

COVID-RECESSION & RECOVERY BRIEF #2

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# ADAPTING TO THE COVID-19 ENVIRONMENT

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SeattleJobs  
Initiative



Seattle Office of  
Economic Development

The COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations. The initial job loss precipitated by the pandemic has been higher in communities of color.<sup>1</sup> More devastatingly, Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) are vastly overrepresented in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths.<sup>2</sup> The outbreak in Seattle/King County is concentrated in areas with higher proportions of BIPOC and higher rates of poverty.<sup>3</sup> This reflects systemic racial and economic inequalities, both locally and nationally.

This brief assesses the capacity of the Seattle/King County workforce system to support those in the most vulnerable position during the crisis and its aftermath to re-enter the labor market. It then offers some guidance for how organizations and the system can successfully respond to the COVID-19 unemployment crisis. A subsequent brief will identify effective programs that can be built on or expanded under current conditions.

The key findings are:

- Seattle/King County has a robust workforce development structure that is geographically well-distributed to serve those in most need.
- Despite the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act's (WIOA) charge to improve coordination and collaboration, the resources available to support it have been very limited.
- The diverse funding streams and channels in the workforce ecosystem make coordinating an effective, collaborative regional response that serves marginalized communities more challenging.
- Workforce funding was strained before the crisis, and there has been no significant additional funding for workforce development in COVID-19 relief to-date to offset cuts in state and local budgets.
- There are gaps in South Seattle and South King County in the capacity of CBOs connected to BIPOC communities critical to driving an inclusive recovery.
- Additional resources are needed to invest in the capacity of these organizations to respond to the COVID crisis including the funding of connection sites and increasing the number of BFET providers serving BIPOC communities.

## Workforce Development System

The workforce development system is a complex system that serves both businesses and job seekers. It draws its funding (and direction) from six main funding sources (Figure 1).

In Washington State, there are 13 main streams of public funding plus philanthropic funds (Table 1). While quantifying the public funding sources is straightforward, the philanthropic dollars are less so.

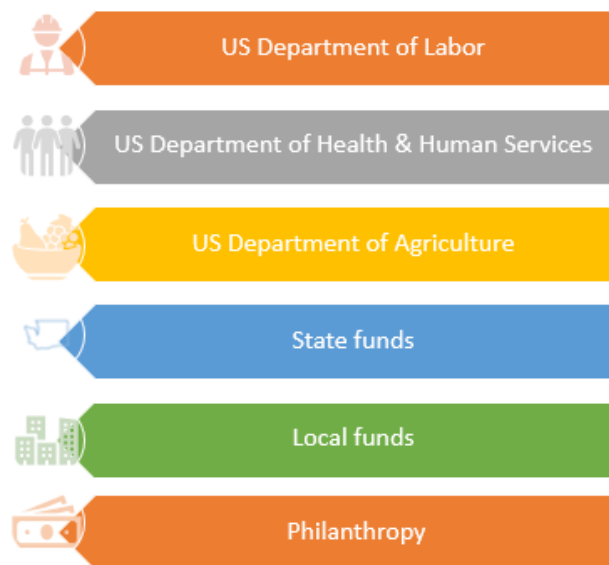


Figure 1. Funding Sources

Source	Funding Mechanism	Amount (state unless indicated <sup>\$</sup> )	Number Served 2018- 2019 Program Year
<b>Private</b>	Philanthropy	\$9,120,000 <sup>\$*</sup>	
<b>Federal</b>	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)	\$42,477,000	33,942
	Basic Food Employment & Training (BFET) <sup>†</sup>	\$27,000,000	6,779
	Wagner-Peyser (job search assistance)	\$17,339,000	104,827
	Trade Adjustment	\$11,597,000	1,895
	Professional Technical Education	\$281,849,000	159,200
<b>Federal &amp; State</b>	Basic Education for Adults	\$85,900,000	54,549
	Vocational Rehabilitation	\$51,218,000	13,482
	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) WorkFirst	\$46,409,000	16,277
	Limited English Pathways (ORIA)	\$9,270,000	7,158
	Apprenticeship	\$4,930,000	17,969
<b>State</b>	Worker Retraining	\$39,759,000	10,963
<b>Local</b>	County, Port, municipalities	\$29,640,000 <sup>\$</sup>	

Table 1. Workforce Development Funding

\*This is explicit workforce funding and underrepresents total funding dedicated to support workforce development programming, including grants to colleges and funding for wraparound services.

<sup>†</sup>Includes Office of Refugee & Immigrant Assistance (ORIA) BFET.

Despite the diversity of funding, the US funds workforce development at a much lower rate than other OECD\* countries.<sup>4</sup> Funding from public sources has fallen over the past two decades.<sup>5,6</sup> At the same time, business spending on its workforce has remained flat (Figure 2).<sup>7-9</sup> The financial burden of training and education has shifted to the individual. Workers are not only more responsible for paying for their training; they also often lack guidance on what training is worthwhile. This leaves low-wage workers 21% less likely to be able to access training than medium- and high-wage workers<sup>10</sup> at a time when the baseline level of skill to participate in the workforce is increasing.<sup>11</sup>

Workforce development organizations combine several of these sources of funding to provide services. Each of the funding streams has its limitations, including requiring matching funds. Organizations braid these funds together to meet participants' basic needs while also funding their tuition and education expenses. But this patchwork funding leaves many gaps to fall through. Many funding sources require that they are “last resort”: that job seekers exhaust other resources before accessing their funds. And those funds frequently do not meet participants' needs† when they do access them.

\* Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development is an intergovernmental economic organization made of 37 member countries that are democracies with market economies. They are high-income, advanced economies and are frequently used as “peers” in comparisons between economies.

† Typical emergency housing assistance is \$600-\$800 while the median rent in the Seattle region is approximately \$1,200.

## Education & Training Expenditures

Adjusted for Inflation

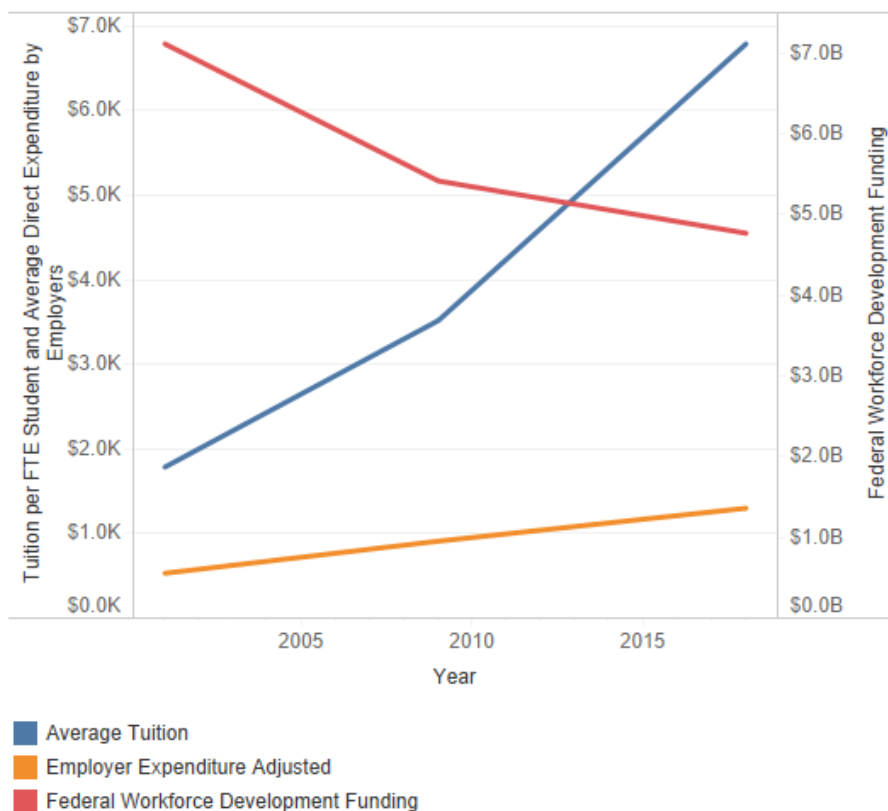


Figure 2. Education and Training Expenditures<sup>6-9</sup>

## Legacy of the Great Recession

During the Great Recession, there was a surge of federal workforce funding, and workforce development agencies scrambled to launch programs to serve the millions of newly unemployed. The focus was largely on getting as many people as possible reemployed. Many programs were light-touch, enough to help those who were unemployed because of the economic collapse but who did not face other significant barriers to success in the labor force.

As unemployment fell to record lows and funding tapered down, the workforce development system was confronted with the reality that those programs did not adequately serve the most marginalized.\* BIPOC individuals and communities, people with disabilities, and people with low educational attainment were disproportionately impacted by the economic collapse and left behind during the recovery.<sup>14–18</sup> Black households were particularly hard hit, with median income still lower in 2018 than it was in 2007.<sup>21</sup>

Even in Seattle/King County's strong pre-COVID-19 economy, all racial and ethnic groups other than white, non-Hispanic/Latinx were overrepresented among the unemployed and even more so in low-wage jobs. Disabled workers, foreign-born individuals, single mothers, veterans,<sup>†</sup> and those with two-year degrees or less were also overrepresented in these categories.<sup>19,20‡</sup>

The workforce development system was given the mandate to improve coordination in the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA). And in the post-Great Recession Recovery years, the local workforce system undertook a reorganization to accomplish this goal. However, there are very few resources available to dedicate to sustaining this work.

In this reorganization, the workforce development system leadership and staff have focused on better coordination between the various providers. The aim is that there is “no wrong door” to enter the system with a robust referral process that connects clients to the organization and programs that best fit their needs. Providers also want to minimize the number of

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\* This reflects structural changes in the labor market that were years if not decades in the making with the automation of highly routine jobs, decline of labor unions, and shrinking public sector eliminating many good jobs that required less than a four-year degree and reducing access to middle income jobs for BI-POC in particular. <sup>12,13</sup>

† Disaggregated data is not available for other identified populations including justice-involved, English language learner, LGBTQ+, and homeless individuals.

