

# BUILDING A HIGH-PERFORMING STATE WORKFORCE BOARD



A FRAMEWORK  
AND  
STRATEGIES FOR STATES

## Acknowledgments

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## About the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) is the only research and development firm that directly serves the nation's governors and their key policy staff. Governors rely on the NGA Center to provide tailored technical assistance for challenges facing their states; to identify and share best practices from across the country; and to host meetings of leading policymakers, program officials and scholars. Through research reports, policy analyses, cross-state learning labs, state grants and other unique services, the NGA Center efficiently informs governors what works, what does not work and what lessons can be learned from others grappling with similar issues.

## About the National Association of State Workforce Board Chairs

The National Association of State Workforce Board Chairs is a membership organization that provides the chairs and staff of gubernatorial-appointed state workforce boards, which are responsible for overseeing state workforce development systems, opportunities to:

- Build their leadership capacity;
- Share best practices;
- Collectively influence federal workforce policy; and
- Become catalysts for state workforce development system reforms.

The association provides a unified voice for state workforce boards on national policy issues, with a focus on strengthening the nation's employment, training and education systems and on collaborating with other national organizations engaged in areas of common interest.

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## Executive Summary

### THE PROBLEM

As many as one in three businesses in the United States struggled to fill needed jobs in 2015.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, millions of Americans, including at least 5.5 million youth, are disconnected from employment. Too often, state responses to these challenges are uncoordinated, and no single agency or entity is fully responsible for coordinating education and workforce development agencies to connect businesses with the talent they need.

### THE OPPORTUNITY

Governors have a tremendous opportunity through the implementation of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to reset their state workforce boards that oversee the publicly-funded workforce system. This reset can ensure that boards are empowered to lead the alignment of the state's education and workforce development systems to meet the needs of businesses and workers. This guide will lay out a framework for high-performing boards and will provide clear examples of how governors are already leading the way.

A high-performing state workforce board is one that provides leadership to the entire education and workforce system to create sustainable change. Looking across states, three key roles stand out as being critical for achieving success as well as represent the system leadership high-performing boards use to move their states forward. High-performing boards:

- Set and communicate the **Vision** for the workforce system;
- Model and manage **Strategic Partnerships** that achieve the vision; and
- Use data and accountability systems to **Keep the System Accountable** to the vision.

This framework in Figure 1 on [page 3](#) provides a clear understanding of the high-level roles that state workforce boards need to fulfill. It offers clear guidance and examples of what these roles look like in practice across a variety of individual state contexts, ultimately leading to better outcomes for businesses, workers and state economies.



System  
Leadership

*"A State Workforce Development Board should be formed to bring together the broad range of stakeholders to provide state-level coordination and integration among federal and state workforce development policies and programs."<sup>2</sup>*

- Executive Order 15-03 signed by  
**Nebraska** Governor Pete Ricketts

1 Manpower Group, "2015 Talent Shortage Survey," [http://www.manpowergroup.com/wps/wcm/connect/db23c560-08b6-485f-9bf6-f5f38a43c76a/2015\\_Talent\\_Shortage\\_Survey\\_US-lo\\_res.pdf?MOD=AJPERES](http://www.manpowergroup.com/wps/wcm/connect/db23c560-08b6-485f-9bf6-f5f38a43c76a/2015_Talent_Shortage_Survey_US-lo_res.pdf?MOD=AJPERES) (accessed August 1, 2016).

2 State of Nebraska Office of the Governor, "Executive Order 15-03," <http://nlcs1.nlc.state.ne.us/docs/pilot/pubs/eofiles/15-03.pdf> (accessed September 9, 2016).

Figure 1: Three Critical Roles For High-Performing State Workforce Boards



## The Challenge for States: Introduction and Background

As state economies continue to grow and put more people to work, finding skilled labor is increasingly the greatest challenge facing many competitive American businesses. Considering 32 percent of U.S. businesses consistently report difficulty finding skilled talent to fill job openings—particularly in technical, middle-class jobs—a need for state action to connect individuals to careers exists.<sup>3</sup> Despite job openings, a significant number of Americans are unemployed or underemployed, including the 5.5 million youth ages 16 to 24 who are not connected to school or work.<sup>4</sup>

This disconnect represents significant lost opportunities, wages, growth, taxes and more for states. The public sector plays a clear role in better matching individuals with meaningful, long-term careers that also meet the demands of businesses today and tomorrow.

