



**Nebraska Workforce Development Board**  
Meeting Minutes  
March 11, 2022, 9a – 12p  
Administrative Services Building  
1526 K Street, Lower Level  
Lincoln, NE 68508

Agenda item 1. Call to Order

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Chair Mark Moravec called to order the meeting of the Nebraska Workforce Development Board (the Board) on March 11, 2022 at approximately 9a at the Administrative Services Building, 1526 K Street, Lower Level, in Lincoln, NE.

Agenda item 2. Roll Call

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Nicole Schaefer called roll and advised Chair Moravec that quorum was established.

Members in Attendance

- |                      |                       |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. John Albin        | 10. Kyle Nixon        |
| 2. Brain Deakin      | 11. Don Nordell       |
| 3. Gary Dixon        | 12. Terri Ridder      |
| 4. Jason Feldhaus    | 13. Bradley Schroeder |
| 5. Lindy Foley       | 14. Jennifer Sedlacek |
| 6. Allan Hale        | 15. Jim Smith         |
| 7. James Hansen      | 16. Becky Stitt       |
| 8. James Hanson, Jr. | 17. Paul Turman       |
| 9. Mark Moravec      |                       |

Members Absent

- |                           |                   |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Governor Pete Ricketts | 7. Anthony Goins  |
| 2. Senator Ben Hansen     | 8. Tate Lauer     |
| 3. Greg Adams             | 9. Susan Martin   |
| 4. Kyle Arganbright       | 10. Kyle Nixon    |
| 5. Elizabeth Babcock      | 11. Danette Smith |
| 6. Michael Geary          | 12. Lisa Wilson   |

Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) Board Administrative Staff

1. Derek Ahrens, State Monitor, Division of Reemployment Services
2. Deb Andersen, Administrator, Division of Reemployment Services
3. Elizabeth Cano, Attorney III, Office of the General Counsel
4. Erick Carrillo, Program Analyst, Division of Reemployment Services
5. Jana Dye, Administrator, Division of Reemployment Services
6. Bobbi Jo Howard, Administrator, Division of Reemployment Services

7. Lisa Laws, Administrator, Division of Reemployment Services
8. Bradley Pierce, Director, Division of Reemployment Services
9. Nicole Schaefer, Administrative Programs Officer, Division of Reemployment Services
10. Katie Thurber, General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel

### Agenda item 3. Notice of Publication

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Nicole Schaefer announced that the Notice of Public Meeting was duly published, in accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act, in the Beatrice Daily Sun, Columbus Telegram, Grand Island Independent, Hastings Tribune, Kearney Hub, Lincoln Journal Star, Norfolk Daily News, North Platte Telegraph, Omaha World-Herald, and Scottsbluff Star-Herald. Nicole announced that notice of the meeting was also posted on the State of Nebraska Public Meeting Calendar.

### Agenda item 4. Approval of Minutes

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Chair Moravec called the next order of business, which was the approval of the meeting minutes from the September 10, 2021. The draft minutes from the September meeting were emailed to the Members of the Board on September 9, 2021. The meeting minutes were included in Board Member meeting packets as Handout 1.

Chair Moravec opened the floor for public comment on the draft minutes. No public comments were made. James Hanson, Jr. motioned to approve the minutes, and Bradley Schroeder seconded the motion. Members of the Board in attendance voted on the motion by roll call vote, which carried unanimously.

### Agenda item 5. Old Business

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#### a. NDOL Updates

- Local Area Monitoring

Bradley Pierce advised the Board that Nebraska Department of Labor's comprehensive monitoring schedule for the upcoming Program Year 2022 (July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023) has been established.<sup>1</sup> Bradley reported that each local workforce development area will be comprehensively monitored during a four-month period during Program Year 2022. Bradley also advised the Board that internal process improvements and additional investment in monitoring staff has drastically improved the effectiveness of the State Monitoring Unit. These enhancements ensure that Federal expectations and requirements are met by the State when performing monitoring of the local areas and will also benefit the local areas in their pursuit of continuous improvement to service delivery.

- Statewide Security Policy

Bradley Pierce also advised the Board that the State will be issuing a policy on physical security in response to security incidents in one-stop centers during the pandemic. NDOL is currently developing the policy in collaboration with the US Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. The policy will address security vulnerabilities that have been observed in recent

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<sup>1</sup> The Program Year 2022 monitoring schedule is accessible at <https://dol.nebraska.gov/webdocs/getfile/ba8e80c0-562a-4203-a6e1-516961f382c3>.

years and focus on planning, risk identification, mitigation response, and reporting procedures to ensure that all one-stop centers have sufficient mechanisms in place to address accessibility concerns of the public and provide reasonable safety for one-stop center staff and customers.

Bradley went on to say that local boards are required to annually assess the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers in their respective local areas, pursuant to Federal law and regulations. In addition to this assessment requirement, local boards will also be required to assess local area compliance with the physical security of measures established in the future policy. Additionally, compliance with the State's future physical security policy will be incorporated in the triennial site certification process. The State will be working with all three local areas in the coming months during development of the policy, in addition to the Board's Policy and Oversight Subcommittee.

## Agenda item 6. New Business

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### a. RISE | Prison Reentry | Nebraska Prison Program

Chair Moravec introduced Jeremy Bouman, Erica Raetz, and Maria Godemann from RISE, a non-profit organization in Nebraska focused on rehabilitative programming in prisons and reentry support. Jeremy is the founder and CEO of RISE, Erica is the Director of Reentry Services, and Maria is Director of Programs. During their presentation to the Board (Handout 2), they described how they prepare and train individuals during each phase of their involvement with Nebraska's criminal justice system through intensive character development, employment readiness, job creation through entrepreneurship, family programming, and case management. RISE acts as a liaison between employers and currently and formerly incarcerated individuals to help them find gainful employment while participating in work-release programs. Upon release, RISE helps justice-involved individuals find housing, learn to balance a budget, reintegrate into society and bring about healing and restoration with their families and facilitates transformation of justice-involved individuals by building awareness and empathy in their home communities, which ultimately reduces recidivism rates.