‡ Data not available about low-wage jobs though that it is a relatively safe assumption that that are vastly overrepresented in those jobs in addition to being unemployed at higher rates than those with a four-year degree or more.

times participants have to “tell their story” to get support and align services and programs to better serve those farthest from opportunity (e.g., BIPOC communities, justice-involved, immigrants and refugees, those with a high school diploma or less).

While this is a widely recognized and desired goal within the system, it has been challenging to make significant progress. In part, this is due to the fact that the new system is still being constructed. However, the limited availability of resources for coordination means that this effort is dependent on many organizations having excess capacity. Capacity is in short supply during a time of crisis, particularly when organizations are faced with shrinking budgets and layoffs.

For example, the Workforce Development Council (WDC) has developed a network of connection sites. These are community-based organizations, many in underserved communities, with whom the WDC has developed relationships to more effectively reach out to and serve individuals in those communities. This network has facilitated community building but there are no dedicated funds from the workforce development system to the connection sites as connection sites. The sites’ participation at any given time is voluntary and dependent on how well it aligns and can be integrated with their primary mission.

### Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 shutdown is worse than the Great Recession on several fronts. First, the loss of jobs is orders of magnitude greater and faster than the Great Recession. The influx of newly unemployed—disproportionately low-wage workers without a four-year college degree—has put enormous strain on safety net programs.

Second, the very nature of the crisis has made many services unavailable or much more difficult to access, particularly for those who were already struggling to meet basic needs. Agencies, organizations, and libraries closed their in-person operations, moving their services online and over the phone to limit the spread of COVID-19. But low-income households are more likely to depend on limited mobile data plans and access the Internet via mobile devices or in library or other public computer labs. And many of the most vulnerable lack critical digital skills necessary to navigate support services online.<sup>22</sup>

Third, most of the jobs that are available to these workers require them to work outside of the home. This means they have a higher likelihood of being exposed to COVID-19 and their options for managing any caretaking responsibilities\* while they work are more limited than ever.

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\* Caring for children or disabled or ill adults.

## Federal Response

The nature of the crisis has hit state and local budgets hard. The demand on the state and local budgets for emergency response have been significant and the federal government has not yet provided adequate emergency funding to state and local governments.

The US Congress has passed five pieces of legislation in response to the COVID-19 crisis\* and the most recent efforts are the HEROES† and HEALS‡ Acts, neither of which have passed Congress as of this writing. Each act has elements that addressed workforce needs or were even workforce-focused.§ Federal agencies have allowed for greater flexibility in using funds for online training delivery.<sup>24</sup> However, none have directly addressed the overwhelming need for investment in training for those most impacted by job losses. In total Congress has allocated or proposed approximately \$20 per laid-off worker for workforce development.<sup>24</sup>

## Workforce Development System Funded Capacity

The existing workforce development system is vastly undersized to meet the current need. In the 2018-2019 program year, the Seattle/King County WorkSource system served 41,610 unique job seekers¶ while providers supported 2,251 people in vocational education, 1,071 in job training, 1,385 in job search, and 299 in job retention\*\* through BFET. In contrast, there are 83,757 continued claims and 34,313 Pandemic Unemployment Assistance claims†† in King County in the week ending August 9, 2020. Post-COVID the demand for services has increase manyfold with no meaningful increase in public resources.

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\* Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), Coronavirus Aid Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), Paycheck Protection Plan and Healthcare Enhancement Act (PPP), and Paycheck Protection Plan Flexibility Act (PPPFA).

† Health and Economic Recover Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act

‡ Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection and Schools Act

§ PPP failed to serve the businesses and workers most vulnerable to the shutdown. The PPPFA was passed in response but the program as a whole has been difficult to access and still has \$130 billion left to lend after running out of money in its first iteration.<sup>23</sup>

¶ This is through all of the WDC's funding streams and including Wagner-Peyser job search assistance and WIOA workforce training.

\*\* Individuals may be counted twice as they move from job training to job search to job retention or between to providers.

†† PUA claims, individuals who were not eligible for unemployment insurance prior to the expansion under CARES.

## Coordination in the System

One hundred one organizations play an identified role in the local workforce development system (Appendix). These roles are:

- WIOA Provider
- BFET Provider
- TANF WorkFirst Coordinator
- WorkSource Office or Affiliate
- WorkSource Connection Site
- Employment & Training Provider
- Refer to WorkSource

Thirty-six organizations play multiple roles, enrolling individuals in WIOA, BFET, or TANF WorkFirst, depending on the client's eligibility. Or they may serve as a WIOA, BFET, or TANF WorkFirst provider while also providing training services (e.g., community and technical colleges). These organizations include state and local agencies, large organizations like Goodwill, YWCA, and community colleges, and small grassroots organizations like the Mother Nation and Partners in Employment.

## Target Populations

Many organizations are embedded in marginalized communities and have specific target populations, including:

- Specific communities of color
- Refugee and immigrants
- Youth
- Justice involved
- Homelessness
- LGBTQA+
- In recovery
- Disabled & chronic illness
- Veterans
- Women
- Specific religious communities
- Public housing residents



Some organizations are limited in their ability to serve people outside of those targeted populations (e.g., justice-involved, veterans). However, most prioritize serving populations or communities but are open to any individual that meets the income and needs eligibility requirements.

