

# Enhancing the Recruitment Experience for Employers Engaging with Workforce Development Programs

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Workforce development programs across the nation have a federal mandate to provide services to employers. This mandate is frequently referred to as “Business Services” or “Business Engagement.” When the economy is thriving, employers tend not to reach out to Workforce Boards because they associate workforce services with those that are offered to laid-off workers in times of financial hardship. Workforce Boards need to expand marketing efforts and improve their appeal to employers.

In 2017, Monterey County began development of a core competencies model that will be applied to all phases of the employment cycle for county employees, (recruitment, examinations and screening tools, candidate selection, onboarding,

probation, performance evaluations, career milestones, succession planning, and separation).

A scaled-down version of Monterey County’s Core Competencies Model—specifically the portions of the model that deal with recruitment, screening, performance evaluations, and succession planning—may prove a valuable resource that workforce boards could offer as a service to ensure that employers who utilize Business Engagement services secure viable candidates who possess the skills, knowledge, and competencies that will result in long-term employment. Succession planning will also be important as the baby-boomer generation begins to retire from the workforce.

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## The Workforce Board Mandate for Employer Engagement

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) is federal legislation that provides for employment, vocational training, job-seeker, and employer services throughout the United States. In addition to assisting job-seekers, workforce boards have a mandate to provide comprehensive services to companies and employers located within the geographic regions the boards are funded to serve.

The Business Engagement requirement is a fairly new mandate and the state of California is still working to develop performance criteria that will measure the effectiveness of this mandate in our communities. Alameda County Workforce Development Board (ACWDB) has, over the years, developed a reputation for implementing innovative programs that meet requirements imposed by federal and state mandates, while anticipating and addressing the needs of local communities. This mandate to provide Business Engagement services is very relevant to the needs of employers during this time of economic growth in our nation.

## ACWDB's Business Services Unit (BSU)

ACWDB hosts a Business Services Unit (BSU). This unit is comprised of a team of individuals who are tasked with carrying out ACWDB's business engagement activities, including developing relationships with employers, chambers of commerce, industry-sector-specific round-tables, local education agencies (LEA), the Employment Development Department (EDD) and Economic Development agencies across Alameda County. The BSU has provided a number

of services to employers in Alameda County. Historically, these services include: assisting employers with candidate recruitment, upskilling of incumbent workers to meet employer needs, linking employers to LEAs to develop cohort training opportunities from which they may recruit candidates who possess the skills and knowledge the employer requires, coordination of rapid response activities for employers who must down-size their workforce, and referrals to state and local agencies that offer tax credits and other assistance to employers.

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## The Unemployment Rate and Employer Needs

California's unemployment rate is currently 4.2% based on preliminary reports for March, 2018 published on April 18, 2018 by the California Employment Development Department (EDD).<sup>1</sup> According to this same data source, Alameda County's unemployment rate is presently at 2.8%. The low unemployment rate is an indication that currently unemployed individuals likely possess some barriers to employment or are lacking in the required vocation or soft-skills<sup>2</sup> employers seek. Additionally, the

1. [www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/data/unemployment-and-labor-force.html](http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/data/unemployment-and-labor-force.html).

2. Soft-Skills: noun – "skills, abilities and traits that pertain to personality, attitude and behavior rather than to formal or technical knowledge". As defined in: Austin, Michael J.; Carnochan, Sarah; Pascual, Gina; Taylor, Sarah "Employer Perspectives on the Role of Soft Skills in Subsidized Employment Relationships". *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, June 2, 2014.

low unemployment rate means that job candidates can be more selective about the employment they are willing to accept—and more likely to leave a position without gaining tenure due to the availability of a better employment opportunity with higher pay or a better benefit package. Local employers are struggling to fill vacant positions while also attempting to prepare for succession planning as baby-boomers begin to leave the workforce.<sup>3</sup> In addition to being eager to fill vacant positions, employers are finding that the costs associated with continually engaging in recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and training are exorbitant.

