# An Analysis of the Connection Between Workforce Development and Higher Education Within State Policy and the Sharing of Best Practices

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**Abstract:** Workforce development policy is a major cornerstone for many governments. The success can be linked to educational programs that support the training of the workforce. Sharing of best practices among higher education institutions supporting workforce development can help newer institutions and support regional workforce development goals.

Workforce development policy has been a critical part of government structures worldwide. The success of these policies has been based on critical components, such as training and the increased knowledge of a societal segment (Giloth, 2000; Leigh & Blakely, 2013; Porter, 2000). There also has been a significant requirement within economic development policy to further develop or cultivate a workforce to support the focused industry (Giloth, 2000; Waits, 2000). This close attention to the education policy, its structure, format and sub-components, is important to best support the workforce development policy. The education portion of workforce development policy also demands involvement of educational leaders in the early policy framework (DeLeon, Haldane, Heldring, & Willis, 2014; Gabel & Scott, 2011). This involvement would include a determination by educational leadership of the education requirements of the government and business stakeholders, recommendations for crafting the educational programs, and the format to best support skills training (DeLeon et al., 2014; Gabel & Scott, 2011). This set of topics does not represent the complete set of factors that educational leaders need to consider in a workforce development program. However, to make sure that the policy framework is supported effectively, education leadership needs to be considered as essential stakeholders within the early stages framework of the workforce development policy (Waits, 2000). This is supported by many different research studies, and the connection between government, business community, and higher education within workforce development policy requires some examination into how information and best practices are shared among higher education institutions (DeLeon et al., 2014; Gabel & Scott, 2011).

This paper seeks to examine some of the key stakeholders required for the development of workforce development policy. Also, this paper investigates some of the structures used for workforce development programs and analyzes the role of higher education institutions in developing key parts of the training and education, specifically curriculum development. Furthermore, the importance of sharing of best practices is discussed. Finally, some recommendations are made on how best practices can be better shared between state higher education institutions, specifically in workforce development programs.

## Typical Structures of State Workforce Development Programs

The structure of workforce development programs at the state level is usually decided upon by state level leadership. This decision in part or as a whole has a dotted or solid line to the governor's directions and goals for the state to grow economically. As a result, many of the goals reflected in any type of workforce development policy also have political components that can be at the core of the policy itself (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2015; Porter, 2000; Waits,

2000). Most state governors have some appointed body or an elected official who acts as the chief agent in enacting workforce development policy. For example, many state governors appoint a Chief Elected Official under the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act to fund programs (Glickman, n.d.). States may also have economic development boards or departments that lead and organize the entire state workforce policy's direction and structure. Educational institutions involved with the training and skills development of the local workforce would be involved to different degrees and at different levels within the state level workforce development policy. One key area of their involvement includes the organization of training and format for delivery. This is very important as the curriculum structure and pedagogy of instruction can impact the ability of the students within the program to apply the skills learned.

### Participation of Education Institutions in Workforce Development Programs

Education institutions involved with workforce development programs can be tasked with many parts of the educational program structure. One of their main responsibilities is to develop the curriculum that delivers appropriate skills training and also to assess the level of student understanding and application of those skills (Koo & Miner, 2010). This may involve working with business and industry groups to identify the skills that the workforce would need and then crafting a curriculum from a fundamental or nonexistent framework (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006; Koo & Miner, 2010). The ability to put together an education program with rigor is where the educational institution's value is really demonstrated (Koo & Miner, 2010). In addition to the curriculum development, subcomponents that also need to be considered include how to recruit teachers with the necessary skill set and professional experience for the program, how the structure of the workforce development programs may differ from traditional degree and diploma programs, and also how the school advertises the program to local businesses partners and candidates alike (Hung, Lau, Wei, & Wei, 2012). Such concerns and considerations for educational institutions can vary in the level of complexity and detail based on the local and regional demographics that surround the school. Some successful practices could be replicated in different regions of a state among educational institutions. Having some format or forum to share some of these best practices in some of these areas can prove very effective in helping other education institutions who are just getting started with developing their own programs.

