



Chairman Zeltwanger, Vice-Chair Powell, Ranking Member Sobecki, and members of the committee, thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk to you about workforce development in Ohio.

A special thank you to Representative Liston for extending the invitation and to her team for coordinating my visit.

I'd also like to extend a thank you to each of you for adopting economic and workforce development as an issue area. Your efforts are critical to the future of work for Ohio's workers, employers, and community stakeholders and I hope to help inform the future of workforce development in Ohio.

Introduction

I am Rebecca Kusner,ⁱ and I am here today as a small business owner, workforce development professional, and lifelong resident of Ohio to talk to you on behalf of the Ohio Workforce Coalition.

Founded in 2007, The Ohio Workforce Coalition brings together leaders from education and training, economic and workforce development, business and industry, labor, and human services to promote public policies that build the skills of Ohio's adult workers. Our work is guided by three overarching objectives to: **build the skills of adult workers; meet the skill needs of employers; and strengthen the workforce system.** I work with a Leadership Committee with current members from the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, Great Lakes Community Action Partnership, Towards Employment, Policy Matters Ohio, Ohio Association of Goodwill Industries, National Skills Coalition, and JobsOhio (we are in the process of inviting additional members). We advance the Coalition's goals through information sharing and education, legislative and administrative advocacy, and promotion of the innovations in workforce development that have emerged through our statewide network.

Since launch, the Coalition has worked across stakeholders and with Ohio's public officials to advance supports for adults pursuing career pathways, grown industry sector partnerships and demand driven strategies, and promote the need for a lead state workforce official and better data systems.

It's been 12 years since the Coalition was launched and workforce development and talent are more ubiquitous than ever and even central to economic development, education, and human service conversations. While I'm looking forward to this being the first of ongoing discussions, today I hope to leave you with an conceptual overview of workforce development, an understanding of the Ohio Workforce Coalition's priorities, and opportunities for you—as state legislators—to shape the future of workforce development in Ohio. I'll start with some definitions.

Definitions

Shared understanding of language is critical to workforce development discussions. While it seems basic, different understandings and lack of clarity about foundational terms create a great deal of confusion. I'm offering a few basic definitions and I'm happy to provide clarification as we go.

The term '**workforce**' includes current and future workers—those preparing for work, looking for work, currently working, and those looking to advance along a career pathway. This inclusive definition allows us to plan for the emerging and existing workforce, acknowledge different levels of social, academic, and technical preparation, and to recognize that the needs of the workforce aren't addressed overnight and don't magically 'end' on the date of hire. The workforce is commonly referred to as the 'supply' side of the equation and has been the target of most public investments.

In workforce conversations '**employers**' are the public, private, non-profit, or corporate entities that hire talent.ⁱⁱ '**Employer engagement**' is the effort to reach out and connect to employers and the meaningful contributions they make to the planning, design, and delivery of workforce interventions. '**Employer partners**' are employers who are willing to engage with their communities, value workers as talent and invest in accordingly, and consider the quality of their workplace and equitable access to their jobs. This definition allows us to focus on a continuum of employer needs (sourcing, screening, hiring, retaining, advancing), to value employers as part of a workforce rather than just consumers of it, and to invest limited resources into quality employers. Employers are commonly referred to as the 'demand' side of the workforce development equation.

Next, '**workforce development programs**' are the efforts of government, schools, community-based organizations, industry associations, employers, faith-based institutions and others to support the workforce and employers. Typically, programs offer services to source, screen, prepare, train, place, support, coach, and grow workers and the career opportunities available to them. While the public workforce systemⁱⁱⁱ is arguably the most prominent actor and funder, workforce development is not defined by or limited to any one entity, program, organization, or funding source—it is an assortment of many. More and more organizations are beginning to offer workforce programs making it critically important that we focus on best practices and professional programming despite different goals, targeted customers, funding streams, measures, and timelines.

Finally, the **workforce development system**—which the Coalition works to build, improve, and change—is the intersection of these various programs, organizations, and other systems.^{iv}. The system includes the stakeholders I listed at the outset (education and training, economic and workforce development, business and industry, labor, and human services), sometime collaborating, sometimes competing, sometime doing both at the same time. As you consider workforce

development interventions, I encourage you to consider which stakeholder group is advancing a new initiative or program, who benefits short/long term, whether or not it is grounded in best practices (if so, which), and how you will measure overall progress towards goals and equitable outcomes.

These definitions are basic, but they are the foundation for discussions of career pathways, sector partnerships, and workforce system building, and they are how the Ohio Workforce Coalition has organized its work.

The Ohio Workforce Coalition Priorities

While we are still developing our platform, throughout 2019-2020, the Ohio Workforce Coalition is guided by **three overarching goals** the workforce, employers, and system. We are pleased to share an overview of our goals with ideas of how this committee might engage in each area.

BUILD THE SKILLS OF ADULT WORKFORCE Members of the Coalition will work to increase the effectiveness and accountability of Ohio's workforce development programs and policies so job-seekers and workers have equitable access to affordable, high quality education and training, safety-net and work supports, and employment services that lead to quality jobs with career pathways. We would welcome working with members of this committee to:

- 1) highlight and promote best practices^v in workforce development from local partners and boards as well as promising practices like contextualized literacy and work-based learning;^{vi}
- 2) support the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services as they consider building SNAP E&T^{vii} programming across Ohio; and
- 3) explore ways to spur innovation in service delivery and grow availability of post-employment coaching and services to improve long-term success for all Ohioans.