### b. Fidelity Bonds

Lisa Laws presented to the Board on the Federal Fidelity Bond Program (Handout 3). Fidelity Bonds provide \$5,000 in insurance coverage to employers that hire at-risk and hard-to-place job seekers. The coverage is provided at no cost to the employer or employee. The Federal Fidelity Bond Program targets individuals with backgrounds that pose significant barriers to securing or retaining employment, such as justice-involved individuals and individuals in recovery from substance use disorders. Fidelity Bonds benefit employers by protecting company assets, providing tax benefits, and providing access to an otherwise untapped talented labor pool. Fidelity Bonds also benefit justice-involved individuals by assisting them with employment placement, thereby reducing recidivism. Fidelity Bonds protect the employer against crimes of dishonesty, and coverage is effective from the date of issuance and terminates six months after the employees' start dates. Coverage does not, however, protect against liabilities due to poor performance or on-the-job injuries and accidents.

### c. Career Pathways Advancement Project (CPAP)

Chair Moravec introduced Mary Kunes-Neary and Janet Drudik, both Project Managers with the Nebraska VR Program, a Federally funded vocational rehabilitation program. Nebraska VR was

recently awarded a Career Pathway Advancement Project (CPAP) 2.0 grant through the Federal Rehabilitation Service Administration (Handout 4). CPAP's main goal is to help individuals obtain gainful employment where they can receive good wages and benefits. CPAP also seeks to up-skill individuals with disabilities by providing opportunities to advance them in their employment. CPAP also aims to backfill positions through access to Nebraska VR's untapped talent bank. CPAP benefits employers by retaining key talent, cultivating workforce development, improving morale, and reducing training cost. Targeted career pathways under CPAP include agriculture and construction, healthcare, manufacturing, administrative support, lodging, sales, and restaurant/food and beverage service. Eligibility for participation in the program requires that individuals have a disability, whether physical or mental, and an interest in advancement through training.

#### d. Subcommittee Reports

- [Policy and Oversight Subcommittee](#)
  - [Annual Performance Report for Program Year 2020](#)

James Hanson, Jr. advised the Board that since the September 2021 meeting of the Board, the Nebraska Department of Labor submitted the Program Year 2020 Annual Performance Report Narrative to the US Department of Labor and the Nebraska Legislature (Handout 5). James pointed out three significant sections of the report.

1. Section II(c) provides a summary of an evaluation project conducted by NDOL during late 2020 and early 2021.
2. Section II(f) provides information on sector strategies and career pathways activities occurring in Nebraska's three local workforce development areas.
3. Section II(h) addresses performance deficiencies among Nebraska's local areas.

Another section in the report worth noting is Section III, along with its supporting Appendices VI and VII, all of which meet the reporting requirement established under Nebraska Revised Statute 48-3304 regarding NDOL's utilization of Federal funding for WIOA Title I adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs.

- [2022 Modification of the Combined State Plan](#)

James Hanson, Jr. referred the Board to the last page of the Board packet (Handout 6) which provided a link to the draft modification of the Combined State Plan for Nebraska's Workforce Development System. James stated that the draft modification was published on February 16, 2022 for public comment. The plan partners held a public hearing on March 2, 2022 at 10am. The hearing concluded at 10:30a as members of the public were not in attendance. The public comment period ended on March 18, 2022. As the date of this meeting of the Board, plan partners had not received public comments on the modification. James advised the Board that the plan partners intend to submit the entire state plan modification to US Departments of Education and Labor no later than April 1.

James informed the Board that the Policy and Oversight Subcommittee has a meeting scheduled for March 16, during which the Greater Nebraska One-Stop Operator, Josh Hanson, will present to the Subcommittee on the Greater Nebraska Career Pathways Planning Project that will support the activities of both the Policy and Oversight Subcommittee and its Career Pathways Workgroup, as well as the activities of Strategy and Innovation Subcommittee.

- o Workgroup Updates

- Alignment

Stan Odenthal presented to the Board on the Alignment Workgroup's progress toward implementation of the goal and strategies defined in the current Combined State Plan. Stan advised the Board that the Workgroup's membership consists of representatives from required one-stop partners, including representatives from various state agencies, as well as representatives from each local workforce development areas. One-stop operators from each of the three local areas were recently added as Workgroup members, which is important considering one-stop operators coordinate activities of required one-stop partners in each of Nebraska's one-stop center.

The Alignment Workgroup is currently addressing the need for an effective common-intake system. The Workgroup is also preparing to provide quarterly training for required one-stop partners beginning in July 2022. The quarter training sessions will feature presentations from select required one-stop partner program representatives who will train attendees on services available through their respective programs.

Stan announced that Jody Easter will assume his role as Chair of the Alignment Workgroup.

- Career Pathways

- Strategy and Innovation Subcommittee

Deb Andersen spoke to the Board on behalf of Michael Geary, Chair of the Strategy and Innovation Subcommittee. Deb reminded the Board that during the September meeting of the Board, Michael mentioned that the Strategy and Innovation Subcommittee has two projects in progress, which were to establish an MOU between the Board and Nebraska's three Homeless Continuums of Care and alignment of statewide workforce initiatives.

When the Subcommittee meets on March 18, there will be discussion on a Subcommittee recommendation to the Board that the establishment of the MOU be tabled until they had heard from Nebraska's three Homeless Continuums of Care, all three of which have fallen silent on proceeding with the MOU. There will also be discussion on next steps for alignment of statewide workforce initiatives. In addition, there will be a presentation from Josh Hanson, the Greater Nebraska One-Stop Operator. Josh will present to the Subcommittee on the Greater Nebraska Career Pathways Planning Project, which will support the activities of both the Strategy and Innovation Subcommittee, as well as the Policy and Oversight Subcommittee and its career Pathways Workgroup.

- e. Member Updates

Chair Moravec asked Members of the Board for updates on their respective industries or organizations and local workforce development area activities for the Members who also serve on local workforce development boards. Members of the Board provided updates as requested.

