Partnership for Learning
Education Foundation of the WASHINGTON ROUNDTABLE

PARTNERSHIP FOR LEARNING · WASHINGTON ROUNDTABLE

Employer leadership in credential pathways

Career Connect Washington Cross Agency Working Group · October 2026

ABOUT THIS WORK

Employer leadership in credential pathways

DESIRED OUTCOME

Build a Washington talent system that consistently connects more students to family-sustaining careers – and employers to the talent they need to grow

FOCUS

Strengthen employer leadership in defining pathways and driving system alignment

FIRST STEP

Landscape analysis to understand how employer engagement actually works in practice across different systems

NEXT PHASE OF WORK

Building on the findings from the landscape analysis to reimagine how Washington's education and workforce systems partner with employers, so that engagement consistently delivers the outcomes our students and employers need.

METHODOLOGY

Landscape analysis: initial approach

The initial phase involved a comprehensive review and validation process to build a foundational understanding of employer touchpoints with Washington's education, training, and workforce development ecosystem.

Document review

Analyzed policy, agency, and institution documents to understand current requirements, guidance, and recommendations for employer engagement

Digital footprint

Examined system websites and public information to understand how required or recommended employer engagement translates into practice

Expert interviews

Conducted interviews and validated initial findings with subject matter experts spanning Washington's education, training, and workforce development systems

DEFINING THE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT ECOSYSTEM

Who requests employer participation

PUBLIC SYSTEMS

Employers are asked to engage across 8 public-system domains:

- **OSPI** – including 9 ESDs, 295 school districts, and ~2,500 schools
- **SBCTC** – including 34 community and technical colleges
- **State Workforce Board**
- **Local Workforce Development Boards** – 12 boards and local WorkSource services
- **Labor & Industries** – including the Apprenticeship and Training Council and ~200 registered apprenticeship programs
- **Employment Security Department** – including Career Connect Washington
- **Department of Commerce**
- **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

COMMUNITY-BASED WORKFORCE PARTNERS

Employers are also asked to engage with a wide range of community-based workforce partners:

- **300+ private career schools**
- **A large and diffuse set of community-based workforce partners** – nonprofits, industry associations, chambers, labor-management partnerships, and workforce intermediaries
- **A large and evolving set of grant-funded, time-bound initiatives** – including sector partnerships, program-building efforts, and regional STEM or career-connected learning efforts

What employers are asked to do

The ecosystem asks employers to play at least 8 different functional roles:

Provide information	Share workforce data, hiring priorities, and training practices
Advise and validate	Provide guidance, often on education and training curricula
Provide formal oversight	Provide governance or compliance sign-off
Co-design and build	Help create standards, curriculum, programs, or pathways
Engage learners	Interact with learners in the classroom – guest speakers, project-based learning
Host work-based learning	Provide structured workplace learning – job shadows, internships
Train employees	Deliver structured on-the-job training, such as apprenticeship
Hire and advance talent	Provide priority access to interviews, internships, or employment opportunities

DEFINING THE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT ECOSYSTEM

Why employers are asked to engage

Underlying motivators

Educators, programs, institutions, and agencies engage employers to ensure:

- Programs align with in-demand occupations
- Students develop relevant, workforce-aligned skills
- Learners transition successfully into quality jobs with advancement potential
- Employers can effectively hire, train, and retain talent
- Local economies and communities are strengthened