Aside from race, the data about the number of each of these target populations is not consistently available across the system. In Figure 4, we can see that the job training programs are serving a disproportionate number of people of color relative to their share of the King County's population. However, not all minoritized racial groups are overrepresented and, as noted above, people of color are overrepresented among the unemployed and low-wage jobs.<sup>19,20</sup> As disparate workforce outcomes persist and, in fact, were growing in Seattle's pre-COVID-19 economy, there is substantial evidence that programs were not large or robust\* enough to offset the larger structural changes in the economy and meet the need in marginalized groups.

## Location

Though there is a concentration of organizations in Seattle's downtown, there are organizations distributed throughout King County, with key overlaps in areas with the highest continuous claims for unemployment insurance (Figure 5).

\* Are the supports available to each participant enough to fill their resource gaps such that they can persist in training? Does the post-training pipeline adequately address racial disparities in hiring, compensation, transportation, housing, childcare, etc.?

## Participant Race in Seattle/King County Job Training Programs

WDC, SJI, & L&I - 2015

(Percent of King County population)

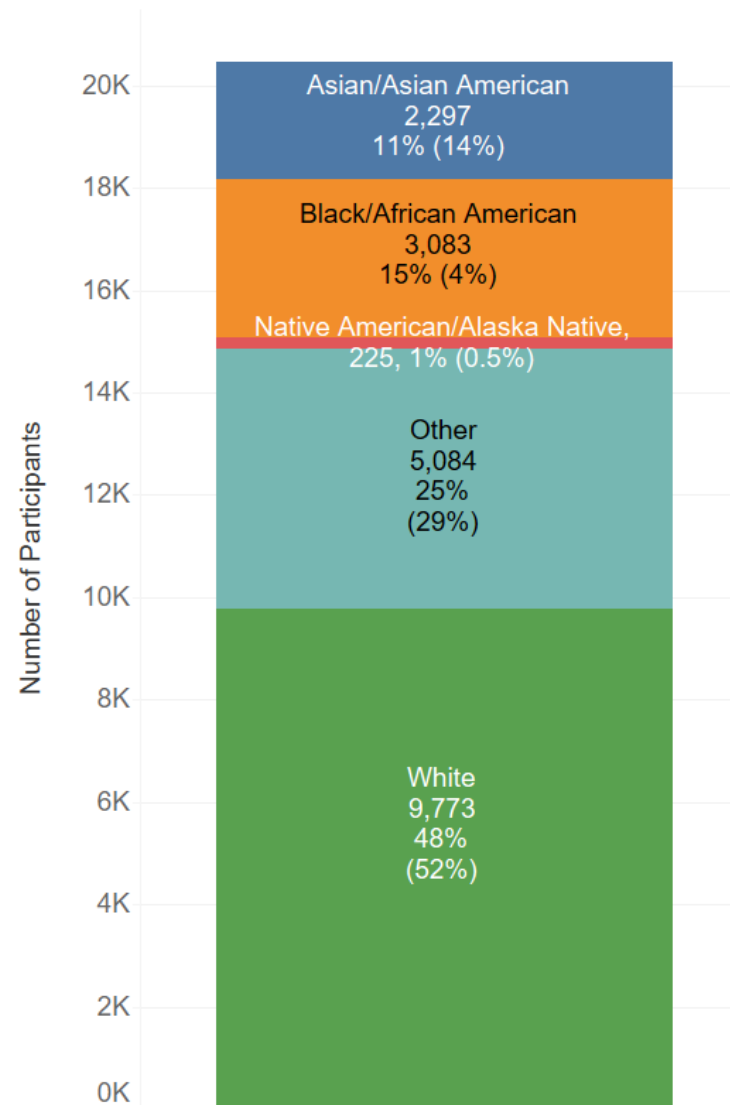


Figure 4. Target Service Populations

Workforce Development System Organizations and  
Continuing Unemployment Insurance Claims by ZIP Code  
Week Ending August 9, 2020