#### Agenda item 7. Next Meeting – Date and Time

Chair Moravec reminded the Members of the Board that the next meeting of the Board is scheduled for June 10, 2022 from 9a to 12p, at the Administrative Services Building, 1526 K Street,

Lincoln, NE. If the date or time of the meeting changes, Members of the Board would be notified by email.

#### Agenda item 8. Public Comment

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Chair Moravec opened the floor for public comment. No comments were made.

#### Agenda item 9. Adjournment

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Chair Moravec asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting of the Board. Brian Deakin motioned that the meeting be adjourned, and Bradley Schroeder seconded the motion. Members of the Board in attendance voted on the motion by roll call vote, which carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at approximately 12p.

DRAFT


## Handout 2



### **Ignite Nebraska is a new workforce development model designed to spark meaningful career opportunities for individuals who are active in the workforce but underrepresented in higher-paying, high-impact industries.**

In collaboration with Bellevue University and community partners, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska (BCBSNE) is providing accelerated higher learning and paid, on-the-job training in the field of information technology (IT). Upon program completion, participants will earn a full-time, rewarding job at BCBSNE or get help finding another local position to put their new skills to work.

This Ignite model is designed to scale to other companies, career paths and communities over time.



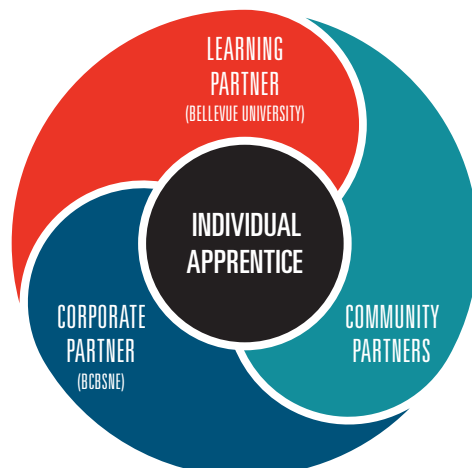
#### **WHY** Because people of color are underrepresented in high-skill, high-demand, high-wage occupations.

- Black talent represent just 5% of the tech workforce<sup>1</sup> and 3% of tech leadership<sup>2</sup>
- In Omaha, 21.7% of Blacks and 13.4% of the Hispanics have a bachelor's degree or higher (which is required of most BCBSNE entry-level IT roles)<sup>3</sup>
- 68% of business leaders feel there is a lack of diversity in their tech workforce<sup>4</sup>
- Workforce concerns dominate the list of business growth challenges for 92% of Nebraska business leaders<sup>5</sup>

#### **HOW** Helping companies like BCBSNE take the lead in creating a more diverse, direct talent pipeline by partnering with local organizations and educational institutions.

Ignite provides end-to-end support for individuals' career development, including:

- Identifying individuals who fit the criteria, need the support and have the desire
- Eliminating financial barriers to post-secondary education and providing accelerated, specialized, hands-on, paid training that leads to a full-time position
- Ensuring access to necessary family and financial resources along the way



<sup>1</sup> Analysis of 2019, 2021 Company Diversity Reports, Kapur Center

<sup>2</sup> Just 2.7% of Top Roles in Big Tech Held by Black Executives, The Information

<sup>3</sup> 2019: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimate (Educational Attainment)

<sup>4</sup> mthree Diversity in Tech 2021 U.S. Report: diversity\_in\_tech\_2021\_us\_report\_by\_mthree.pdf

<sup>5</sup> Lincoln Chamber Legislative Update – November 2021, Slide 3

# IT APPRENTICESHIP PILOT PROGRAM

The pilot program, beginning in February 2022, is focused on people of color in North and South Omaha who are interested in IT careers. It covers Microsoft Office fundamentals, software development processes, computer programming basics, SQL, databases and XML. Roughly 10 hours a week are spent in the classroom, and 10 hours a week are spent getting hands-on work experience at BCBSNE.

All participants are well paid (earning up to \$21/hour for 20 hours/week), eligible for employee benefits through BCBSNE and supported by a care team, including representatives from BCBSNE, Heartland Workforce Solutions and other community agencies. Equipment is provided by BCBSNE; tuition, fees and course materials are covered by Bellevue University and/or training grants.

This pilot program will inform BCBSNE and Bellevue University's next IT Apprenticeship class, as well as Ignite guidelines shared with other companies, learning partners and community partners.

## THE APPRENTICE JOURNEY LASTS SIX TO 12 MONTHS



### Nebraska community collaborators include:

- Heartland Workforce Solutions
- National Able Network
- Department of Economic Development (DED)
- Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
- Department of Labor (DOL)



**Sparking careers. Connecting communities. Driving growth.**



# COHORT 1 PROGRAM METRICS AS OF MAY 2022



## REDUCTION IN STATE SPONSORED BENEFITS UTILIZATION

PER APPRENTICE	AMOUNT	TOTAL FOR FOUR APPRENTICES
Starting allotment – January 2022	\$402/month	\$1,608/month
Current allotment average – May 2022	\$184/month	\$736/month
Average savings to the state in benefits	\$2,616/month	\$10,464/annually

Data provided by Department of Labor, Office of Employment & Training

Blue Cross and Blue Shield continues to work with DHHS to help participants plan for additional decreases in benefits as hours and pay increase. The intent is to increase hours to 40/week, which will eventually move all participants completely off assistance. This would increase the overall savings in public assistance.