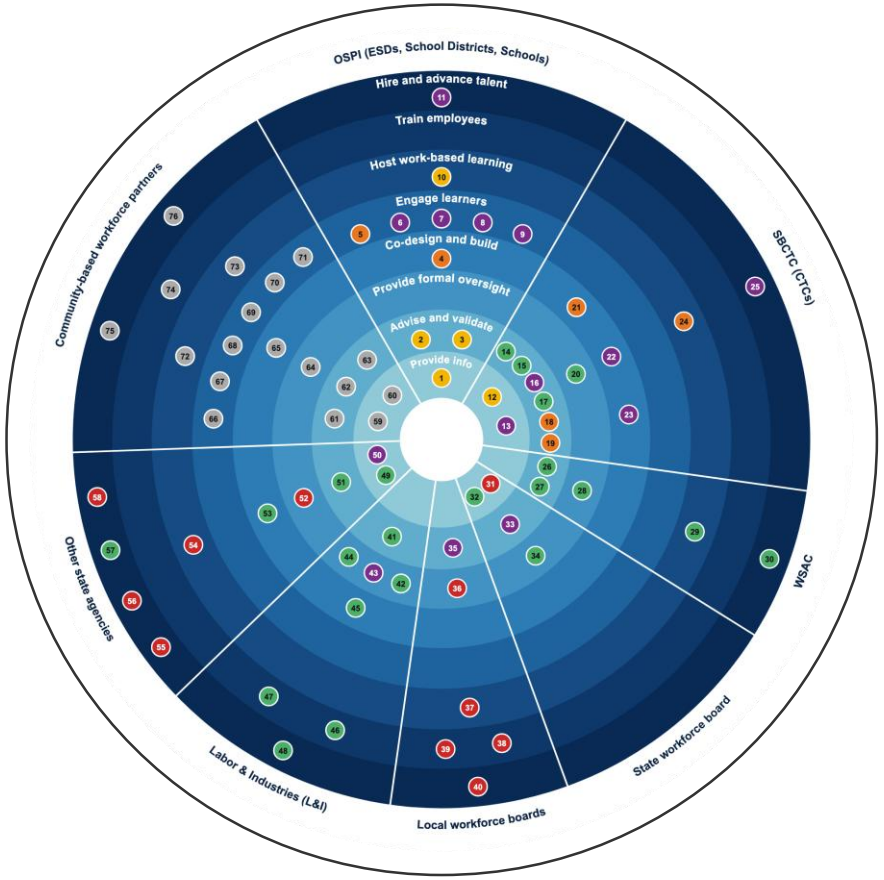
Practical drivers

In practice, engagement is also shaped by overlapping policy, funding, and institutional drivers:

- Perkins funding
- WIOA funding
- State statute
- Institutional policy
- Institutional practice
- Other public or philanthropic funding

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Initial landscape analysis has captured 75+ types of requests Washington's workforce ecosystem makes of employers



TOUCHPOINT CATEGORIES

Provide information: Share workforce data or priorities

Advise and validate: Ad hoc or ongoing guidance

Provide formal oversight: Provide governance or compliance sign-off

Co-design and build: Help create standards, curriculum, or programs

Engage learners: Interact with learners (inform/mentor/evaluate)

Host work-based learning: Provide structured workplace learning

Train employees: Deliver structured on-the-job training

Hire and advance talent: Provide priority access to interviews or jobs

EMPLOYER TOUCHPOINT DRIVEN BY

- Perkins
- WIOA
- State statute
- Variable; often driven by public or philanthropic funding
- Institutional policy
- Institutional practice

[Interactive landscape analysis here]

BY THE NUMBERS

The scale of what we ask

The map shows the types of requests employers face. To gauge their weight, the landscape analysis also estimated how often each plays out across Washington's hundreds of institutions – immense volume and complexity, with minimal coordination.

300+

Public institutions

Including 295 school districts, 34 community and technical colleges, and 12 local workforce development boards

2,900

Standing tables

Estimated standing committees and groups that regularly solicit employer input across the state

9,000

Annual meetings

Estimated meetings per year generated by those standing tables – demanding significant time from employers and education and training partners

5,000

Employers with 100+ employees

Nearly all of this outreach competes for the attention of these roughly 5,000 employers – about one standing committee for every two employers.

Figures are directional estimates intended to illustrate scale, not precise counts.

KEY FINDINGS

What the landscape analysis revealed

Mapping the ways Washington's workforce development ecosystem engages employers today brought four recurring patterns into focus.

01	**Volume of engagement**	• There is no shortage of employer engagement across the system. • Information capture is abundant, but information flow is limited – input rarely travels beyond the structure that collected it.
02	**Employer representation**	• Participation is largely "raise-your-hand," not representative by design. • Individual employers are often asked to provide input or validation on sector-wide matters.
03	**Nature of employer asks**	• The ecosystem leans on many small asks instead of fewer high-leverage roles. • Many engagement structures are shaped by funding and compliance requirements, leaving limited time and space for forward-looking workforce strategy and innovation.
04	**System dynamics**	• Funding dynamics amplify the volume of requests made outside of public institutions. • Significant time and effort is expended on advisory structures that run in parallel.

BRIGHT SPOTS

Across the state, some are already addressing these gaps

There are real bright spots across the state where coordinated, employer-led models are already delivering value for students and employers. They show that a better model isn't just possible – it's already taking shape.

Coordinated employer engagement

Some regions coordinate employer engagement across programs and agencies – building relationships once and using them across multiple programs.

Consolidated advisory committees

Some programs are already moving toward consolidated, area-wide advisory committees rather than separate program-level ones.

Employer co-design

There are partnerships where employers meaningfully co-design programs and pathways – delivering value for employers, educators, and learners.

Employer investment

In some cases, employers co-invest in workforce growth alongside public institutions – bringing dollars, staff, and paid opportunities that stretch public funding and signal genuine employer demand.

APPENDIX · LOOKING AHEAD

Emerging themes for recommendations

As we move from the landscape analysis into the next phase of work, three themes are emerging for where recommendations could focus – building on bright spots and addressing the dynamics we surfaced.

Represent

Representative employer intelligence about job demand, competencies, and credentials – aggregated through sector-level structures that can speak for businesses across size and geography.

Receive

A system designed to hear and respond – formal channels for employers to surface their own priorities, and agencies that share information provided by employers and coordinate their responses.

Respond

Priorities and investments guided by outcomes that matter to employers and students – with incentives that encourage alignment with sector hiring and skill demand signals.

Thank you!

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