### Monterey County's Core Competencies Model

In the past, Monterey County had experienced a number of challenges with workforce-related competency issues, including:

- High turnover in vital county positions
- The need for succession planning
- Financial losses due to
  - Lack of efficiency
  - Understanding and acceptance of standard operating procedures (SOP)
  - Interpersonal conflict and lack of conflict resolution skills
  - Poor communication

These issues were contributing to an increased number of incidents being elevated to the Labor Unions and to the Board of Supervisors—at great costs to the county. Financial losses related to a lack of soft skills such as conflict resolution were one motivating factor that led to the planning and development of Monterey County's Core Competencies Model in 2017.

Monterey County's Core Competencies Model is extensive and comprehensive. The model calls for county-wide identification of competencies that are vital to workplace performance at all levels of county employment (soft-skills). The model also allows county divisions and departments to identify

competencies that are specific to the department or work unit for each position. The identified competencies will be used in recruitment, examinations and screening tools, candidate selection, onboarding, probation, performance evaluations, career milestones, professional development, succession planning, and separation from employment.

### Core Competencies Models in California

The establishment of core competencies standards for employees is taking hold with many public and private sector employers; the State of California, the University of California, Kaiser Permanente, Disney, and larger counties like Alameda, Orange, Sacramento, San Mateo, and Ventura, have all adopted core competencies models for their employees. While larger and government employers may have available resources to develop core competency standards, most small-to-medium-sized employers do not have the capacity to effectively engage in the actions required to progress toward any meaningful tool. This is where business engagement services provided through local workforce boards can be useful and appreciated by employers.

### Adaptation of Monterey County's Core Competencies Model

Monterey County's Core Competencies Model is planned to be extremely comprehensive, with potential impacts on the day-to-day functions of county managers and their Human Resources Departments. A competencies standard like Monterey County's would be nearly impossible to recreate for each employer ACWDB's BSU encounters. However, it is more feasible to adapt Monterey County's proposed model by scaling down and simplifying the process.

### Recommendation

Business Engagement Services that are offered through Workforce Boards should include a Business Competencies Model. This model includes recommendations for establishing Core Business Competencies that are specific and relevant to each individual employer, work unit, or job classification.

3. As referenced in *Career Outlook*, a Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) publication dated May, 2017; Authors: Mitra Toossi and Elka Torpey



Business Engagement Staff will use the prescribed process to assist an employer to identify competencies that are considered core to the continuing success of the employer's business. Once the core competencies are identified, they may be applied to the posting and recruitment process, the screening and candidate selection process, ongoing performance evaluations, and any succession planning processes the employer wishes to develop.

### **The Core Business Competencies Development and Evaluation Processes and Timelines**

#### *Development*

Business Engagement staff [Business Service Representatives (BSR)] will utilize a generic listing of competencies that will be generated utilizing the following resources: Occupational Information Network (O'Net) at [www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org); the Human Resource Systems Group (HRSG) at [www.hrsq.ca](http://www.hrsq.ca); Workforce.com; and others. Business Engagement staff will work with an employer's Human Resources Department or other relevant employer staff to identify those competencies that make up the ideal candidate for a particular position, work unit, or department. The identified competencies then become part of: 1) Minimum Qualifications (MQs) for the open position; 2) Supplemental Questionnaires to be submitted with candidate applications for employment; 3) Interview questions; and 4) Performance evaluations.

Business Engagement staff, working toward long-term relationships with the business community, will offer to continue to provide support in utilizing the Core Business Competencies throughout the employment cycle.

#### *Evaluation*

In order to facilitate continuous improvement of Business Engagement Services, ACWDB's BSRs will incorporate questions regarding the Business

Competencies Model into the anonymous evaluation tool already being used by employers. This tool measures the value of Business Engagement Services provided through WIOA funding. ACWDB BSRs are adept at working with and relating to employers and would be the best candidates to refer employers to the evaluation tool. Most businesses are wary of dealing with numerous government representatives, so it may prove challenging to attempt to introduce a new individual or agency just for evaluation purposes.

#### *Timelines*

The Business Competencies Model could be prepared for launch within three to six months after approval by the ACWDB Director, depending upon workload and other factors relating to staff capacity. The development process would require input from the Workforce Board Assistant Director, the Workforce Board System Administrator, the Business Services Liaison, and the Lead Business Services Representative.

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