



CSW

Corporation for a
Skilled Workforce

Good Jobs. Thriving Communities.

California Workforce Development Board
Regional Plan Implementation

2.0 EVALUATION REPORT
December 2020

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RPI 2.0 Evaluation Report

Introduction and Overview

In 2019, the California Workforce Development Board (CWDB) engaged the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) to evaluate regional plan implementation efforts in California's regional planning units, of which there were 14 at the time, in the state's second round of regional funding (referred to hereafter at RPI 2.0). CSW partnered with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to bring more than 50 years of workforce development design and evaluation experience to support this assessment of regional work in the State of California.



Regions in 2019

Purpose

The RPI 2.0 evaluation was designed to help CWDB evaluate regional plan implementation efforts and explore the lessons learned from that process to date. The evaluation was always intended to be formative, and it quickly became clear that frequent and direct feedback to the state throughout the evaluation process would be of significantly greater value to policy makers than the standard interim and end-of-project reports. Consequently, the role of the evaluators came to include not just periodic observations but real-time recommendations to address ongoing issues impacting policy direction and future funding. While not every suggestion was adopted, the evaluation did lead to changes over the past year in the way the state is approaching regionalism.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Most local workforce boards were found to be complying with the state's regional directives, but without fully embracing regionalism in a way that could really take it to the next level. However, regional directors did find value in certain aspects of the regional work.



Measuring regionalism is difficult, but successful regional work should lead to improved outcomes for California residents. The evaluation team suggested that the state work with the regions to see if common ground could be found on a few concrete participant level outcome measures tied to moving the needle on good jobs and higher wages.



Regional fiscal leads expressed frustration with administrative requirements and expectations of regionalism, because these functions were taking significant time away from the critical work of serving employers and job seekers. The evaluation team participated in a task force which developed a set of recommendations to mitigate administrative issues, some of which have been implemented.



The 2021-2025 Four Year Plan process was identified as an ideal opportunity to try to establish a new and more collaborative relationship with the local directors regarding regionalism. The evaluators helped to craft the planning guidance, urging CWDB to treat any new measures as aspirational rather than punitive and to find ways to incentivize and positively reinforce progress.



Key Findings

The table above highlights several of the evaluation team's recommendations, which are discussed in greater detail later in this report and the appendices that follow. Our first key finding, which came out of the initial interviews with each region during the Fall of 2019, was that while the strategy of requiring local areas to act regionally had led to significant progress in advancing regionalism, such an approach was unlikely to be successful in taking things much further. Interviews suggested that there was a fundamental philosophical difference between the state and the local directors regarding the value of regionalism. Generally speaking, most local workforce boards were complying with the state's regional directives without fully embracing regionalism in the kinds of ways that could really take it to the next level. We noted, however, that the directors did find value in certain aspects of the regional work, and

that this might provide some common ground from which to try to engage local workforce boards more collaboratively in the future.

A second key finding involved CWDB's desire to find ways to measure the impact of the regional work, and the reluctance of the regions to commit to anything concrete in that regard. Measuring regionalism has been a perennial topic since the early days of SlingShot, but it has not been mandated by the state, in part because the nature of the work varies significantly from region to region. The regions argue that the essential elements of successful regional work – things like *partnership* and *collaboration* – are difficult if not impossible to measure. To the extent measures do exist, they tend to be process measures rather than outcome measures (e.g., how many sector partnerships exist; how frequently do they meet). Ultimately, however, successful regional work should lead to improved outcomes for some number of individual participants. The evaluation team suggested that the state work with the regions to see if common ground could be found on a few concrete participant-level outcome measures tied to moving the needle on good jobs and higher wages.

The regional interviews also uncovered a high degree of frustration with many of the administrative requirements and expectations of regionalism. In particular, the regional fiscal leads argued that administrative functions were taking significant time away from the critical work of serving employers and job-seekers. They noted that the complexities of local procurement rules were always not well-understood by the state, which was particularly problematic for local boards that are embedded in county government. The evaluation team participated in a task force which developed a set of recommendations to mitigate administrative issues, some of which have been implemented.