Though many governors and state officials realize the importance of this challenge, the core barrier for solving the disconnect stems from the lack of communication and alignment between various state agencies and programs. Potential employees often experience poor connections during the transitions from K-12 to post-secondary education and training to work. Businesses face a dizzying array of programs operated at state and local levels by a variety of entities that make finding skilled labor a confusing task.

3 Manpower Group, "2015 U.S. Talent Shortage Survey," <http://www.manpowergroup.us/campaigns/talent-shortage-2015/assets/pdf/2015-Talent-Shortage-Whitepaper.pdf> (accessed July 15, 2016).

4 "Zeroing In on Place and Race," Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council, <http://www.measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2015/> (accessed July 15, 2016).

In the face of these challenges, a renewed focus on the role of state workforce boards addresses the disconnect by providing leadership that aligns the public education and workforce development systems. The ongoing implementation of the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)—the first significant piece of federal legislation to reform the public workforce system in more than a decade—provides an opportunity for governors to take a fresh look at how they organize and utilize their state workforce boards to achieve success. While WIOA identifies several operational functions of state boards, the law also envisions a broader, more strategic role for state boards as leaders of an integrated, job-driven public workforce system. WIOA refocuses state and local boards on formulating policies and providing leadership and governance to serve all the customers of the education and workforce system.

### WHAT IS A STATE WORKFORCE BOARD?

Though state workforce boards go by different names and can have unique structures, they share statutory responsibilities under 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, including oversight of the one-stop system of American Job Centers and development of a state plan. (For more detailed information on board composition and responsibilities, see [TEGL 27-14](#).<sup>5</sup>) State workforce boards are appointed by the governor and led by private sector business representatives, who make up a majority of the board’s membership. Boards also include organized labor; leaders from state agencies responsible for post-secondary education, career and technical education, workforce development and economic development; and community organizations. Boards often represent the embodiment of public-private partnerships.

## The Path Forward: High-Performing State Workforce Boards as System Leaders

To achieve the broader vision of an integrated, job-driven public workforce system, state boards can focus on more than their statutory requirements. Indeed, focusing on developing and growing a state’s economy requires thought and action that is broader than only WIOA. Given the complexity and number of partners involved in creating system success at the state, regional, and local level, governors must take a central role in setting the vision for the state, and ensuring boards articulate policies that fulfill that vision.

Looking across states, three key roles stand out as being critical for achieving success, which represent different domains of system leadership high-performing boards use to move their state forward (see Figure 2 on [page 5](#)). High-performing boards:

- Set and communicate the **Vision** for the workforce system;
- Model and manage **Strategic Partnerships** to achieve the vision; and
- Use data and other tools to **Keep the System Accountable** to the vision.

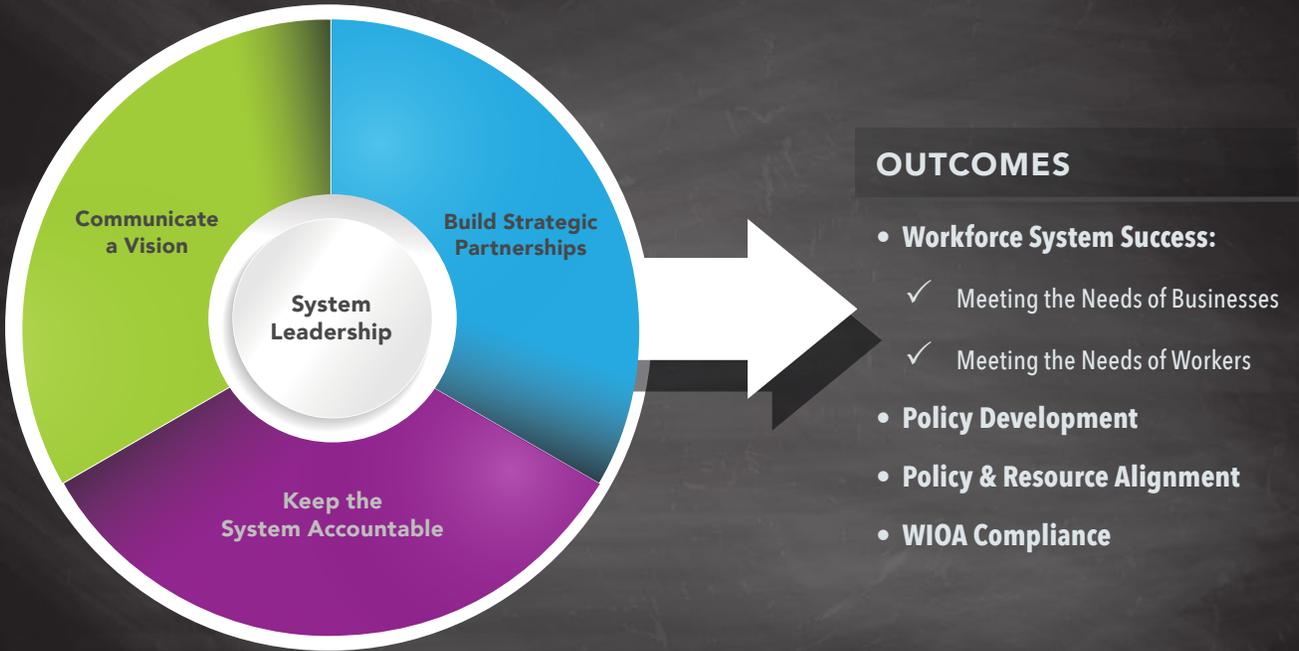
High-performing boards understand the mutually reinforcing opportunities and challenges that they must balance between their roles as the entity responsible for formulating, communicating and