### Best Practice Sharing in Workforce Development Education Policy

The connection between workforce development and higher education in policy development is essential to the success of the policy. Also, critical to the success of the policy development process is the clear designation of the appropriate stakeholders at the state level, within the business community and the higher education environment (Bagin, Gallagher, & Moore, 2008; Bird, Foster, & Ganzglass, 2014; Hooper & Hughes, 2000; Nowlin, 2011). Also, educational partners and leaders need to be involved in the early framework development of workforce policy so that they can align the training provided with the goals of the program (DeLeon et al., 2014; Gabel & Scott, 2011). Furthermore, additional consideration should be given to the education structure, including the faculty and teaching staff within the workforce development program and key components that educational leadership within the higher education institution should review to make the workforce development faculty more effective (Cramer, Shealey, & Valle-Riestra, 2011; Hung et al., 2012; Parker, 2015). One key area where literature and research is lacking is how to propagate best practices for implementing workforce policy through a state organization down to locl officials and leaders where different ideas and programs are to be developed. Most research within this area supports success of individual

programs, but research on better ways to promulgate successful ideas for workforce development and higher education programs is scarce. This paper attempts to lay a foundation for a need to examine the dissemination of the best practices for workforce development and higher education programs from the state and below.

## The Stakeholder Types and Roles

Afdal (2013) identifies key stakeholders for any policy related to teaching staff and education policy, which closely follows the stakeholders necessary for the education portion of a workforce development policy. Certain key stakeholders should be involved in the policy development process at different levels at different phases (Afdal, 2013; DeLeon et al., 2014). Glickman (n.d.) organizes a complete layout of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), renamed in 2014 as the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA), for state and local officials to understand the stakeholders from the federal level down and their roles and levels of involvement in the policy created for workforce development and higher education under the act. The governor has a major role in the use of funds for WIOA programming, and many of the policies are implemented through direct reports or other elected or selected state officials or business leaders (Glickman, n.d.). Though these studies present the main dynamics of the stakeholder involvement within policy in general and workforce development policy, additional research needs to examine the stakeholders' involvement in the dissemination of the best practices down through state structures to support local workforce development programs and policies that have worked well in other regions or scenarios.

## Higher Education Involvement in Workforce Development Policy

Involvement of higher education partners and leaders at specific framework stages can be crucial to the success of the long term implementation of the policy. Eduardo Padron (2013), the current president of Miami Dade College, one of the largest higher education institutions in the U.S., highlights the connection the community college has to the local community and the role of the community college as a source for economic growth for the surrounding business community. Cooper et al. (2015) support the importance of early alignment of post-secondary institutional goals and business goals early within the workforce development process. Padron (2013) also discusses the impact of business relations on the school's success. Hung et al. (2012) further discuss the importance of the right set of goals in higher education institutions to support the most effective hiring of personnel. This supports the need for the involvement of school leadership early to make the best choice in workforce education structure to best meet the training and skills requirements for businesses and students alike. Constan and Spicer (2015) further emphasize the importance of having the right involvement from college and university leaders to best measure the effectiveness of the programs as the businesses and state involvement may not have the expertise to create efficacious assessments, especially within the technical fields, which many workforce development programs are developed for.

Partnerships between the local business and higher education community serve similar goals, and that for the partnerships to be successful within the workforce development area, the schools and business involvement in merging learning and practice is crucial (Bailey et al., 2007). Education leaders need to be involved in seeking out future staff as the dynamics of learning and training change (Bailey et al., 2007). This involvement would help create the formal structure for evaluation of the workforce development programs that meets the goals and needs of the training for the business community. Also, the involvement of education leaders can support the need for workforce development programs to meet the ever-changing need of the

business environment. Within the literature and research, much of the focus supports the need for the early involvement of educational partners and also how the involvement can support the workforce development goals. However, some additional research can be made into how the involvement supports dissemination of best practices down to local program and policy.

