

# Virginia Career Works of the Capital Region

## Vision 2024

### *A Strategic Plan for the Workforce Development Board and Consortium of Elected Officials*

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#### OUR VISION

***To serve as a premier gateway for workforce resources connecting people to jobs and employers to talent.***

#### Our Story:

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The Capital Region Workforce Development Board (WDB) is responsible for promoting the alignment of resources and leveraging partnerships among business, economic development, labor, government and community partners and education systems to enhance workforce services to continually meet evolving business and jobseekers needs for a skilled labor force at the regional level. The WDB is appointed by and shares governance responsibility in this journey with the region's local elected officials collectively known as the Capital Region Workforce Partnership.

The Partnership and WDB direct the investment of approximately \$5 million annually to support the alignment of strategic, market driven workforce goals and initiatives in the Counties of Charles City, Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, New Kent Powhatan and Virginia's Capital City of Richmond. In the past four years over, 108,150 individuals visited our three regional workforce centers for basic career services. 2,221 of those jobseekers received individualized career development and training services along with an additional 943 young adults aged 17-24. Since 2020, we have also deployed a dynamic virtual services platform that we will continue to finesse and integrate into our service delivery system.

## OUR MISSION

***To advance comprehensive, demand driven and accessible workforce solutions for Virginia's Capital Region. We do this by collaborating with partners leveraging resources, and advocating for a collective impact that benefits our community.***

## WHERE ARE WE NOW? SCANNING THE ENVIRONMENT

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After an employer survey, stakeholder virtual “town hall” and other input points, as well as review of labor market information, the WDB and Consortium have identified the following as overarching theme to address during the life of this plan:

- The lack of widespread businesses awareness of and value in the workforce system.
  - As a subset to this issue, the WDB recognizes this can and should begin with its own business members in terms of using the system's services, promoting them to their peers and engaging in Board activities.
- Striking the right balance for jobseekers in planning career pathways vs. “getting a job”. This becomes compounded in times of economic downturn as those less skilled will find it harder to gain entry into higher-skill, higher-wage employment with less turnover.
- The aging of workforce
- The need for diversified funding. The current Board organizational structure does not allow pursuit of philanthropic and other non-government sources.
- The need for greater engagement with community partners and education beyond the “core” group of collaborators

During a strategic planning retreat the Workforce Development Board took an opportunity to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that shape and impact upon its world of direct and indirect influence. An honest assessment in these 4 quadrants is critical to understanding where the Board stands now and where it may have the most influence and ability to map out and implement strategies that move the meter in a positive direction.

## Strengths

- A significant enough funding level to be able to make a difference and operate programs at a scale large enough to impact the wider community.
- A good physical infrastructure in terms of well-situated workforce centers and growing use of technology to extend services into remote areas and offer virtual services in a time of health crisis that will also benefit customers ongoing.
- Committed local government leadership engagement and leadership.
- Growing engagement of and new leadership on the Workforce Development Board.
- A solid record of service provider program performance and stability in terms of contractors and staff.
- Positive working relationships with economic development partners; in part enhanced by a growing reputation of the Business Solutions Team as a “value add”.
- Policy emphasis on targeted industries, in-demand training, career pathways/cohort and career coaching over case management.

## Weaknesses

- An organizational structure that does not allow for pursuit of private funding and therefore limits funding to government resources only. (This also stifles creativity and flexibility when attempting to expand scope of services and relevance).
- Lack of awareness from both the jobseeker and employer perspective as to the Board’s existence and services that are available.
- Tendency for front-line staff to be complacent in “doing what we’ve always done” and a reputation for being process-driven and overly bureaucratic.
- Ability to adequately address all customer barriers and support them after job placement.

## Opportunities

- Stable economy despite recent spike in unemployment.
- New Administration at federal level has potential to reshape regulations.
- Current framing federal law allow flexibility
- Business partnerships with schools
- Participation in the Regional Workforce Development Coalition
- Increased engagement from Board members can signal confidence in the Board’s services
- Strong industry associations are present and provide the Business Solutions Team a launch pad to expand awareness and usage of services

## Threats

- A poverty rate that exceeds the state average.
- Post-COVID hiring challenges that compound hiring challenges
- Lack of job-ready, trained workforce
- Lack of uniform transportation availability
- Homelessness and housing instability
- Fragmented delivery system
- Childcare issues (beyond cost, availability of enough providers etc.).