5 Employment and Training Administration, US Department of Labor, “Training and Employment Guidance Letter WIOA No. 27-14,” [https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL\\_27-14.pdf](https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL_27-14.pdf) (accessed September 9, 2016).

leading the realization of the state’s vision for the workforce system and as the entity tasked with fulfilling the statutorily-required responsibilities of WIOA. Boards that focus on these domains of system leadership will be well positioned to achieve the requirements of WIOA, as well as maintain a broader focus on the success of their state’s businesses and workers.

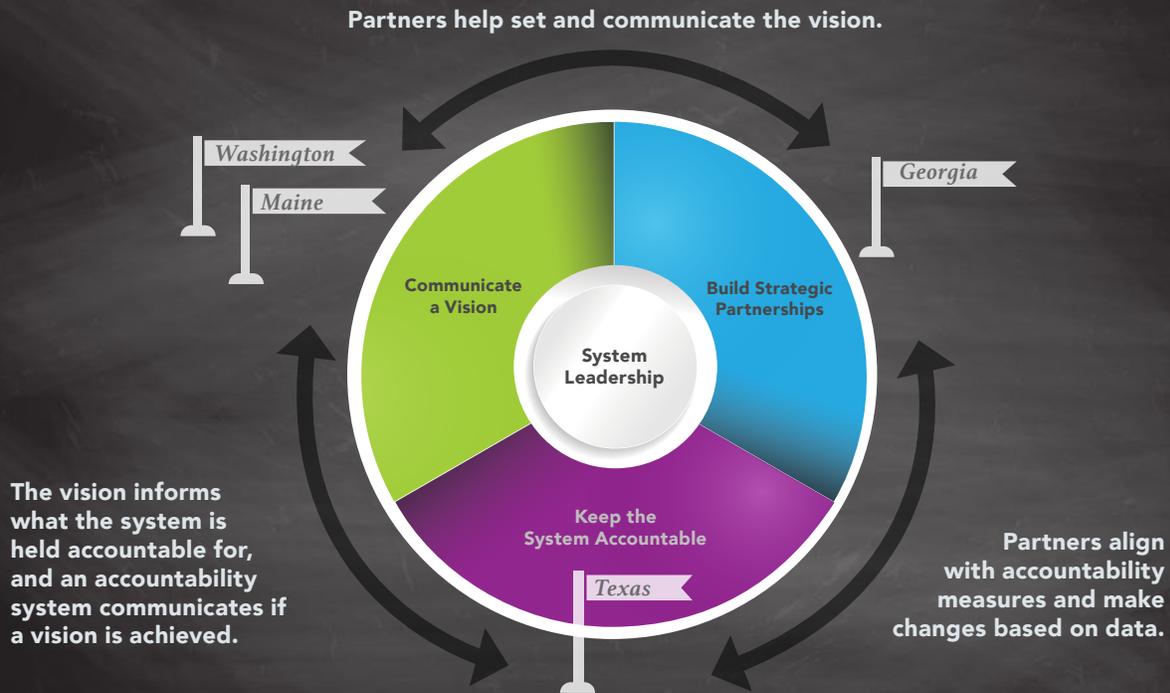
*A high-performing state workforce board is one that provides leadership to the entire workforce system to create sustainable change.*

