



MEMORANDUM

TO: Snohomish County Council

FROM: Kara Main-Hester, Chief Recovery & Resilience Officer

DATE: February 28, 2023

RE: 2023 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Workforce Spending Plan

Background

Workforce development in Snohomish County is adapting to meet the needs of a changing workforce and address lasting impacts caused by the pandemic. Local efforts, County-funded pilot partnerships, and the Future Workforce Alliance are bringing the County toward a “gold-standard” workforce system that is well-coordinated, data-informed, and centers equity and inclusion. However, for the user of workforce services, the path toward obtaining the support they need to enter the job market and advance into a high-quality career can be challenging.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on the workforce, and Snohomish County employment has not caught up to pre-pandemic levels. An estimated [11,000 fewer people are working today than at the start of the pandemic](#), largely due to the increasing retirement rates of thousands of workers and lack of child care availability. Although countywide unemployment rates are near historic lows, some groups are lagging behind. Young people ages 16-24 have an unemployment rate of 11.9 percent, which is nearly four times the countywide unemployment rate of 3.2 percent.

As a result, Snohomish County employers are struggling to fill roles. Planned projects including the Boeing 737 MAX line, historic federal investments in infrastructure funding including Link light rail expansion, the Cascade Industrial Center, and the Darrington Wood Innovation Center will bring thousands of jobs to the county, and we need to bring new populations into the labor force to meet that need. Nationwide, the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce has stated](#), “If every unemployed person in the country found a job, we would still have 4 million open jobs.”

Focus Populations & Goals

To ensure new high-quality jobs are filled by people living in Snohomish County, the County recommends focusing on training and supporting individuals who are newly entering the job market and those who may have left the job market or are underemployed. This includes youth, caregivers who cannot find or afford child care, justice-system involved individuals, individuals with mental health

and/or previous drug dependency issues, and people that cannot easily access training that leads directly to better jobs or promotions.

The objectives of the ARPA funds to support workforce development are as follows:

- Develop and/or expand enhanced training to obtain career-focused credentials to meet employer needs;
- Assist individuals in becoming job-ready by addressing related challenges such as child care, transportation, behavioral health services, language access, and supports;
- Establish a streamlined, user-friendly system that supports individuals through better technology infrastructure and expansion of existing career path systems; and
- Develop a countywide model for distributed workforce services by enhancing Workforce Entry Sites and supporting community-based organizations to become trusted employment service providers.

Proposed ARPA Programming

In the 2023 adopted budget, \$8 million in ARPA funding was appropriated for workforce development. Based on conversations with highly impacted individuals, employers, service providers, and educators, the County recommends the following estimated appropriations. Estimated funding may change as outreach continues and programmatic costs are further refined.

Enhanced Employment Training - \$4,000,000

The County recommends investing \$4 million to meet the needs of target industries that are experiencing a retiring workforce and provide high-quality jobs and careers to impacted groups.

Investments will be made in these focus areas:

1. Scale existing high school, college, and apprenticeship programs with a focus on industries impacted by the pandemic;
2. Outreach to high schools, workforce service locations, and community-based organizations to highlight opportunities for high-quality jobs; and
3. Subsidized employment and training opportunities including on-the-job training, transitional jobs, and integrated classroom/worksite training.

Addressing Challenges to Employment - \$2,500,000

The County recommends investing \$2.5 million to address challenges that limit an individual's ability to begin and/or complete workforce training programs. These investments will address the following:

- Lack of public transportation in rural areas as well as the high cost of owning and operating a car means that many individuals struggle with physically getting to training sites;
- High cost and shortage of child care options that prevents caregivers, particularly mothers, from [entering workforce programs](#); and
- An overall need for additional supportive services, such as mental health counseling, to get individuals job ready.

Supports provided in other ARPA policy areas – notably child care – will be embedded as resources to job-seeking or underemployed individuals.

Workforce System Enhancement - \$1,500,000

For many individuals, the road to employment requires involvement with an array of service providers, job and employment training programs, educational services, government agencies, and employers.

The County recommends investing \$1.5 million to increase system accessibility for job-seekers and move Snohomish County toward a “Gold Standard” workforce system through coordination, capacity-building, and enhancement.

Specifically, funding will be used to:

- Map the continuum of workforce and supportive service providers across Snohomish County, including the two main WorkSource Resource Centers, 23 Workforce Entry Points, community-based organizations, and federal and State-funded programs such as the County’s Career Path Services for youth with developmental disabilities, Basic Food and Employment Training (BFET), WorkFirst, and others. The goal is to identify existing resources and increase collaboration to ensure we provide more efficient and accessible services.
- Build a model for distributed Workforce Entry Points so that there is no “wrong door” to the workforce development system, regardless of which provider an individual starts with. This approach recognizes that people have different needs, preferences, and geographic locations when it comes to seeking employment. Currently, the Future Workforce Alliance is developing a strategy that will standardize the model to effectively serve individuals.

Timeline

Given the urgency of need in the community and ARPA’s compressed timeline, the County’s intention is to have the vast majority funding from the remaining \$8 million available throughout the second quarter of 2023.

The County will soon solicit proposals for Enhanced Employment Training from a variety of organizations. Concurrently, the Economic Development Team will work with the Future Workforce Alliance to develop a strategy for the workforce system enhancement funding which will likely include a competitive process for Workforce Entry Points.

Expenditures and outcomes associated with all investments will be available through quarterly U.S. Treasury reporting and a public transparency dashboard ORR is currently developing in partnership with County departments.

Appendix

TABLE 1. Workforce Development Recovery Investments

STRATEGY	INVESTMENT
Enhanced Employment Training <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Apprenticeship Programs- Career Exploration- Subsidized Employment- Training Opportunities	\$4 million
Addressing Challenges to Employment <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Transportation- Child Care- Behavioral Health- Language Access- Other Customized Supports	\$2.5 million
Workforce System Enhancement <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mapping the current workforce system and creating a sustainable coordination model- Distributed Workforce Entry Point Model	\$1.5 million