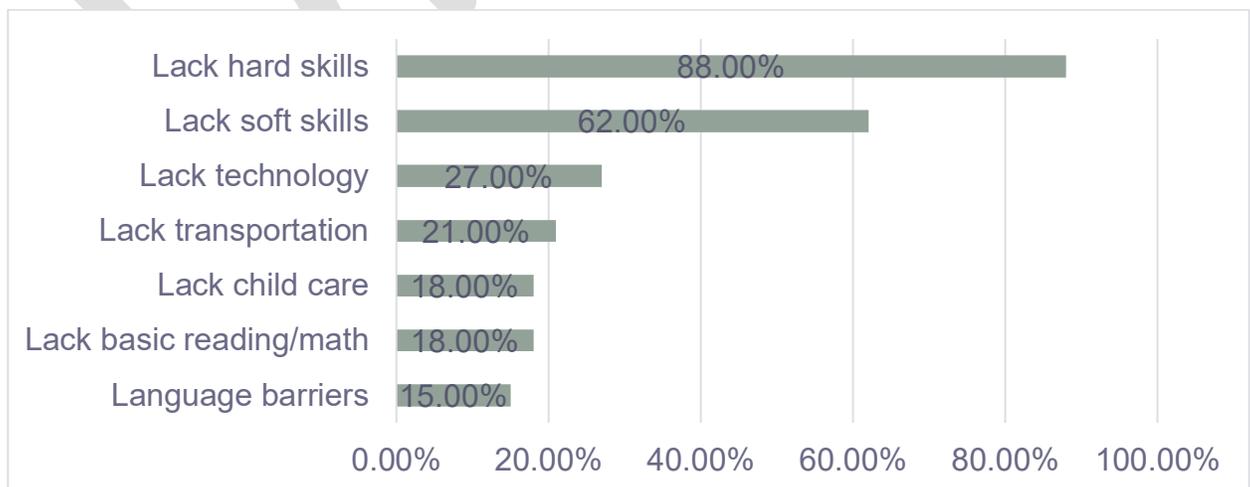
*After an inside look, the WDB turned outside to gain additional insights from the employer, community, job seeker and partner perspectives.*

### The Employer Survey

The survey was conducted for two weeks in January of 2021. Respondents represented a variety of industries and employer sizes representative of the region as a whole. All indicating that they plan to hire within the next 6 – 12 months, with nearly 40% indicating they were planning to hire over 50 employees.

The biggest challenges identified, both in the hiring process and in retaining new hires, was lack of hard skills and soft skills related to the job. Lack of hard skills was cited by 88% of employers as a recruitment challenge, with both hard and soft skills issues common in over 60% of responses as far as retention. There was a 30% margin between these categories and the next biggest category of child care and transportation, with lack of technology factoring as an issue for new hires at 30%

### Challenges in recruiting:



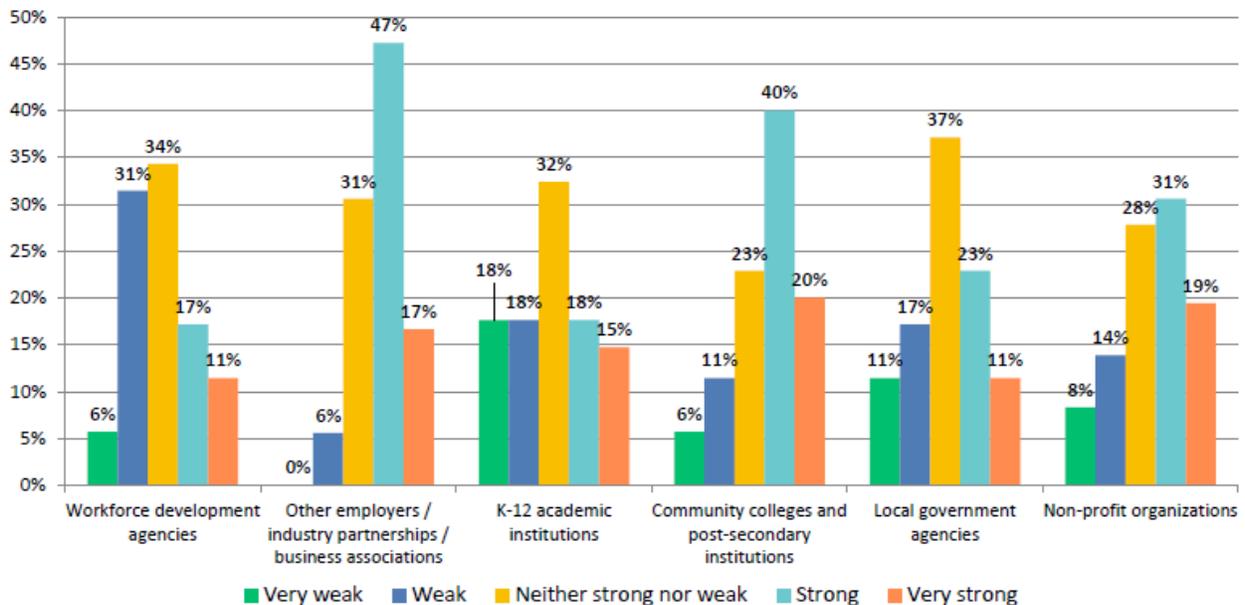
Respondents indicated a heavy reliance on internal methods of training and workforce development, with 88% relying on internal training.

Some additional takeaways from the survey results include:

- Only 25% reported using the Virginia Workforce Connect to hire. (This is the state’s publicly funded online job service board).
- Only 33% reported having formal relationships with education providers
- None reported having strong awareness of the Virginia Career Works network. Half indicated being somewhat aware with the other half indicating they were not aware at all.