**Figure 2: Critical Roles for High-Performing State Workforce Boards**



These roles are highly interrelated and represent different elements of leadership that cannot be approached sequentially or in silos (see Figure 3 on [page 6](#)). A high-performing board clearly articulates and shares the state’s vision for workforce development. This can include enumerated goals for the attainment of credentials or degrees or a vision for a system where all youth have access to integrated career pathways. Additionally, high-performing boards act as backbones that support the development of high-quality partnerships with industry, as well as across public agencies. Boards also create strategies that align state agencies and programs and other workforce system partners toward shared goals. Boards can organize the state’s strategy across agencies for business engagement, providing a unified voice to the business community so that the workforce system can meet their needs. Finally, high-performing boards use data to drive decision making and continuous improvement of the system. Data can be used to help keep all partners focused and accountable to the shared vision.

Figure 3: Connections Across Roles



## SET AND COMMUNICATE THE VISION FOR THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM

Developing a statewide vision and goals for the education and workforce development system is vital for ensuring that the state meets the needs of individuals and businesses. The governor and partners help set and communicate this vision, and by embracing it, they align their activities to achieve the vision. Operationally, boards can align their structures and meeting agendas with their strategic priorities, as well as collaborate with the governor's office and industry to develop shared messages and identify priority actions. Individual members of the board ideally serve as ambassadors of the workforce system and are provided tools to effectively communicate that vision broadly. Furthermore, as regional and local organizations understand and align to the board's vision, meaningful change is more likely to be implemented and sustained.



Capitalizing on the requirement of 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to align the various components of the workforce development system, the **Maine** State Workforce Board hosted a series of vision sessions throughout 2015. Bringing together a group of 60 workforce system stakeholders across 41 organizations, including businesses, state agencies, educators, advocates, economic development professionals and other policy makers. The partners convened for three full days to discuss the state's workforce development system and to create a strong vision for the future.

By focusing discussions on what success will look like for Maine's workforce development system in five to 10 years, the group could identify what changes need to occur in order to make the vision a reality. Ultimately, the process demonstrated that participants shared many of the same ideas, which resulted in a new vision for the state's workforce development system. That vision addresses the requirements of WIOA and also serves as a meaningful plan for the future that speaks to Maine's vision and goals for itself. Partners were encouraged to commit to staying connected to and involved in the work of the state and local workforce development boards or of the new WIOA workgroups that were formed to assist in the implementation of the strategic plan.

Tips from the field for setting and communicating a vision:

- Articulate a vision for the overall workforce system, not only for the board or WIOA;
- Develop the vision in collaboration with the governor and all stakeholders;
- Create a vision that is inspirational, aspirational and concise – one that answers the question, “Where the state is headed?”;
- Include all regions, populations, sectors and resources in the process;
- Use a common language that conveys the vision to different stakeholder groups throughout the state; and
- Realize the vision by focusing on two or three key areas or issues and aligning resources in support of these priorities.



**Washington's** workforce training and education coordinating board identified the importance of their board's steering committee in developing a comprehensive state plan, Talent and Prosperity for All, which combines more than 20 programs across seven agencies. A key factor in the plan's development was that the steering committee was jointly led by senior representatives of the two customers of the system: business and labor. By including representation from both customers, the board is able to develop solutions that serve all stakeholders. The business and labor co-leads and other stakeholders articulated a clear vision of success for the state: “A workforce system that empowers individuals, communities, and employers to realize their full potential through a universally accessible workforce system that continually improves and adapts to changing conditions and demands.”<sup>6</sup> This process also identified a small set of strategic priorities:

- **Improving the customer experience:** Better serving current and future workers;
- **Business engagement:** Engaging business for better results;
- **Accessibility and technology:** Ensuring access for everyone; and
- **Performance accountability:** Next generation performance measures.

