

What is a Sector Initiative?

Sector initiatives are regional, industry-focused approaches to workforce and economic development. They improve access to good jobs and/or increase job quality in ways that strengthen an industry's workforce.

Sector initiatives have four elements that distinguish them from conventional workforce programs:

- They focus intensively on a specific industry over a sustained time period, customizing solutions for multiple employers within a regional labor market.
- They strengthen economic growth and industry competitiveness by creating new pathways into targeted industries, and toward good jobs and careers. This approach benefits low-income individuals and sustains and creates middle-class jobs.
- They utilize workforce intermediaries, organizations that have a deep understanding of worker and employer issues in an industry and within a regional labor market. These organizations facilitate the many stakeholders involved to develop and implement industry-based workforce solutions.
- They promote systemic change that achieves benefits for the industry, workers, and the community.

Sector initiatives are typically collaborations that bring together key partners to achieve an industry-wide impact. Therefore, a strong workforce intermediary is critical to the sector initiative's success. A workforce intermediary is an entity with expertise and credibility in the industry sector and in workforce issues. It plays a leadership and coordinating role in bringing the key stakeholders and partners to the table and keeping stakeholders on task, and managing the partnership's services to employers, job seekers, and workers.

Characteristics of a workforce intermediary include the following:

- It has an entrepreneurial culture
- It has a results-driven focus that promotes flexibility and accountability amongst partners
- It has the capacity to act as a project manager, be a neutral manager of partnerships with multiple organizations in order to deliver services that respond to the needs of the industry and its workforce, and determine service delivery providers in a way that does not produce conflicts of interest
- It has the capacity to manage multiple sources of funding in order to meet the needs of an industry's employers and workforce
- It has expertise and credibility with the industry sector's employers and an understanding of the sector and the needs of its employers, its workforce, and its potential workforce
- It has or develops an awareness of best and promising practices in service delivery
- It has or develops an understanding of systems change and a commitment to accomplishing it
- It plays a strong role in solving the workforce needs of the industry and addressing the need for good jobs for the community and its workers.

The workforce intermediary has several specific roles in implementing the sector initiative:

- Work across jurisdictional boundaries to manage sector initiative partners' activities throughout the regional labor market within which the sector initiative operates and has impact.
- Coordinate the sector initiative's employer and/or workforce service delivery, providing a level and data-driven management capacity, information systems to coordinate the flow of services across multiple agencies to employers and individuals, and monitor outcomes for industry, workers, and job seekers
- Improve data collection and analysis capacity, and the use of it to drive sector initiative activities
- Anticipate challenges and technical assistance needs.
- Build the capacity of service providers to better meet the needs of employers and job-seekers
- Bring about efforts to update understanding of employers', workers', and job seekers' needs, ensuring that service provider practices change to address these needs, and ensuring that systems change objectives do so
- Stimulate systems change, lead efforts to identify systems change strategies and to pursue them, and monitor the sector initiative's progress
- Bring about a structure for governance of the partnership and participate in it
- Secure financial support, involve sector initiative partners in doing so, and manage multiple funding streams so resources can be used most flexibly to meet the needs of employers, workers, and job seekers
- Examine possible areas for expansion of the sector initiative and its sustainability
- Market the sector initiative; publicize progress

For more information – go to the National Network of Sector Partners website - www.nnsp.org