

Legislative Workforce Policy Group

SECTOR-FOCUSED CAREER PATHWAYS

WHAT IS A SECTOR STRATEGY?

A sector strategy is an organizing principle that provides incentives and support for the alignment of workforce, education and economic development policies around major regional industry sectors to address the needs of both businesses and individuals. The goal is to connect a patchwork of workforce programs around sector-focused career pathways to make more efficient use of limited public resources; provide access to a full range of skill attainment course work for students, job seekers, and incumbent workers; improve labor market outcomes; and meet the needs of regional industries and economies.

The national “movement” toward sectoral approaches began roughly two decades ago and contains three related strands.

The Philanthropic Model – This approach is aimed at providing good jobs and career advancement opportunities for individuals with serious barriers to labor market success. Advocates argue that by deeply engaging employers in design and implementation, workforce programs can be crafted that both provide new kinds of openings for low-skilled, low-wage workers and meet the labor needs of employers.

The Economic Development Model –In this model, there is much less focus on workers and jobseekers with serious barriers to advancement and more focus on the overall labor

demand of industry sectors and clusters critical to the economic health of a region. Often these kinds of efforts are funded by a mix of state monies and federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I funds.

The Career Pathway Model – This approach, which has emerged from community colleges, links career technical education (CTE) courses into coherent educational “career pathways” for students, organized by industry sector and occupation, and informed by the active involvement of employers. Career pathways are a series of connected education and training programs customized to the needs of local labor markets. They provide on-ramps for underprepared students and result in credential, certificates, and degrees that have value in the market places.

WHAT ARE THE CORE ELEMENTS OF A SECTOR-FOCUSED CAREER PATHWAYS MODEL?

- ✓ *Dual customer* focus on the labor market needs of both business and individuals.
- ✓ *Employer engagement* by industry sectors or “clusters”, rather than by single employers.
- ✓ *Labor market information* that is timely and accurate.
- ✓ *Collaborative and sustainable partnerships* among employers, labor, educational institutions, workforce investment boards, one-stop career centers, adult education providers, and community-based organizations.
- ✓ *Programs and curriculum* designed around clear pathways with roadmaps that provide coherent course offerings that address the labor “pipeline” needed by industry.