Each of these areas was tackled by smaller working groups that replicated the customer-leadership process, ensuring that the vision and partnership was communicated to the program and implementation level. This was one important way to ensure stakeholder buy-in and make complex change more manageable.

## MODEL AND MANAGE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Effective state workforce boards manage partnerships and alignment among state agencies, as well as the partnerships between state agencies and the private sector. Given the historic and renewed focus on building sector-based partnerships between education, workforce systems and industry, high-performing boards essentially model such partnerships, creating environments conducive to forming new partnerships and supporting existing partnerships. State boards can act as a hub or manager that understands and supports statewide and local partnerships. For example, state boards can coordinate state activities to ensure that the time of employers is spent wisely, avoiding scenarios where multiple agencies or programs approach the same set of employers with similar requests.

<sup>6</sup> Washington State Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board, “Talent and Prosperity for All: The Strategic Plan for Unlocking Washington's Workforce Potential,” <http://www.wtb.wa.gov/Documents/TAPStrategic2016.pdf> (accessed September 9, 2016).

Tips from the field for modeling and managing strategic partnerships:

- Recognize that change takes time, and be open to mid-course corrections—over time collaboration becomes the new normal;
- Develop a clear decision-making process with a defined division of responsibilities among partners that recognizes the authority and autonomy of each partner;
- Understand that alignment requires meaningful day-to-day collaboration and coordination, not only a member's presence in a meeting;
- Build partnerships that are based upon a mutual understanding of each partner's perspectives and the identification of reciprocal value for all partners;
- Recruit board members who are empowered to serve as ambassadors for the system and communicate the vision to different stakeholders; and
- Be willing to have difficult conversations.



**Georgia's** workforce development board has embodied 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provisions requiring the alignment of, and coordination between, workforce and economic development activities through multiple strategic efforts. With key workforce program responsibilities shared across four state agencies, Georgia navigated the complex process of coordinating WIOA implementation across agencies. Furthermore, the state wanted to ensure that the local and regional perspectives and needs were represented. The state workforce development board created several working groups, each charged with different aspects of systems coordination. Core partners identified membership for each working group, including local representation. Having truly representative groups empowered with key decision-making authority allowed the working groups to reach consensus that hastened the successful implementation of policies.

Additionally, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal brought the state's workforce services under the Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) in April 2014, giving workforce activities a strong industry and business sector perspective and a deepened customer service mentality toward both business partners and participants. While GDEcD previously had a presence on the state board, Georgia's experience suggests this presence was not sufficient to achieving significant integration of programs and services. Joining the workforce programs to economic development through meaningful, day-to-day coordination aligns these two efforts, creating more streamlined services to businesses and individuals.

## **USE DATA AND OTHER TOOLS TO HOLD THE SYSTEM ACCOUNTABLE TO THE VISION**

A state workforce board can leverage its shared vision to help agencies develop a common dashboard of success indicators, coming to consensus around desired outcomes. That can include the performance metrics in WIOA, but it also can be more broad, as in the several states that have set state-wide educational and training attainment goals. High-performing boards understand how their system goals can be supported by the goals of individual programs like those in WIOA or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA). In addition, state boards can develop a process for collecting and analyzing data and using metrics to make future policy and program adjustments. This involves using data to inform cross-agency planning processes and identifying the appropriate roles for each partner.

Tips from the field for holding the system accountable:

- Set specific goals and strategic priorities related to the state vision that would demonstrate progress towards achieving the vision;
- Develop an evaluation plan for your board that will assess whether the board is making progress;
- Establish a timeline of activities and desired milestones related to each goal or priority;
- Identify which partners are accountable for what activities and milestones to keep partners focused and honest; and
- Utilize both partner feedback and other data sources in a documented and consistent way to correct course, align systems and direct resources.