**80%** OF APPRENTICES  
**SUCCESSFULLY**  
**COMPLETED MODULE 1**

ON AVERAGE, APPRENTICES  
HAVE **INCREASED THEIR**  
**MONTHLY INCOME BY** **136%**

**75%** AFRICAN  
AMERICAN  
**25%** WHITE

## SHORT TERM PROGRAM METRICS

Pre/post survey developed by DED that measures:

- Grit
- Financial well-being
- General well-being
- External constraints on performance
- Work experience

## LONG TERM PROGRAM METRICS

- # applied/interviewed/selected for the program
- Program completion rate
- # of apprentices who remain employed with host company six months after completing the program
- Average salary at beginning of program vs. end of program

## WHAT'S NEXT?

- Expanded program offerings to include developing professional acumen and personal brand and financial literacy
- Expansion to other companies across the state
  - Nebraska Department of Labor projects over 2,000 annual openings for high-skill, high-wage, high-demand information technology workers by 2028
- Program infrastructure
  - Website and external branding
  - Incorporation

# Career Pathways Planning

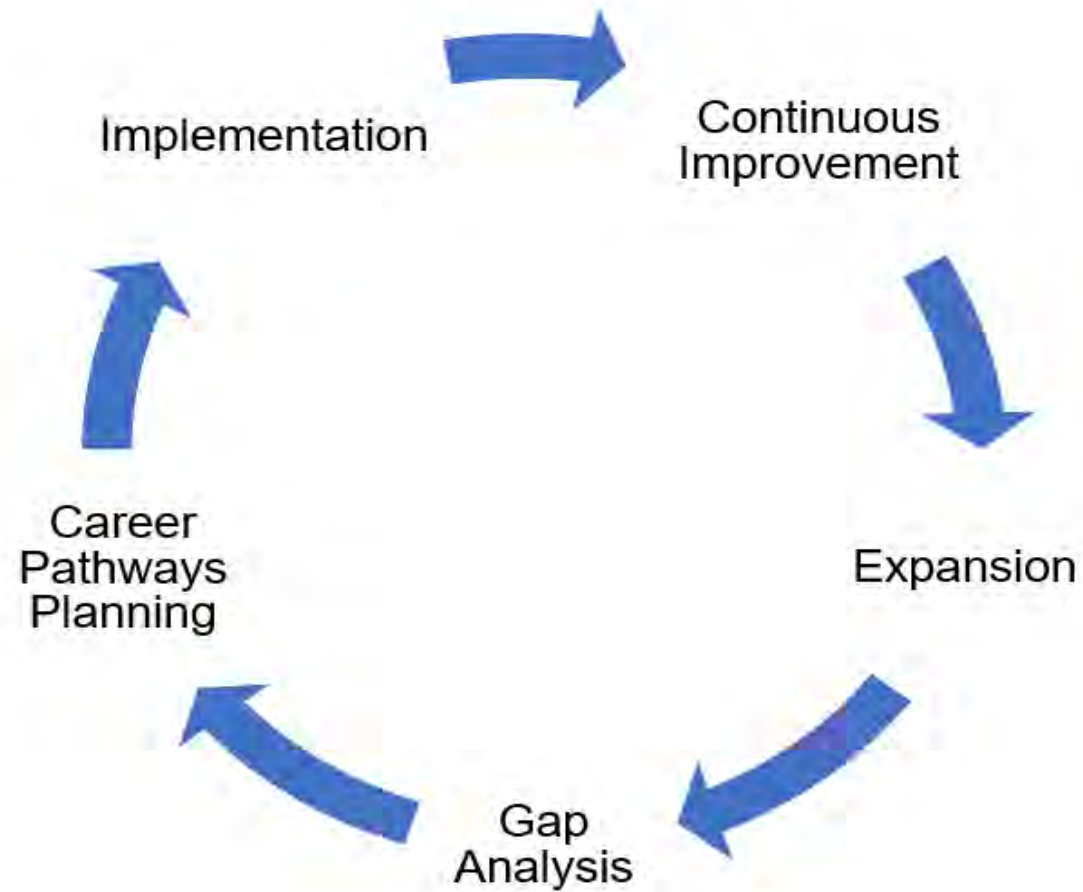
NEBRASKA

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# Key Features of Career Pathways

- Target jobs in industries of importance to local regions
- Create avenues of advancement for current workers, jobseekers, and future labor market entrants
- Increase supply of qualified workers for local employers in the target industries

# Overview of the Process



# Gap Analysis Example

*Location:* Mid-Plains Region  
*Industry Sector:* Health Care

*Occupation Category:*  
**Patient Care:** 136 Vacancies  
**Allied Health:** 50 Vacancies  
**Medical Administration:** 20 Vacancies  
**Services/Trade:** 22 Vacancies

*Targeting all four occupations:*

*Training/Job Certifications per Job Category*

*Estimated # of qualified applicants*

## **Patient Care**

- Graduate of accredited school of nursing
- RN License

or

- Graduate of an accredited LPN program
- Current Nebraska License as LPN

or

- High School Diploma or Equivalent.
- Current Nurse Aide Licensure in Nebraska
- BLS Cert

## **Allied Health**

- Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science
- Bachelor Degree in Food and Nutrition

or

- Associates of Radiologic Technology
- Associates of Science / Medical laboratory/clinical laboratory technical education program.

or

- High School Diploma or Equivalent
- Phlebotomy Certification
- Central Service Tech Certification

## **Medical Administration**

- Bachelor of Science in Business/Health Administration
- or
- High School Diploma or Equivalent

## **Services/Trades**

- High School Diploma or Equivalent
- Some College or experience in Management
- EPA Certificate
- CPI Certificate

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# Gap Analysis Example (continued)

## *Current Training Programs at MPCC*

### **Patient Care**

- Associate Degree in Nursing
- Licensed Practical Nurse Diploma
- Nursing Assistant / Medication Aide

### **Allied Health**

- Associate of Applied Science
- Associate of Science
- Biology Degree
- Medical Laboratory Technician

### **Medical Administration**

- Accounting Certificate
- Business Administration
- Business Office Technology
- Information Technology
- Medical Administrative Assistant