## Additional Considerations

Educational structure that supports a workforce development program can vary based on the goals and complexity of the program. Different components of the educational structure, from the faculty, professional development, to hiring practices, support the program goals. Padron (2013) emphasized the importance of diversity, including diverse teaching staff. This teaching staff may inadvertently reflect a larger demographic within professional workforce field if not for strategic recruitment efforts on behalf of school leadership (Cramer et al., 2011; Parker, 2015). Creating a recruitment plan for recruiting minority and under-represented teaching staff can also help support efforts to recruit and retain students from these same groups into the programs and furthermore into the workforce. The actions and efforts of the educational institutions can benefit the overall diversity efforts with workforce development programs.

Teaching staff retention and professional development could be improved by mentoring, community building, and field experience. Bailey et al. (2007) suggests the use of metrics to recruit teachers who are able to effectively teach workforce development. Differences between traditional full-time faculty and the adjunct professional teaching staff can influence their retention (Bailey et al., 2007; May, Peetz, & Strachan, 2013). Adjunct workforce development staff could be given the same benefits, for example school sponsored professional development, as full-time professors and instructors (Bailey et al., 2007). They should have opportunities to refine professional skills to stay current on changing skill-sets within specific areas and also gain additional skills to support their classroom instruction and pedagogy (Bailey et al., 2007).

Faculty recruitment for workforce development programs tends to follow a traditional pattern. Recruitment efforts also are closely tied to program funding and course load. So retaining teaching staff could be hard when the number of courses and course types can vary from term to term in some cases. Also, the course hours can affect the availability of professional teaching staff. For example, if courses are scheduled in the middle of a typical work day, most professional teaching staff may be employed and unable to teach at these times. Proper scheduling of workforce development courses is also important in retaining teaching staff for workforce development courses like these.

Finally, educational program structure and delivery format itself is another key area that should be considered. Though many workforce development programs require a face-to-face format, some attempt to include hybrid or fully online courses to get students to practice skills very quickly after or even during the training (Alssid et al., 2002; Koo & Miner, 2010). Some instructors may not be able to use this type of educational structure because they may have come from traditional learning formats. Hence, some additional training could support the professional teaching staff within these programs. Also, students within these programs may need additional tutoring and assistance, especially if they have been out of traditional schooling or training of any kind for some time. Also, the support maybe needed to help students through online based instruction that requires them to be self-paced in their learning.

## Recommendations

Sharing of best practices among education institutions could be improved based on known challenges and needs specific to a region or area of the state. For example, one idea

created at some higher government levels above the state is the periodic sharing of best practices with workforce development programs across the country.  The U.S. House of Representatives sub-committee on Higher Education, Life-Long Learning and Competitiveness has held hearings on the best practices within Workforce Investment Act, now Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) funded programs (Congress of the U.S., 2009).  However, additional discussion is necessary to know how best practices about work strategies and areas of improvement are being shared among educational institutions.  This sharing would take place at the state economic development directors, technical or community college presidents, and key business leaders.  State level communication and sharing of best practices can impact the development of technical and community college workforce education programs.  Lower level communication among education institutions, such as among school chairs, program chairs, and even key faculty members from different college campuses, can also help facilitate best practices.  For example, a visit to a different campus or college could help them understand how to further develop a workforce program.  These types of sharing engagements can be created routinely or as needed.

## Conclusion

Workforce development and educational institutions have to communicate and work together develop a successful workforce development policy.  In addition, further communication among state technical and/or community colleges within workforce development programs and sharing among school leadership, including school and program chairs, can help spread best practices across a state where some ideas may be better used in certain areas of the state the others.  As the number of workforce development programs increases at the state level, so does the need for higher education institution to help deliver the necessary skills training.  Therefore, increased communication and best practice sharing can help future programs be better developed and implemented to meet the state's workforce development goals.

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