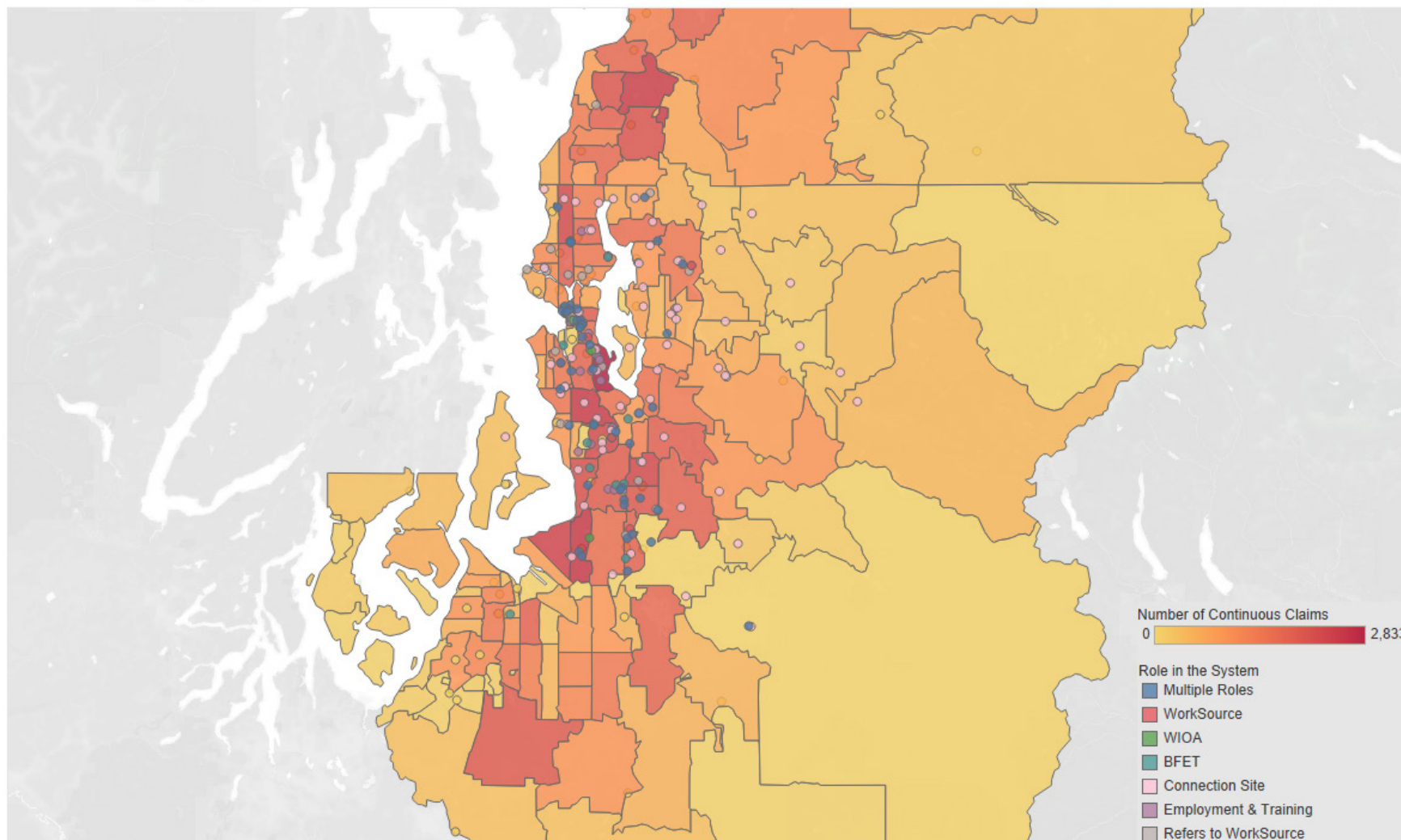


Figure 5. Map of Workforce Development System Organizations

## Serving Marginalized Communities

While the system has been focused on improving its ability to serve the most marginalized communities, we have chosen to focus on Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) providers to gauge the system’s current capacity to do so. BFET provides employment and training programs—including job search assistance, educational services, and skills training—to individuals who receive Basic Food (SNAP\*). Community-based organizations (CBOs) and community and technical colleges (CTC) provide training, career navigation, and wrap-around services.

BFET is a proxy for organizations’ capacity to serve marginalized populations and operate in the highly complex workforce system. BFET programming explicitly targets low-income individuals and includes Able-bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs),<sup>†</sup> who are not eligible for TANF. It remains a good proxy despite the expansion of the public charge rule.<sup>25‡</sup> The federal government extended the rule to include SNAP in the list of programs that refugees and immigrants will be penalized for accessing when applying for residency or citizenship. While there has been a noticeable decline in immigrants’ and refugees’ willingness to apply for BFET since the proposed rule change was announced, organizations that serve immigrant and refugee communities have maintained their BFET provider status.<sup>24</sup>

That is not to say that the BFET program is without flaws. However, CBOs that serve as BFET providers typically aim to respond to the needs of marginalized communities more generally. They hold a crucial role in supporting the most vulnerable populations during economic downturns. These organizations are required to have robust internal infrastructure to comply with the programs administrative, data, and fiscal management requirements. Finally, SNAP expands to meet demand, acting as an automatic stabilizer during economic downturns.

Figure 6 is a map of 29 BFET providers in King County. They are well-positioned to serve areas with the highest rates of continuous unemployment insurance (UI) claims. There are a few “holes” where there exists a higher concentration of UI claims coupled with fewer providers; however, by and large, these areas have ample BFET providers in nearby ZIP codes. There is a lack of BFET providers in eastern King County, but there are relatively few continuous claims in these ZIP codes.

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\* Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

† Their participation has been limited but ABAWDs can be eligible for BFET but are not eligible for TANF.

‡ The new rule took effect in February but on July 30, a judge blocked the expansion of the because of COVID-19 concerns.<sup>26</sup>

BFET providers exist with a primary focus on serving each of the types of target populations (except the LGBTQ community and specific religious communities), focusing their outreach and program design to meet specific needs of those populations.

