

Adapting WorkFirst to the 21st Century Economy of Washington State

Core Assumptions for the WorkFirst Program

June 29, 2010

***Our ability to fully realize the core assumptions for the WorkFirst program must be
Balanced with current and future fiscal realities and constraints.***

Achieving stable and successful employment is our main objective for WorkFirst participants; we will maximize opportunities for participants to successfully attach to the workforce and have opportunities to move out of poverty.

Work provides the best opportunity for parents to provide a stable income and move their families out of poverty. Children benefit when their parents model to them a strong work ethic. However, participants need assistance to be prepared for work and we will help them identify and remove barriers that hinder their ability to be employed. To assist participants in developing and maintaining a strong workforce attachment, we will strengthen the linkages between TANF and workforce development programs in Washington State. We will work in partnership with the business, education and labor communities to develop jobs and career pathways that are aligned with the state's goals for economic competitiveness in the 21st century. We will provide opportunities for participants to gain soft and hard skills that allow them to compete and succeed in the job market. We will develop education and training opportunities to move participants into the workforce and on a pathway to a living wage job. When participants experience success they are more likely to be highly engaged and motivated in realizing their longer term goals. Ultimately our strategies need to position people with the best opportunity to break the cycle of poverty, recognizing that to do so means more than placing a person in a job. To achieve our goals, we will strive to invest in what has been shown to work based on empirical evidence.

A family-centered case planning and engagement approach is necessary to achieve good outcomes and reduce long-term dependency and generational poverty within families.

Comprehensive assessments and person- and family-centered planning and case management strategies will be necessary to ensure that our engagement, goals and services assist and motivate parents to meet their employment goals and help their children succeed in school, develop and realize their full potential.

Policies will recognize the critical role and responsibility of parents in their children's development, foster the healthy growth and development of children, and promote family stability.

Parents are their child's first and best teacher. Some parents, however, lack the knowledge and skills needed to create a healthy and nurturing environment for their children. To reduce generational poverty within families and communities, we will help these parents gain the knowledge and skills they need to help their children succeed, and we will reinforce the importance of their parental responsibilities. Substantial evidence shows that investments in parenting education, family strengthening, and early childhood education programs improve outcomes for at-risk children and reduce public expenditures associated with incarceration, child abuse and neglect, teen pregnancy, and long-term welfare dependency. Stable child care arrangements are also critical to the success of WorkFirst parents and their children.

WorkFirst is a transitional, not long-term, program to assist families on the pathway to self-sufficiency.

Through our engagement strategies, we will reduce the number of participants in WorkFirst beyond 60 months and reduce long-term dependency on the program. Nearly 14% of the TANF caseload (6,721 families) in Washington State has been on assistance for 60 months or more, and many of the parents now on TANF have been on TANF before. We will engage recipients to reduce long term dependency on temporary cash assistance.

Many of our participants have significant barriers to employment. It will be important to create a clear sense of shared responsibility with our participants and accountability for results.

Leveraging non-TANF resources is crucial to achieving the goals of WorkFirst.

We will partner with public and private entities to successfully realize our vision for WorkFirst and manage the program with financial integrity. This will involve the development of new community- and state-based partnerships to identify resources and systems outside of TANF that can be leveraged to share in the achievement of WorkFirst goals.