responses is below.

#### *Strategic Challenges for the Workforce System*

- There is a need to be flexible because the projects planned may not be what is needed due to market shifts.
- Most participants in the focus group agreed that there is a gap between employers needing to fill jobs and people out of work who could fill jobs. The challenge is how to develop strategies that make this connection systematically.
  - *We need to be better at making a clear connection/pathway from training to employers who have jobs.*
  - *Finding jobs for people, especially in some of the rural counties.*
- Aligning training programs with business needs in each sub-area of the region.
- Several participants spoke to the need to engage employers so that the workforce system can understand how their business model may be changing. The pandemic has catalyzed a lot of changes and the workforce system needs a method to understand, in real time, what the skill sets are that they need now and in the future.
- Transportation continues to be an issue for people trying to get to work.
- Training for those who have been working and lost their jobs. Matching skills and training/retraining to labor market needs (e.g., what do they need in terms of skills to obtain open positions). Also figuring out how to help individuals who may not want to be retrained.
- Connecting with services because *for some people face to face is what is needed.*
- Access to technology, including both devices and internet
  - Some programs have distributed Chrome Books. However, as one participant stated, *even with Chrome Books being distributed, they do not have all the capacity and functionality required for all the suite of Microsoft (and other) programs.*
  - *The cost of internet service is prohibitive for so many.*
- *K-12 virtual learning puts a burden on parents/caregivers that leaves little time to focus on getting a job/getting training.*



- Several participants spoke to the challenge of finding enough employers during this pandemic that can provide clinical sites for students to do an internship. As an example, one participant stated, *health care needs workers, however, the health care businesses do not want or cannot have students on site and students cannot get certified without work experience.*
- Coping issues such as mental health challenges, childcare, food insecurity and the lack of access to the services that help with these issues (e.g., mental health services being delivered virtually but for those who do not have access to the internet they still cannot access services).
- *Non-educational challenges can knock people off the education track, e.g. a 100-dollar car repair bill.*
- *Not having a family infrastructure that can support educational aspirations because they do not know how; it is not because they do not want their children to move forward.*
- One participant stated that *VEC is not always as helpful to customers as it could/should be.*

### **Challenges for the WDB**

- Board member engagement.
- Increasing business representation.

At the end of the focus group, the facilitator asked, *if the board could focus on only one thing to move the needle, in your opinion, what should it be?*

- One participant stated, *that is very hard to do as so many of the issues we discussed are related to each other but, if I have to choose it would be business engagement because without jobs it will not matter what we do.*
- A few participants agreed that the things that keep people from working, like childcare and food insecurity, are key.
- Others agreed that the focus should be on identifying skills and figuring out how to be more responsive and connected to businesses looking for workers.

## **PARTNERS FOCUS GROUP**

### **WHAT WORKS AND WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?**

After introductions, the facilitator the asked, *‘what has worked well for you/your agency in the workforce system and with the partnership?’* A summary of the responses is below.

#### **What works**

- *Jackie and her team work hard to make solid partnerships.*
- *The business solutions team. I am on it and the distribution of job orders/announcements of job openings works well. However, it is a very transactional approach.*
- *Every time I go to the center, I am impressed with it and all the resources. I still wonder about the messaging. Not enough people know about the center and the resources,*



*including my own staff who do not refer people to the center. Even if it means driving people there.*

- *The WDB are unsung heroes in trying to make it all work.*
- *Glad to see that the WDB is engaging in setting a strategy. Need to think about the art of the possible. Need to focus on the developing a common definition of the problem so resources can be directed there and not dispersed.*
- *Several participants spoke to their partnership with the community college(s) and that it was working very well.*