BFET Providers and Continuing Unemployment Insurance Claims by ZIP Code  
Week Ending August 9, 2020

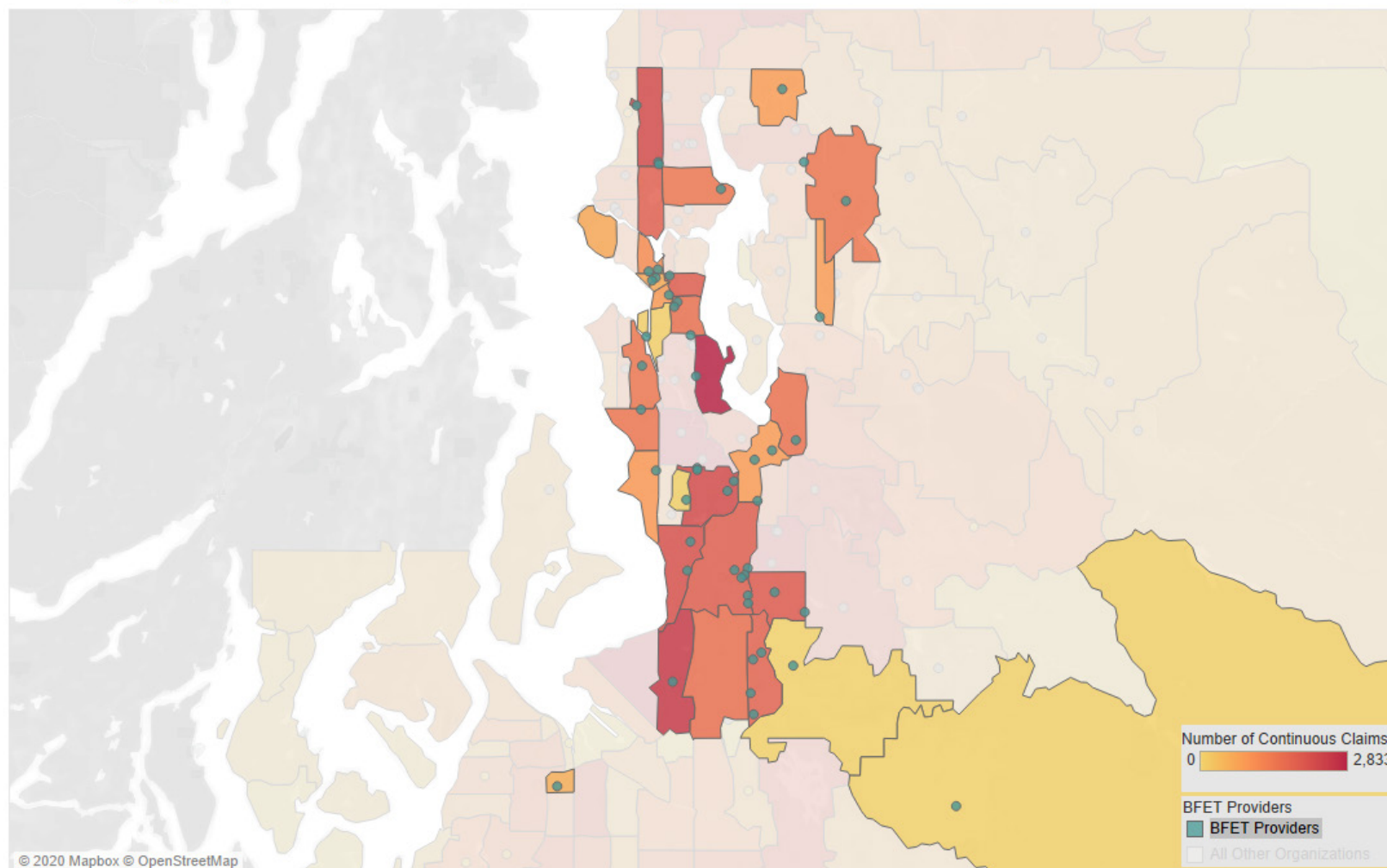


Figure 6. BFET Providers



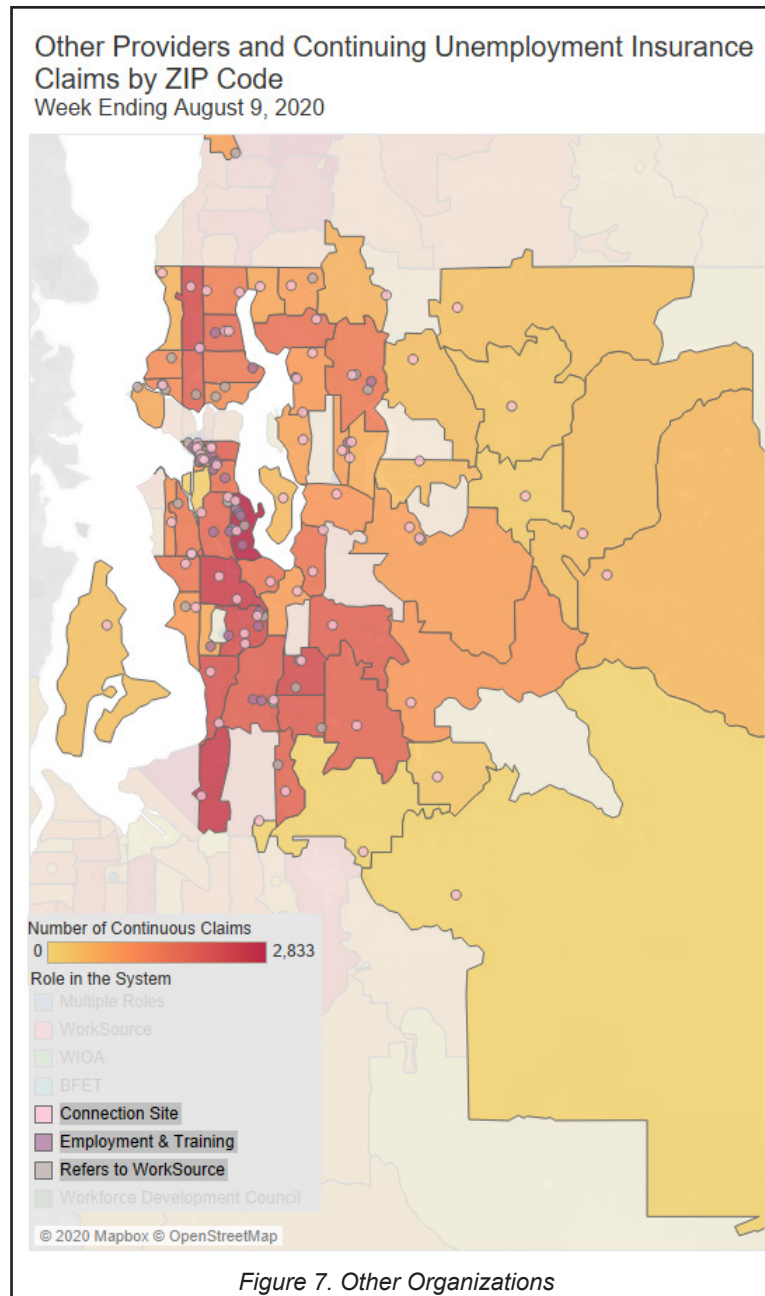
The area of concern is the most southeastern ZIP code of the City of Seattle, 98118, and its neighbor, 98108. The 98118 ZIP code has the highest number of continuous UI claims in the Seattle MSA as of the week ending August 9th, 2020. It and 98108 are two of the most diverse ZIP codes in King County, with a high proportion of BIPOC and low-income residents.<sup>27</sup> There is a single BFET provider, Neighborhood House, focused on public housing residents, on the border between those two.

Other organizations do fill that gap (Figure 7). The organizations also reflect the diverse community in which they are located, focusing on unique populations, including refugees and immigrants, Black, Native, and Latinx communities.

Near South King County\* remains a concern as the only organization serving those ZIP codes is King County Library, which is a WorkSource connection site. The branches serve a critical function of connecting these areas to the larger system. However, as noted above, the connection sites do not have dedicated workforce development funding.

Targeting resources to support the grassroots CBOs in these communities, including a meaningful needs assessment and supporting communication between organizations and the WDC and local governments is critical to effectively respond and support those who have been hit hardest by COVID-19 layoffs.

\* ZIP codes immediate adjacent to the Seattle city limits in King County, 98168 and 98178, covering Tukwila, Burien, and Seatac, Bryn Mawr, Skyway, and unincorporated King County.



## Building Capacity During a Crisis

The impact of COVID-19 is much larger in scale and reach than typical disasters. However, disaster recovery does offer us some guidance about how individual organizations and the system can recover and serve the community more effectively. Disasters affect community based organizations much like the businesses in the same ecosystem. They affect organizational staff, disrupt their funding, and their services may not be what their communities need most during an emergency and recovery. Resilient organizations do three things<sup>28</sup>:



