

BEYOND THE HEADLINES

At a Glance: Workforce Development

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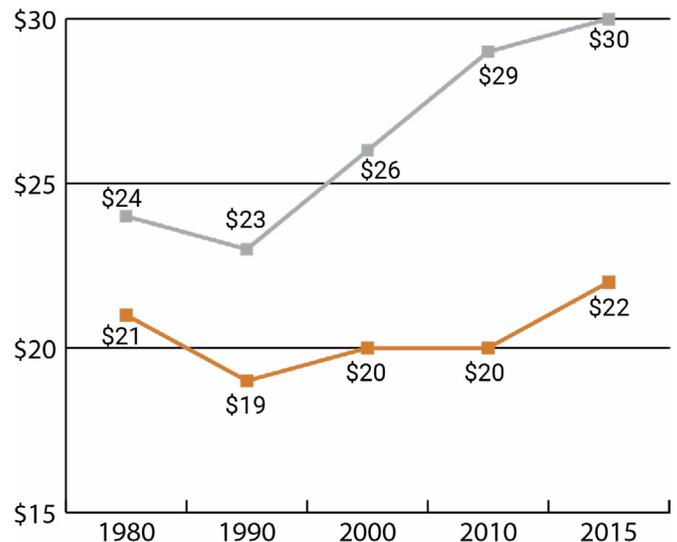
FOCUS: CITY OF SEATTLE

Imagining a World-Class Workforce Development System for Our Region

By most standard measures, Seattle's economy has experienced significant growth in both wealth and opportunity. Over the past decade, Seattle has added 220,000 jobs and is now home to thirty-one Fortune 500 companies. Among the forty largest metro areas in the United States, Seattle's 2016 GDP per capita of \$86,889 was the fourth highest. Unemployment in the Seattle region sits at 3.1%, lower than the national rate.

At first glance, it seems that plenty of employment opportunity is available for our region's residents. Yet, upon closer inspection, it is revealed that largely well educated, tech-savvy talent has fueled Seattle's economic boom. With tech workers in our metro area commanding an average of \$132,000 a year in salary, wealth inequality has risen to its recorded highest levels¹. Corresponding increases in the cost of living for Seattle has resulted in significant displacement of middle class communities of color during this time of heightened economic activity.

**Median hourly wage by race/ethnicity
Seattle, WA
1980 - 2015**
National Equity Atlas



So what is our region to do in response to this booming, skills-dependent economic growth? We must advance a world-class workforce development system that connects all members of our region's labor force to the services, training, and supports that will empower them to thrive in our dynamic local economy as well as build resilience for when labor market conditions change.

Research conducted by the Urban Institute has established the core elements of a high-functioning local workforce system that succeeds in "preparing people for successful careers and connecting skilled workers with employers to improve economic growth." In order to achieve this goal, a local workforce system must accomplish the following functions²:

1. Provide employment services
2. Provide education and training
3. Offer supportive services
4. Support employers' human resources needs
5. Develop and coordinate workforce strategies and policies
6. Provide funding and resources to support the system
7. Improve job quality and access

1 "Seattle hits record high for income inequality, now rivals San Francisco" – The Seattle Times, November 2017.

2 "Understanding Local Workforce Systems" – Urban Institute, March 2016

Additional research identifies a framework to help conceptualize systems change within a workforce system³. In order to adequately respond to changing economic trends in our region, our workforce development community must be nimble enough to coordinate and meet workers where they are. This conception emphasizes the role of collaboration, quality and accessibility, industry engagement, data-driven decision-making, and scale and sustainability as core elements of a workforce development systems change framework.

With industry, direct service providers, education institutions, and government agencies represented at the table, workforce systems can ensure a more appropriate and effective response to our region's economic environment. Individuals experiencing unemployment in our region are facing higher and more complex barriers, which requires careful assessment and coordination of social services to ensure adequate and effective service.

Building a world-class workforce development system for our region is possible if we learn from best practices established through research and example. It is essential that local policymakers focus on intentional coordination coupled with a systems change framework will help ensure our region is prepared to respond to economic trends and offer pathways for career growth and self-sufficiency for all residents. **It is essential that local policymakers focus on intentional coordination coupled with a systems change framework will help ensure our region is prepared to respond to economic trends and offer pathways for career growth and self-sufficiency for all residents.**

Currently, through the efforts of a Regional Workforce Strategy Group (RWSG), leaders from across King County are coming together to address workforce system gaps and structural reforms. This work includes the identification and support of successful programming, the establishment of priorities to address program gaps, and the facilitation of working groups to develop effective and appropriate solutions. Utilizing a systems change framework and maintaining close coordination with strategic partners, the RWSG offers a prime opportunity to enact meaningful improvements to our region's workforce development system.

³ "Changing Workforce Systems: A Framework for Describing and Measuring Systems Change" – Urban Institute, February 2017.

SYSTEM-LEVEL GOALS

COLLABORATION

Actors have shared a vision or coordinated approach to serving workers and employers and effectively work together to solve problems and share best practices.

QUALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Services are visible and accessible to and meet the needs of those who need them, especially people with disadvantages or barriers to employment.

INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

The system is informed by business needs, and employers are invested partners in workforce efforts.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Actors collect and use quality data to design and continuously improve programs and services.

SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

The system has adequate programs, funding, and policies to reliably meet the needs of individuals and employers over time.

Urban Institute – Changing Workforce Systems, 2017

BEYOND THE HEADLINES

Policy and labor market updates for those working to help low-income and low-skill individuals advance through education, training and living-wage jobs

About Seattle Jobs Initiative

Seattle Jobs Initiative creates opportunities for students, workers and business to succeed by helping education and job training programs meet the demands of a new economy. We find and apply solutions for people to gain the skills they need for good jobs that create prosperity for all in today's marketplace.

Supported by the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development

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