MEET THE SKILL NEEDS OF EMPLOYERS: Members of the Coalition will work to assure the availability of a skilled, job-ready, and diverse workforce through sector specific and customized programs or policy solutions available to Ohio employers that offer equitable access to quality jobs with established career-pathways. We would welcome working with members of this committee to:

- 1) explore what lessons were learned from the Industry Workforce Alliance Grants awarded in 2014 and how they can support the sector partnerships referenced in the Governor's proposed budget;
- 2) consider how evidence-based selection and competency-based hiring can help employers identify untapped talent while diversifying their workforce; and
- 3) encourage early and regular connections between the economic development and workforce development systems to leverage expertise for business attraction, retention, and expansion.

STRENGTHEN THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM. Members of the Coalition will work to leverage Ohio’s workforce network—public, private, corporate, and non-profit—to support a comprehensive workforce system that aligns programs, shares accountability, and drives outcomes for Ohio’s workforce and employers. Over the next two years, we hope to continue our Learning Network Series, reinvigorate our work in Columbus, and expand our member network. We would welcome working with members of this committee to:

- 1) support a bi-partisan, bicameral Workforce Development Caucus with the primary goal of growing knowledge about workforce development system programs, policies, and systems;
- 2) connect with funders^{viii} from across Ohio to identify opportunities for targeted workforce development partnerships;
- 3) support investments in updates and improvements to Ohio’s workforce data systems so we can disaggregate data by race, measure quality of outcomes, and document impact over time.

This work is broad and offers a range of opportunities to grow and refine workforce development in Ohio. In addition to if and how you might engage with our three goals, I’d like to ask you to consider how your status and position can help to inform system stakeholders about workforce development related topics in the proposed budget. Consider:

- 1) What evidence and best-practice is the micro-credentialing budget/strategy based upon? Are the micro-credentials transferrable between employers? Do we know if there will be disparate impact and that they will benefit Ohio’s workforce equitably?
- 2) How will local experts and workforce board members be engaged in identifying opportunities for improvements to OhioMeansJobs to better support job-seekers? How will we assure that advancements in technology are available in areas (rural and urban) that lack broadband access?
- 3) How will we assure that investments in higher education yield labor market outcomes? How can we leverage partnerships like those between the Ohio Association of Community Colleges and Western Governor’s University to promote new ways of educating and training our workforce?

Conclusion

In conclusion, these four pages and 10 or so minutes represent a just a small part of what the Coalition could share. Workforce development can seem complex and confusing to navigate. The Leadership Committee of the Ohio Workforce Coalition is here to offer you expert and objective support as you navigate the workforce ecosystem and we are eager to continue this discussion with members of the committee, the committee as a whole, or through whatever other mechanism makes best sense. Thank you for your time. I’m happy to answer questions.

Notes

ⁱ Rebecca Kusner is a workforce development expert and strategist with over 20 years of experience with projects that involve multiple community organizations, government and non-profits, philanthropy, and the business community. She launched her firm, R4 Workforce in 2017. Rebecca is the current convener of the Ohio Workforce Coalition and a member of the National Skills Coalition, where she serves on the Welfare-to-Career Advisory Panels. In 2018 she joined the Board of the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals, became a distinguished Fellow for Hope Street Group's Skilling America Initiative, and was selected as a member of the second cohort of The Aspen Institute's Job Quality Fellowship. Her full bio and other information is available at www.r4workforce.com.

ⁱⁱ We use 'employer' rather than 'business' because our collective workforce and talent challenge ranges from big business to non-profit hospital systems who can't find nurses and small businesses to local community organizations trying to find staff to fight the opioid epidemic.

ⁱⁱⁱ Known in Ohio as Ohio Means Jobs, the public workforce system operates a network of centers known commonly as 'one-stops' that serve employers and job-seekers by offering access to training, job-leads, supportive services and other resources. The system must adhere to the federal legislation that authorizes it—the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act—and the centers are overseen by Workforce Boards. Boards are composed of employers and other partners and operate in different ways and with different footprints across Ohio. There is great variability in the policies, programs, accessibility, and quality of services and supports available through the OMJ centers and it is easy to find both champions and critics. The Workforce Board Directors have organized a relatively new 501©3 and I encourage you to speak to them. There is also a state board—the Governor's Executive Workforce Committee.

^{iv} Frequently, entities offering workforce development interventions are also part of their own systems—i.e. the community college system offers short-term workforce training, human services provider offer job-readiness programs, and industry associations might offer job-placement services. This can make workforce development feel fragmented or siloed because it is rare for these actors to offer (or have expertise in) the full continuum of workforce services necessary to meet the needs of a diverse workforce and employers.

^v We would like to explore how local areas can be incented to deploy tools that are available through public systems but often underutilized—like subsidized wages, customized training, needs-based payments during training, etc. There are constraints to using these tools—like availability of funding and willingness of other actors to embrace them—but there are opportunities for Ohio to increase the deployment of strategies consistent with national best practices.

^{vi} Contextualized literacy involves using real, industry specific content to guide literacy and numeracy instruction, for example, teaching conversation from fractions to decimals using an actual manufacturing blue-print. Work-based learning includes the range of training and development activities that happen at the work-place and while a person is receiving a wage. Examples include apprenticeship, on-the-job training, incumbent workers training etc.

^{vii} Ohio is exploring Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment & Training programs. SNAP E&T allows individuals receiving food supports to access a range of services to help them reduce their reliance on food supports. SNAP E&T is available to recipients who are working and can actually help businesses to train low-wage workers for better jobs. Availability of SNAP E&T funding is contingent upon a state plan and availability of non-federal funding sources for 'match' (i.e. local levy and philanthropic dollars).

^{viii} Public investments dwarf philanthropic investments, but philanthropy can and does invest in innovation, filling 'gaps', and offering opportunities to expand program timelines. Strategic relationships with philanthropy can help advance an overall agenda.