

Enhancing Workforce Development Services in Washington D.C.



Mayor Bowser, Deputy Mayor Snowden, and DOES Director Donald at the opening of a new American Jobs Center site.

As part of Bloomberg Philanthropies' What Works Cities initiative, the GPL provided pro bono technical assistance to help Washington, D.C. apply results-driven contracting strategies to improve the outcomes of its workforce development services.

The Problem: Although Washington, D.C. benefits from a low overall unemployment rate of around 5 percent, the differences in employment prospects across the District are stark. In five of the District's eight geographic wards, the current unemployment rate is below 6 percent, while in the three remaining wards the unemployment rate is higher—at 7, 10, and 12 percent.

To address these employment inequalities, the Department of Employment Services (DOES) strategically located three of its four American Job Centers (also called one-stop centers) in these high unemployment rate wards. The one-stop centers are designed to serve as the entry point to the public workforce system. Staff at the one-stop centers evaluate customers' needs and barriers and match them to appropriate workforce development services. However, the District lacked key information or processes to coordinate 1) the needs of the population seeking services; 2) the customer experience with the public workforce system (e.g. how quickly individuals were connected to programs); and 3) the success of the one-stop centers in matching individuals to the right programs. This coordination is critical for helping the District ensure that workforce development resources are being appropriately leveraged and that services are effective.

Furthermore, the District sought to build on the successful pilot of the Workforce Intermediary Program, which connects businesses in two of the six in-demand industries to jobseekers and is

administered by the Workforce Investment Council (WIC). D.C. wanted to transform this pilot into a permanent part of DOES's service delivery model allowing the intermediary to expand pilots in the four other in-demand occupations.

Applying Results-Driven Contracting Strategies: To procure a new one-stop operator and to design a framework for transitioning programs piloted under WIC into permanent programs under DOES the GPL and Washington, D.C.:

- 1) **Defined the roles and responsibilities of the one-stop operator.** In the procurement for a new one-stop operator, the District clearly defined the objectives of the one-stop operator, which include system-wide coordination of services and developing a measurable referral process. The District allowed for some flexibility and innovation in the responses to the RFP by inviting vendors to describe how they plan to achieve the specific goals and provide the services outlined in the RFP.
- 2) **Laid the groundwork for a strong referral tracking system.** Through the RFP, vendors were directed to explain their plans for assessing customer needs and identifying appropriate programs to which they should be referred, tracking referrals to make sure they smoothly enrolled into those programs, and assisting the agency in collecting data on customer activities post-referral.
- 3) **Defined key performance metrics and deliverables over the contract term.** The District defined key performance measures for the one-stop operator to track enrollments, timely service delivery, and successful coordination of one-stop partner services. A combination of process metrics and outcome metrics will help the District better evaluate performance of the one-stop operator as well as the overall workforce development system.
- 4) **Established active contract management.** The new contract will build in an active contract management approach, with performance data reviews and check-ins between DOES, the WIC, and the operator. The one-stop vendor and the District contract administrator will meet bi-monthly to review key performance indicators, including the number of referrals, the number of enrollments, and the length of time from referral to enrollment. These regular meetings provide opportunities for the District and the vendor to identify and flag coordination issues in real time and brainstorm solutions to address those issues. These meetings can foster a common understanding of program goals and performance and can illuminate trends regarding one-stop customers that need services.

Additionally, the one-stop operator will coordinate quarterly meetings with all one-stop partners to review the referral and hand-off process, identify strengths and opportunities for improvement, and encourage collaboration on system-wide improvements.

- 5) **Formalize contract extension criteria.** Frequently, a lack of clarity around contract renewal terms sets the stage for routine contract extensions regardless of performance. Contract extension decisions can be an opportunity to incentivize performance improvements, particularly if the vendor does not take renewals for granted. The District plans to make decisions regarding renewals based on an annual performance review as well as the vendor's efforts to collaborate with the District and improve during the contract term.
- 6) **Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a partnership between WIC and DOES.** Through the partnership, WIC will develop and pilot innovative pre-apprenticeship, job training, or supportive services programs and establish evidence for their effectiveness. For successful programs, WIC will transfer funding to DOES which will

then a) incorporate the program into the District-wide portfolio of workforce development services; b) align the offering to WIOA metrics in an effort to fund the program using federal WIOA funding; and c) expand the program as appropriate. The MOU defines key metrics that DOES will use for evaluating program effectiveness and in turn informing decisions regarding the continuation and/or expansion of pilot programs.

The Results: The RFP for a one-stop operator launched this summer, a vendor was selected, and the new contract is being implemented. Furthermore, the new MOU between WIC and DOES has enabled WIC to transition the intermediary model to DOES, which will scale it to other in-demand occupations and integrate it into the wider service delivery ecosystem. These efforts are helping D.C. better meet the workforce needs of businesses and jobseekers.