They do effective messaging that connects the disaster narrative to their community-building work. At the same time, these organizations have conversations about their organization's role so they can pivot and do new work that meets the needs of the community and aligns with organizational missions. They embed the new work in their "traditional" community development work. Finally, if staffing needs change or increase, they use the response to the increased needs as an opportunity to create cross-programmatic and cross-disciplinary interactions.

Chronic underfunding of community based organizations, particularly those serving the most marginalized, makes it very difficult for organizations to make the shift. Affected communities are even more resource-strapped than pre-disaster. They have limited access to decisionmakers and risk-averse public officials wary of bringing outside groups into the formal decision-making processes.

Smaller, grassroots organizations have difficulty gaining legitimacy in part because their impact is hard to measure and evaluate. The groups don't have the staff needed to identify, collect, and analyze relevant data. However, these are the same groups that elected officials and decisionmakers need to hear from to make effective decisions. Their ties to the community provide them with more in-depth knowledge at the local level than other actors. They are also in place and have built trust with the communities they serve necessary to carry out effective long-term recovery efforts.<sup>28</sup>

The workforce development system does have the advantage of a network of community based organizations that serve as connection sites for the WorkSource system. This association is voluntary but provides a pre-existing relationship on which to build effective responses that include organizations in the communities most impacted.