The below chart shows respondent’s assessment of their working relations with various organization in the community. Most identified other employers or industry partnership and most frequent, followed by community colleges and post-secondary education. Workforce development organizations ranked lowest.

**How would you rate your working relationships with other organizations in your community? (n=36)**



## Themes from the Virtual “town hall” input session

Held on February 4, 2021, this session also had a good cross-representation of stakeholders to include job seekers, education entities, workforce agencies, businesses, chamber of commerce and economic development.

Participants were asked to relate experiences with workforce system relative to employer engagement, the job seeker experience and training needs.

Employers generally conveyed that they were aware of the workforce centers in the region, were not aware of the services offered nor had they used them. (Economic development and the Chamber were generally aware of both the centers and their services.

The job seekers relayed that they were largely referred through the unemployment insurance system, but had difficulty navigating websites or other means of finding our centers. However, once starting with the Board’s programs, they were pleased with the staff, services and outcomes. They believed that other would find value in the services but that better awareness efforts are needed.

The majority of workforce partners participating rated their awareness of other partner services in the system as a “3” on a scale where 1 was not familiar and 5 was very familiar.

With regards to training, all participants rated the importance of career pathways as a “5” on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 as the high importance.

## OBJECTIVES AND GOALS—

After reviewing the various forms of input and information described above, the Board first opted to adopt a framework of internal objectives that focus inward as an organization, and external objectives that focus of customer-facing matters. Both have been deemed of equal importance to success.

Internal Objectives	External Objectives
Create governance/board engagement committee	Single gateway of workforce resources that gets individuals' jobs and employers the talent they need.
Strategic alignment of goals to funding	Marketing and branding
Long-term funding strategy to expand beyond federal resources to increase flexibility and leveraging of options not currently available	Advocating CLEOs- transportation infrastructure
	Better braiding of existing funding (integrated funding from various sources to meet goals.)
	Unification with stakeholders around goals and mission

**Goals:**

**1. Foster connections, partnerships and collaborations** among businesses, educational institutions, community organizations and workforce entities so that solutions are demand-driven with the “buy-in” and engagement needed to ensure success of efforts

- Maintain active involvement in the Regional Workforce Coalition and collectively and independently contribute to execution of action items within its Blueprint document to advance access, engagement, readiness and retention efforts.
- Establish or connect with Sector Based Advisory Groups that consist of local employers, educational institutions, industry professionals and parents in the development of Business Education Partnerships
- Promote the development of partnerships among training partners and postsecondary educational providers, in developing skill development programs, including soft skills trainings, stackable career pathways, certificate programs and accelerated diplomas that lead to family sustaining jobs
- Develop professional development opportunities, learning events and other resources that create a community of workforce development for service providers, non-profits and other key stakeholders in the region.

**2. Identify and regularly validate priority, critical and emerging industry sectors** in the region and align programs, community services and resources to effectively and efficiently address their current and future workforce needs through regular communication, career pathways and new training as necessary

- Convene or partner in sector conversations and partnerships in key regional industries to better understand needs and emerging industries.
- Map career pathways for each identified industry sector.
- Analyze Data including current labor force intelligence, labor market trends and real-time jobs information, and the educational and skill levels of the workforce in the region, including individuals with barriers to employment
- Promote entrepreneurship and small business development.
- Expand career pathway opportunities, including work-based training opportunities and integrated programs of study, that lead to industry-recognized credentials and improved employment and earnings

**3. Ensure that all job seekers, businesses and partners have equitable and comprehensive access to workforce development services,** factoring items like transportation, housing, childcare, K-12 education and community services

- Work with local government, regional economic development partners and community based organizations to compile a regional asset inventory to identify gaps and prioritize housing, transportation and childcare services needs in the region to be shared with elected state/federal officials
- Serve as an advocate to build awareness of critical issues that affect workforce development, such as infrastructure needs like housing, transportation, and internet access
- Expand workforce opportunities for populations facing multiple barriers to career advancement through improved career services, career pathway programs and expansion of bridge programs.
- Ensure that career pathways have various on and off ramps for different skill and experience levels allows them to reach the widest array of students and jobseekers, including providing additional options to individuals with barriers to employment.
- Work with Chambers of Commerce, SHRM, Metropolitan Business League and other similar groups to ensure small and minority-owned businesses are aware of and able to benefit from workforce system resources.
- Identify and created opportunities to better connect with local secondary school divisions; to include teacher and parent organizations, to increase career awareness and workforce readiness at all levels.

**4. Enhance community and business awareness and usage** of the Virginia Career Works system and its partners in the Capital Region, and **demonstrate the value** for customers

- Engage subject matter experts to develop and deploy effective audience-specific and cross-medium approaches to outreach and awareness.
- Enhance access to services by partnering with libraries, community based and faith-based organizations
- Enhance and expand connections with local economic development organizations for collective advocacy and networking

- Promote open communication and information-sharing among local and regional workforce partners that creates trust in and each other that leads to natural, no cost awareness.
- Create dashboards, regular success stories and other tools that benchmark success against established goals and other value-added benefits of the workforce system.

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