### **Services/Trades**

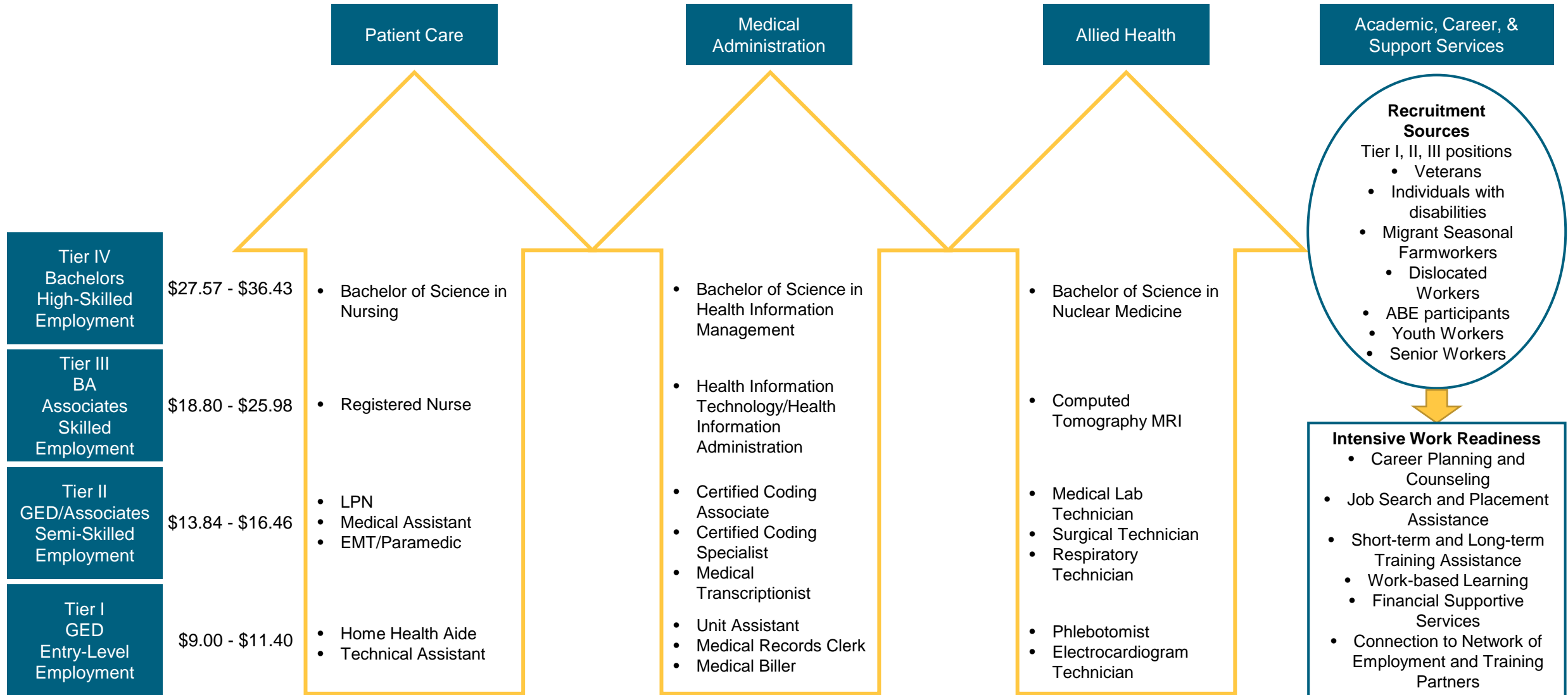
- Electrical Technology
- Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration
- Physics and Engineering

## *Credentials/Training Offered at GHP*

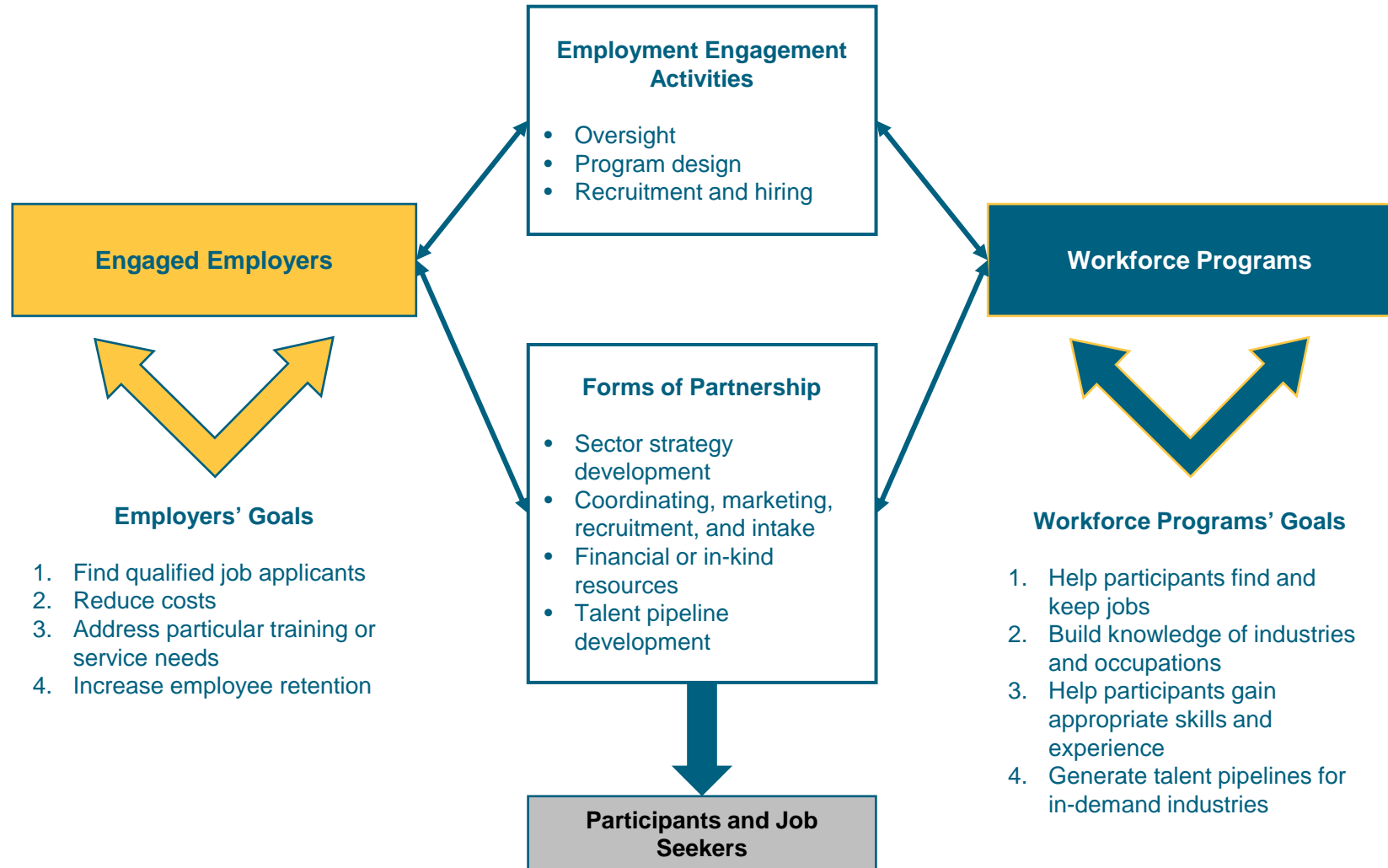
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# Roadmap Example