However, state and local budgets are strained, and the federal government has not yet allocated funds to help adult workers gain additional skills to re-enter the workforce during and after COVID-19. BFET does offer some additional funding in that it expands to meet demand, and Congress has allocated additional funding for SNAP. But this funding stream accounts for a small proportion of the system's overall funding. It is unclear where adequate financing to maintain the current system, let alone expand it to meet the exploding need, will come from.

Effective response to the crisis will require investment with the top two priorities:

1. Funding connection sites, moving away from voluntary to contractual.
2. Increasing capacity to access BFET, as it will allow an expanded participation in the workforce eco-system

## Future Research

In Brief 3, we will be identifying programs that have made the pivot to the COVID-19 environment and can be scaled up or replicated. We will focus on programs in pathways with occupations that have not been hard hit by layoffs or have the potential to recover quickly as well as training and support programs that are successfully navigating the digital divide.

In Brief 4, we will identify skill sets from occupations that are in demand or recovering and what skills from hard-hit occupations can be crosswalked into those occupations to inform targeting and support to help job seekers build on their strengths as they transition to new career paths.

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**To read the first brief in the COVID-Recession & Recovery series, please visit:**  
<https://www.seattlejobsinitiative.com/new-research-covid-recession-recovery/>

## Appendix: Workforce Development System Organizations

Role in the System	Organization	Type
Multiple Roles	Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS)* §	CBO
	Bellevue College§	Community College
	Cares of Washington§	CBO
	Cascadia College§	Community College
	El Centro de la Raza	CBO
	FareStart§	CBO
	Green River College§	Community College
	Highline College§	Community College
	Lake Washington Institute of Technology§	Community College
	Millionair Club Charity	CBO
	Multi-Service Center§	CBO
	Neighborhood House*§	CBO
	North Seattle College§	Community College
	Pacific Associates*§	CBO
	Pioneer Human Services	CBO
	Puget Sound Training Center (PSTC) §	CBO
	Refugee Federation Service Center (RFSC) §	CBO
	Refugee Women's Alliance§	CBO
	Renton Technical College§	Community College
	Seattle Central College§	Community College
	Seattle Goodwill Industries (SGI)*§	CBO
	Shoreline Community College§	Community College
	South Seattle College§	Community College
	The Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle	CBO
	TRAC Associates*§	CBO
	YWCA of Seattle King County*§	CBO

\* WIOA providers, § BFET providers

Role in the System	Organization	Type
BFET	Adonai	CBO
	Apprenticeship & Nontraditional Employment for Women (ANEW)	CBO
	King County Jobs Initiative (KCJI)	Agency
	Partners in Employment	CBO
	Port Jobs	CBO
	Seattle Jobs Initiative	CBO
	World Relief -Seattle- Office of Refugee & Immigrant Assistance (ORIA)	CBO
WIOA	Boys & Girls Club of King County	CBO
	King County Employment & Education Resources	Agency
Connection Site	Children's Home Society of Washington	CBO
	Downtown Emergency Service Center	CBO
	Downtown Seattle Association	CBO
	Hopelink	CBO
	IKRON	CBO
	King County Community Corrections Division	Agency
	King County Public Library	Library
	Lifelong	CBO
	Neighborhood House	CBO
	Refugee Women's Alliance	CBO
	Seattle Housing Authority	Agency
	Seattle Public Library	Library
	Washington Talking Book and Braille Library	Library
	YWCA of Seattle King County	CBO
Refers to WorkSource	Babes Network	CBO
	Ballard Food Bank	CBO
	Bread of Life	CBO
	Bridge Care Center	CBO
	Imagine Institute	CBO
	Issaquah Food & Clothing Bank	CBO
	Kent Youth and Family Services	CBO

Role in the System	Organization	Type
	Muslim Association of Puget Sound	CBO
	Muslim Housing Services	CBO
	Neighborhood House	CBO
	New Horizons	CBO
	NorthShore Youth & Family Services	CBO
	Orion Industries	CBO
	Roots	CBO
	Seattle's Union Gospel Mission	CBO
	Solid Ground	CBO
	Somali Family Safety Task Force	CBO
	Southwest Youth & Family Services	CBO
	St. Luke's Episcopal Church	CBO
	The 180 Program	CBO
	Together Center	CBO
	United Indians of All Tribes	CBO
	United Way	CBO
	YouthCare	CBO
Employment & Training	Alliance of People with disAbilities	CBO
	Boots to Shoes Foundation	CBO
	Casa Latina	CBO
	Chief Seattle Club	CBO
	DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation	Agency
	Horn of Africa Services	CBO
	Interaction Transition	CBO
	International Drop-In Ctr.	CBO
	International Rescue Committee	CBO
	King County Career Connections	Agency
	King County Veterans Program	Agency
	Mother Nation	CBO
	National Asian Pacific Center on Aging	CBO

Role in the System	Organization	Type
	Open Doors for Multicultural Families	CBO
	Real Change	CBO
	Seattle Conservation Corps	Agency
	Seattle Indian Center	CBO
	Seattle Vet Center	Agency
	Somali Community Services of Seattle	CBO
	Sound	CBO
	Southeast Youth & Family Services	CBO
	The Lighthouse for the Blind	CBO
WorkSource	WorkSource	WorkSource
		WorkSource Affiliate
Workforce Development Council	Workforce Development Council	WDC