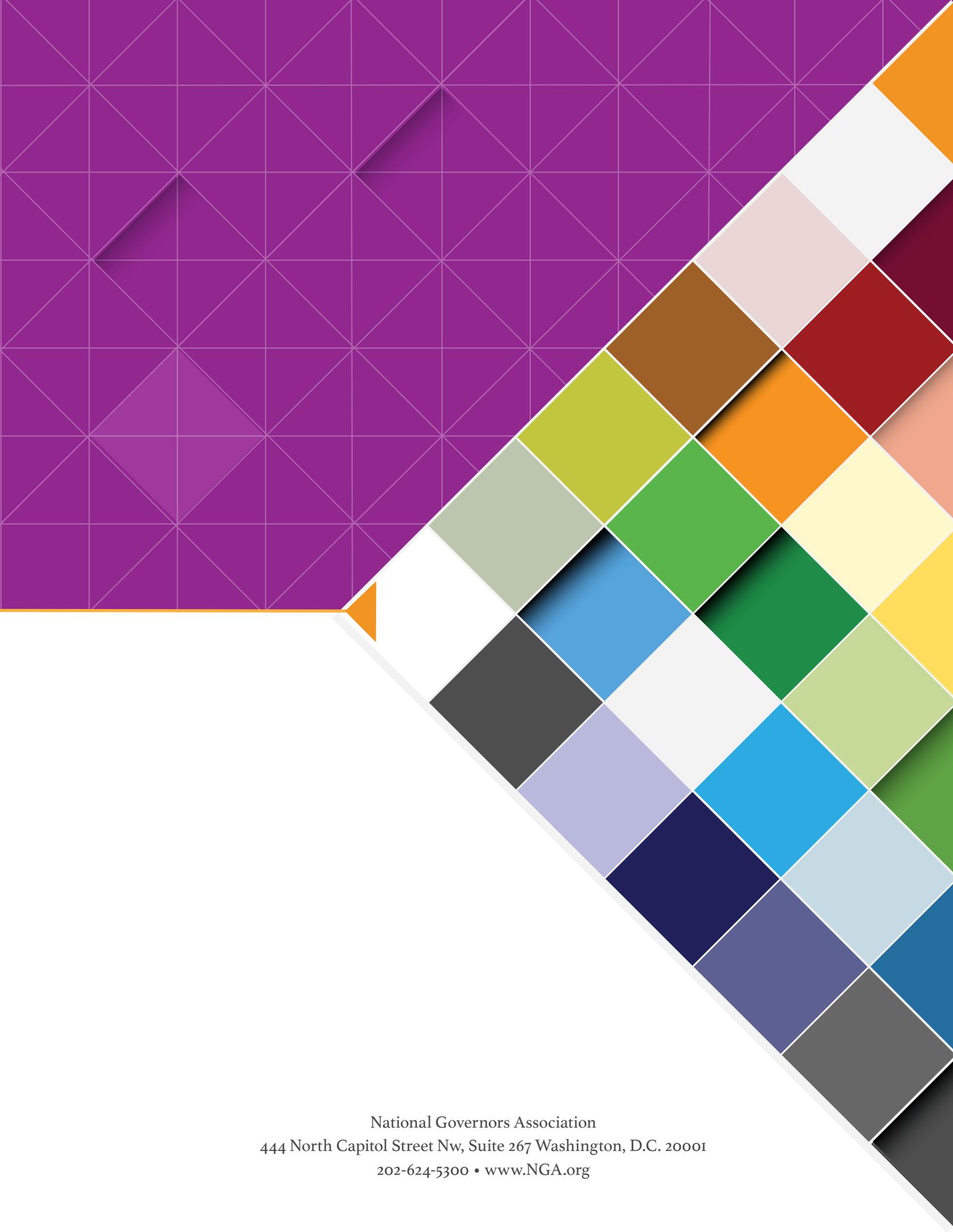


In many states, the workforce system is understood in narrow terms, such as only representing the core 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) titles. Many agencies with workforce programs do not see themselves as part of the workforce system and, therefore, are not part of the system governance and management in any significant way. Facing this lack of system identity or any mechanism to communicate the goals and priorities of the system, the **Texas** Workforce Investment Council implemented a system integration technical advisory council to:

- Create a system identity across 25 programs and eight agencies;
- Build agency partnerships over time to generate a collaborative and aligned culture; and
- Guide the implantation of, and reporting on, the system's strategic plan.

Members of the Texas Workforce Investment Council implemented a system integration technical advisory council that represented all the relevant agencies of the system, including agencies that did not traditionally see themselves as part of the workforce system, such as the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department and the Texas Veterans Commission.

The process of enabling partners to develop a system identity took several years. A 2015 evaluation of their efforts documented several changes in policy, legislation and funding that brought greater alignment and success to the system. By focusing on system accountability and documenting its successes and achievements, Texas institutionalized the workforce system's vision into other agencies' accountability processes.



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