# Implementation Model





# Continuous Improvement

- Recruitment & Retention
- Placement
- Customer Satisfaction

# Career Pathways Planning Template

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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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## Introduction

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) calls for cross-system alignment; education and training that is focused on the needs of high-demand industry sector occupations; regional collaboration focused on the skills of regional economies; and the establishment of career pathways systems that make it easier for all Nebraskans to attain the skills and credentials needed for family-supporting jobs and careers.

Career pathways programs offer a clear sequence of education coursework and / or training credentials aligned with local and regional industry-validated work readiness standards and competencies.

## What is this planning template for?

- This plan is designed as a work aid to assist in developing, implementing, and expanding regional career pathways model.

## Who is this for?

- Planners, managers, and partners of career pathways programs.

## How should the planning template be used?

- Review each element of the career pathways to ensure you are targeting in-demand industries that are of economic importance to the region.
- Occupations that provide family-sustaining wages
- Skills and credentials required to enter and progress within the targeted industry.
- Identifying partners that will contribute to the planning, implementation, and financial aspect of the career pathways.
- Identifying and serving targeted populations for skill development.

# TEMPLATE

## WIOA Definition of Career Pathway:

The term “career pathway” means a combination of high-quality education, training, and other services that-

(A) Aligns with the skill needs of industries in the local economy

**BUSINESS SERVICE TEAMS COMPLETE THIS SECTION**

Identify the skills that are needed by your targeted employer / industry.

Determine how participants are deemed proficient in these skills.

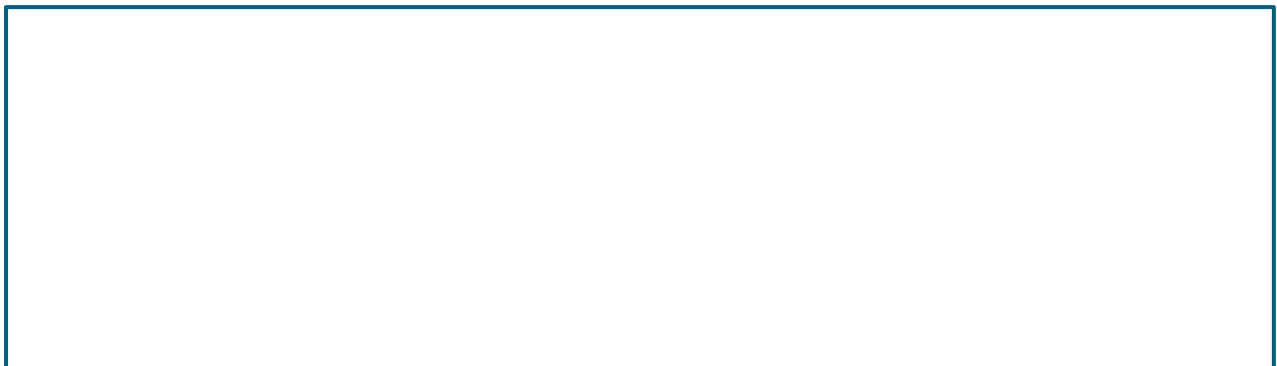
Identify the credentials that employers value in making labor market decisions.



Identify current training or investments made by the employer for new hires or existing workers.



Identify barriers to participation in career pathways and strategies to overcome those barriers.



(B) Prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary, postsecondary, and work-based training options.

Identify the appropriate workforce program(s) that will assist participants in attaining the skills and credentials required by the employer(s). Work with employers to determine a program the employer will be able to participate in.

- Registered Apprenticeship
- Incumbent Worker Training
- Job Shadowing
- Occupational Skills Training
- Customized Training
- Work Experience
- On-the-Job Training
- Transitional Jobs Training

Determine additional workforce incentives that the employer is willing to participate in.

- Worker Opportunity Tax Credit
- Worker Training Grant
- Federal Fidelity Bond Program
- Ticket to Work Program

Organize your summary from the information gathered to determine an action plan for additional agency partnerships including employers that will contribute to the pathway planning.

(C) Includes counseling to support an individual in achieving their education, training, and career goals.

**JOB SEEKER TEAMS & PARTNERS COMPLETE THIS SECTION**

Identify contributing partners.

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Title I Adult, DLW, & Youth                  | <input type="checkbox"/> National Farmworker Jobs Program            | <input type="checkbox"/> Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Community Service Employment Program | <input type="checkbox"/> Career and Technical Colleges             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Title III Wagner-Peyser Employment Services  | <input type="checkbox"/> Trade Adjustment Assistance Act             | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Services Block Grant            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Programs  | <input type="checkbox"/> Jobs for Veterans State Grant               | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American Programs                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job Corps                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployment Insurance                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary Assistance for Needy Families   |

Provide a summary on the roles each partner will play in the Career Pathway process.