### **Opportunities for Improvement**

- *Sometimes we are more competitive with each other than collaborative. We need to find ways to collaborate more across the region.*
- *Almost all the focus group participants spoke to the need to build awareness. As one participant said, so many individuals and businesses have no idea that the WDB exists or the workforce resources available to them. We need to do more messaging and marketing.*
- *There are too many agencies in workforce development and no entity that brings them all together on a regular basis.*
- *There was agreement among all the participants that trying to understand the workforce system is difficult. Some of the statements that exemplify this included:*
  - *As a partner I do not understand the way it works.*
  - *I struggle with understanding the organization and our agency's role in it and how it all works.*
  - *If we don't know how it works how can we expect jobseekers and businesses to understand and navigate getting what they need.*
- *The website(s) is atrocious and not user friendly whether you go to the board or to the VEC website. When I Google, it is not easy to find workforce resources.*
- *Several participants spoke to the need to improve information flow. Examples included:*
  - *an agency leader that sits on the WDB, but it was reported that the staff of the agency may not be getting information about the board's initiatives, etc. from their agency representative.*
  - *there is the need to find better ways to package and communicate LMI information so that workers on the front line can tell their customers what jobs are open/will be open, what occupations are growing etc.*
- *There is a need to do customized training. This is a good strategy used in other workforce areas that helps to address some of the skills gaps and business workforce issues.*
- *Workforce development and the colleges are not at the table with economic development when they are recruiting businesses and they should be.*
- *The WDB should be acting as an intermediary between business and the talent pipeline. The connections are not tight enough and more management of the communication between businesses and the workforce system is needed.*

## **STRATEGIC CHALLENGES FOR THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM**

- *There is a need right now to create a strategy that develops and connects the talent pipeline to businesses.* A discussion ensued about the need to create a ‘*task force*’ where all the players could come together regularly to discuss and take immediate action on things like: what businesses have openings right now and who has talent that could fill the positions or could be trained to fill the positions; who is coming out of high school that may not be going to college and could be directed to training and open positions; what industries are being recruited to come to the area and how we can prepare the workforce; who are the ‘out commuters’ with what skill sets and what do we need to do to keep them here. The discussion was focused on how to be more proactive than reactive to workforce needs and to focus both short and long-term. Other key points included:
  - Players would include towns, counties, high school principals, economic development, workforce development. Designed to think, plan and act.
  - The facilitator asked if this would be one task force for the whole region or smaller subregions. The answer was to begin as a pilot in one sub-region and then move to others.
  - The facilitator asked one of the participants engaged in this discussion if they knew about the WDB’s Business Solutions Team. The response was, *I have never heard of it.* While the *task force* idea being discussed was larger than the current business team, this comment also goes back to the issues around awareness and outreach.
- Several participants raised the need to develop a more comprehensive sector strategy. Sector strategies should include things like promoting apprenticeships; developing career pathways for demand occupations within the sector; focusing on some *forgotten sectors* such as aquaculture, lumber yards, marinas; and providing customized training approaches within the sectors.
- Several participants spoke to the challenge for individuals that want to become entrepreneurs and expressed the need and challenge to support and train in entrepreneurship.
- Transportation to where workforce services are, including to the center.
- Lack of childcare while individuals are in training
- Housing in some of the areas to attract ‘*middle workers*’. One participant reported, *we have trailers and then beachfront homes, not many apartments or town houses. It is a barrier to attracting the middle-income workforce.*
- Lack of access to broadband throughout the region. This is limiting for businesses or a jobseeker trying to access services virtually.
- Creating awareness and messaging about blue collar work, *that these are good jobs, e.g., trades, and that you can make a good living. Everyone does not have to go to college.*
- One participant stated that *when I meet with businesses, I always ask what their greatest issue is right now.* The participant reported that every business answers ‘*workforce*’ as their number one issue. The participant then asks, *if you magically had all the talent you needed right now and knew you could get what you needed, what would you do?* The

participant reported that the business response is always *'expand'*. The focus group participant stated that the challenge is to *bridge this gap*.

- Given the expanse of the region, the challenge is that different parts of the region may require different strategies based on resources, demographics etc. However, some focus group participants thought that some *'umbrella strategies'* could be identified by working together, such as sector strategies, that would be enabling for customized approaches in each sub-area.
- One participant stated that *when talking to businesses and thinking about training, our organization wants to make clear we are only training for jobs with living wages. Each area's living wage may be different, but we are not training people to keep them in poverty*. Others agreed.

Toward the end of the focus group the facilitator asked if there were any burning issues that participants did not get a chance to express. *Racial inequities across the region* was raised by a participant and others agreed. Without much time to explore the issue the things mentioned were how marginalized communities, particularly African Americans in this region, have less access to jobs, training, healthcare etc. The participant stated *this issue is a challenge that must be addressed within the context of workforce development strategies*.

The Strategic Planning Team will use the information provided in this focus group to inform opportunities for improvement as part of the strategic plan.