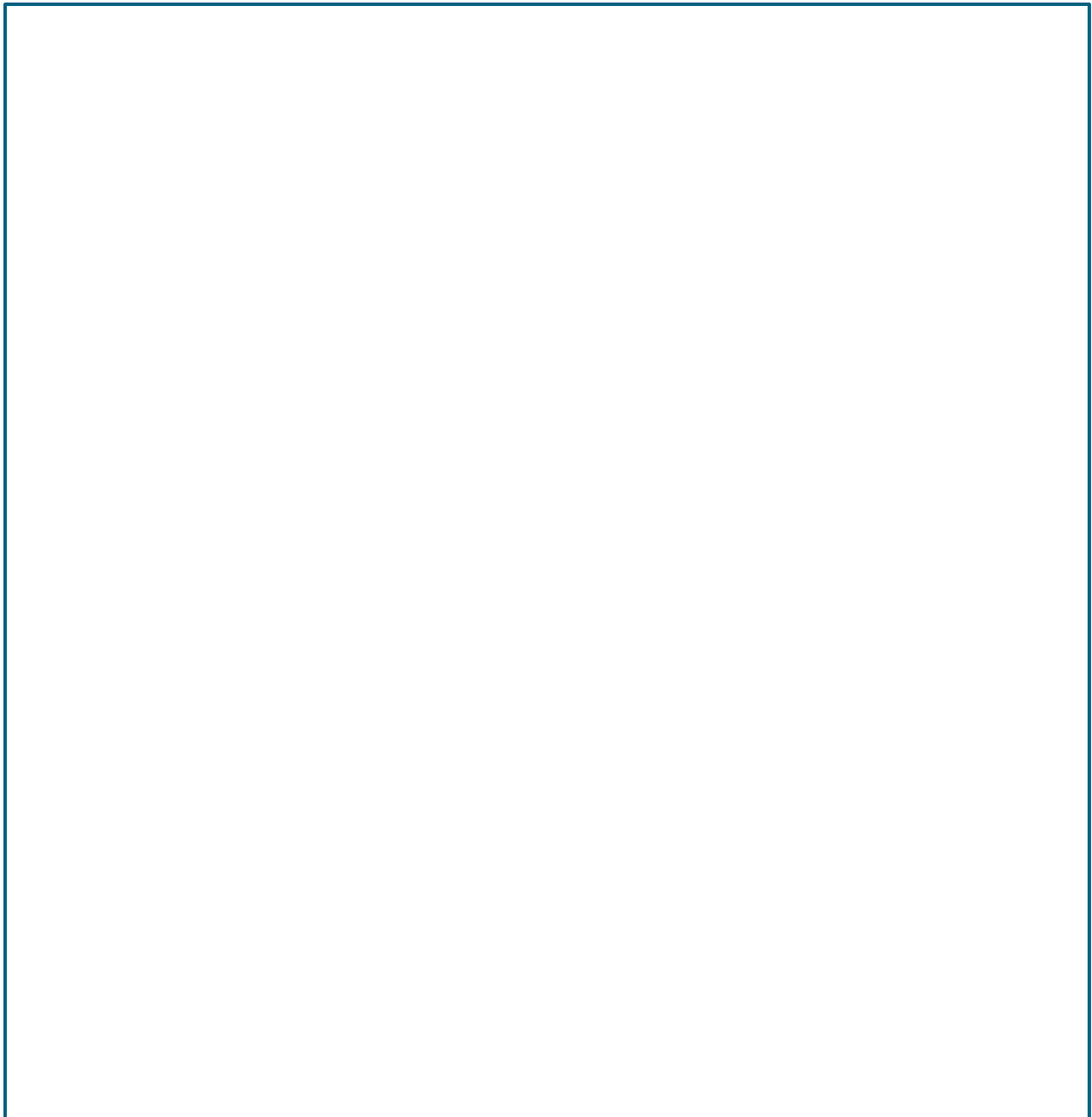
Identify the client's barrier(s) to participating in Career Pathways and strategies to overcome those barriers.



(D) Includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational clusters

(E) Organizes education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement.

Summary of academic and career counseling, planning and navigation strategies for workforce preparation.



(F) Enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and

(G) Helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation.

Summary of placement strategy.




# respect ability

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To: Members and Staff, Nebraska Workforce Development Board

From: Staff, Board, and Apprentices of RespectAbility

Re: Public Comments for June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Dear Gov. Pete Ricketts and Chairperson Mark Moravec,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to offer our comments for the Nebraska Workforce Development Board's June 2022 meeting. RespectAbility is a nonpartisan, nonprofit disability inclusion organization dedicated to fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities for millions of Americans with disabilities.

One-in-five Americans have a disability according to the U.S. Census Bureau. People with disabilities are America's largest minority group and the only one that, due to accident, aging, or illness, anyone can join at any time. Indeed, in Nebraska itself, [there are 218,665](#) residents living with some form of disability and they make up fully 11.5 percent of the Nebraska's population. In that number, it is critical to recognize the great diversity and intersectional identities of people with disabilities in Nebraska. Out of that number, there are 175,16 Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) people with disabilities. That means that 8.1 percent of all Nebraskans with disabilities are also members of other marginalized communities and face barriers such as systemic racism.

These facts have wide-ranging implications for the Nebraska's overall workforce development planning, and the unique challenges facing people with disabilities need to be recognized across the entire scope of your board's work.

In these comments, RespectAbility's team of subject matter experts and advocates with disabilities have collected our critical ideas, policy proposals, and key data to inform your board's decision-making process. While we are a national organization, we are eager to collaborate with you and your team.

Our ideas and recommendations are as follows:

- ***Focus on Closing the Gap in Labor Force Participation Rates between Nebraskans with and without disabilities:*** As the Cornhusker State and the nation grapples with strategies to get people back to work and to fill in labor shortages, it is worth recognizing the good and bad news facing workers with disabilities. Nationwide, as a direct result of the Pandemic, more than 1 million workers with disabilities have lost their jobs nationwide. Back in 2020, Nebraska's employment rate for all working-age people with disabilities in America was 48.1 percent, compared to 81.5 percent of people without disabilities.

People with disabilities want to work, can work, and are striving to work more than ever before. As such, RespectAbility has consistently advocated that decision-makers in the workforce development system at the national, state, and local levels use the Labor Force Participation Rate as a key metric for measuring efforts to get more people with barriers to employment into the workforce.

As of Spring 2022, the labor force participation rate for working-age people with disabilities is now 2 full percentage points higher than it was before COVID-19. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, people with disabilities now have a 37.8 percent labor force participation rate, compared to 77.2 percent of those without disabilities. Decision making entities like your workforce board need to adopt a focused strategy for getting more people with disabilities into the workforce.

- ***Look at Strategies to Close the Gap in High School Graduation Rates:*** The link between educational attainment and ultimate employment success is clear. As such, gaps in educational attainment, especially around high school completion rates, have serious long-term impacts on the labor force, the talent pipeline, and the economic wellbeing of Nebraskans. As such, it is worth paying attention to certain key, disaggregated data points that show where the gaps are in educational attainment for young Nebraskans, especially BIPOC students with disabilities.

In NEBRASKA's K-12 public schools, there are over 46,043 students with disabilities. The changing demographics of the nation are reflected in the student population, with about 35 percent of them being Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) individuals with disabilities. 11.4 percent of students with disabilities nationwide, or almost 720,000 students, identify as English-language learners. The gap in graduation rates between students with and without disabilities continues to undermine their futures. Critically, among the class of 2019, the high school graduation rate for students with disabilities was only 69 percent, compared to 88 percent of students without disabilities.

This means that thousands of students with disabilities are leaving Nebraska's school system with uncertain prospects for finding a place in the workforce. Numerous studies have demonstrated that college graduates will earn far more money than college students who dropped out. By far, those earning the least are students without a high school diploma. Legislators have a moral imperative to invest in and expand services that will support the educational and employment success of more students with disabilities.

- ***Expand on the Use of Online, Cohort-Based Apprenticeships for Workers in the Knowledge Economy and the Nonprofit Sector:*** The pandemic has made remote work an accepted reality for thousands of workers, normalizing a common reasonable accommodation request long championed by workers with disabilities. This has opened an unprecedented window for people with disabilities to contribute to the success of nonprofits, communities and beyond. RespectAbility has retooled our own National Leadership Program from being a cohort-based internship program located in Washington D.C., into an all-virtual, work-from-anywhere skills-based training program. Such

approaches have major implications for efforts to train workers for good-paying jobs in the knowledge economy and the nonprofit sector.

Cohort-based models offer a cost-effective method for delivering workforce services, especially for transition aged youth with disabilities. Instead of the inefficiency method one-on-one client services typified by the usual vocational rehabilitation service system, cohorts offer the chance to blend and braid funding to support training and build in a social component among cohort participants crucial to soft-skill development. As such, we recommend that professionals involved with the provisions of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) examine proven models of cohort-based services and look to build on models such as:

- ***Project RISE in Virginia:*** Project RISE (Resilience, Independence, Self-Advocacy, Employment), sponsored with the support of the Virginia Chapter of National Federation for the Blind, is a cohort based, skill development focused training program for blind and low vision students ages 14-21. Over the course of a 10-month program, students are trained in independent living skills and in professional skills for use in future employment. Students build social connection, even in virtual spaces by connecting and collaborating with fellow program participants. Working with each student, educational and career goals are developed and supported through internship or volunteer placement. For more information about RISE, please visit <https://www.nfbv.org/rise>
- ***Project SEARCH and the Caring Economy:*** Project SEARCH is a school-to-work transition program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities that prepares them for good paying careers in hospitals, elder-care, and the caring economy. By placing students with disabilities into three internships at a job site over the course of an academic year, student learn skills, build their confidence and gain competitive work experience. There is a serious opportunity to expand Project SEARCH and help more job seekers with disabilities launch careers in the caring economy. To learn more, please visit <https://www.projectsearch.us/learn-about-our-book/>
- ***Focus on Encouraging Disability Owned Businesses by Utilizing Best Practices from Other states:*** There is an opportunity for a Nebraska state model which prioritizes contract and purchase services for certified disability-owned businesses as a disability employment model. To measure success, it is also important to ensure that WIOA employer engagement measures the type of employment relevant to small business activities, including disability-owned businesses, in addition to large corporate employers. For example, Iowa VR has embraced entrepreneurship and self-employment as one of the key virtual services provided to the people with disabilities that they serve. Iowa quickly invested in the technological infrastructure to provide virtual services statewide, adopted a cohort-based model for fostering social connections among VR clients on Zoom and tested other emerging practices throughout 2020. Nebraska could learn from the innovations and ideas tested by Iowa and Iowans with disabilities.
- ***Leveraging Federal Contractors and Section 503 to Drive Employment Opportunities for Workers with Disabilities:*** In looking at new strategies, alternative pathways, and economic sectors to support the aspirations of jobseekers with disabilities, it is worth recognizing the unique place occupied by companies doing business with the federal government. Section 503 specifically contains legislative language about non-discrimination against individuals with disabilities, and subsequent regulations have been used to encourage contractors to hire individuals with disabilities through affirmative action. Beginning in 2016, the Office of Federal Contracting Compliance Program (OFCCP) set a

new utilization goal for contractors to have up to 7 percent of their workforce, in all job categories, be individuals with disabilities. *The 7 percent goal was very much intended as a gauging goal and a tool to encourage great diversity efforts.*

In seeking to meet the challenge of Section 503 and the 7 percent goal, contractors have adopted a wide range of strategies including encouraging disability self-disclosure among employees and staff. Contractors are prohibited from asking the nature of a disability however staff may self-disclose through demographic documents and data collection. There is comprehensive information available to support contractors through great national organizations like the National Organization on Disability (NOD) and Disability: IN.

There are major, multi-billion-dollar contractors doing business with the federal government across Nebraska. Examples of major [federal contractors](#) include:

1. Nelnet Servicing, LLC \$146.02 million (1% of total contracts).
2. Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation \$63.76 million (0.4% of total contracts).
3. Perspecta Enterprise Solutions LLC \$61.67 million (0.4% of total contracts).
4. Signature Performance, Inc. \$36.18 million (0.2% of total contracts).
5. Pro-Mark Services, Inc. \$19.02 million (0.1% of total contracts).

As an organization that advocates on behalf of job seekers with disabilities and their families, we believe that collecting the best ideas, emerging practices and innovative policies is critical to ensuring that Americans with and without disabilities have equal access to good jobs. If you have any questions or would like to discuss these matters further, our team stands ready to help, however we can. Thank you.

*These comments were prepared thanks to the hard work and close attention of RespectAbility's Apprentices, Staff, and Board Members.*