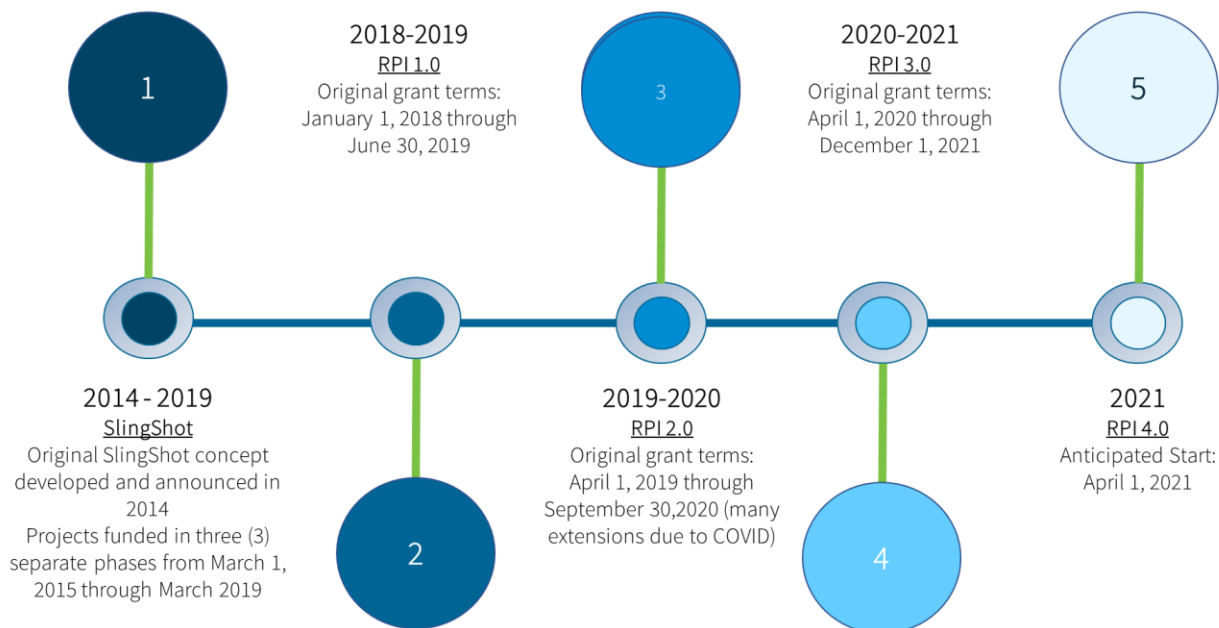
Finally, the evaluation pointed to the 2021-2025 Four-Year Plan process as an ideal opportunity to try to establish a new and more collaborative relationship with the local directors regarding regionalism. The planning guidance issued by CWDB sets the tone for the next four years, and the multi-year duration of the plans provides ample time for regions to reach agreement on key outcome measures, develop and implement systems for tracking progress, and then make pivots if necessary. The evaluators helped to craft the planning guidance, urging CWDB to treat any new measures as aspirational rather than punitive and to find ways to incentivize and positively reinforce progress.

Goals of the Evaluation

The RPI 2.0 evaluation sought to better understand alignment between the regional plan implementation efforts and the vision outlined in California's Strategic Workforce Plan. Key questions included:

- How do local boards and their partners in a region work together to define problems, set goals, identify and implement solutions, and assess outcomes? What are those outcomes?
- How do regionalism and local administrative authority co-exist? How has regional work impacted service delivery systems at the local level?
- How have the regions evolved over time, and how can CWDB support regions in achieving and sustaining their shared goals in the future?

Evolution of the Evaluation Process



An Evolving Evaluation

When the RPI 2.0 evaluation was originally procured, there was no definite expectation of further funding. Fairly early in the evaluation, however, it became clear that there would in fact be an RPI 3.0 funding round, and that there would be an evaluation component of that funding cycle. CSW applied and was selected as the RPI 3.0 evaluator in March of 2020. At the same time, as a result of contracting decisions at the state level in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CWDB offered RPI and other grantees the opportunity to extend their contracts, and the RPI 2.0 evaluation contract was in turn extended by six months, with a new end date of December 31, 2020.

This evolving process is significant in that it increasingly led the state and CSW to view the two evaluations (RPI 2.0 and 3.0) as a continuum rather than wholly separate activities. Since CSW also coordinated the 2017-2018 SlingShot and Accelerator¹ evaluations, our work is in effect an ongoing evaluation of CWDB's regionalism imperative from the initial SlingShot grants to the present day.

The outputs of the evaluation took on new dimensions as well. CSW produced summaries of evaluation findings during the course of the RPI 2.0 evaluation that included numerous recommendations for next steps. This in turn led to an increasingly interactive relationship with state leadership on how to operationalize the findings in order to apply the team's workforce knowledge to help flesh out the recommendations into actionable steps.

There is extensive back-up data to support the evaluation findings, which can be found in the Appendices. The main body of this report focuses on the major findings and the big-ticket recommendations, several of which continue to have major impact on the state's policy decisions.

¹ Social Policy Research Associates conducted the Workforce Accelerator Fund evaluation; BW Research Associates conducted the SlingShot evaluation; CSW served as the Evaluation Coordinator.

Perhaps most significantly, the evaluation work has led to a recommendation of a shift in direction-setting for the upcoming four-year planning guidance. Based on the evaluation findings, the nexus was clear: in order to impact future RPI funding expectations, the overarching planning guidelines needed to include the policy direction decisions emerging from the RPI 2.0 evaluation work.

Regions in 2020:



Major RPI 2.0 Evaluation Products and Areas of Emphasis


Early Evaluation Findings (January 2020)

What Does ‘Regionalism’ Mean? Conflicting Understandings

Between late August and mid-November of 2019, the evaluation team conducted interviews with each of the 14 regions, most of them on-site. Participants typically included most or all of the local workforce board directors in each region; in some cases, staff or stakeholders were present as well. In preparation for the interviews, the team reviewed relevant documents for each region, including their RPI proposals, quarterly reports, and summary documents prepared by CWDB. As soon as the regional interviews were completed, the team conducted interviews with staff and leadership at CWDB in late November and early December. These two sets of interviews highlighted a marked difference between the way most local boards view the purpose, strategy, and implementation of regionalism and the way CWDB sees things. Local boards, as a rule, tended to view their regional efforts as project-based engagements that generally went no further than whatever project was at hand, while CWDB saw regionalism as a progression to a new way of delivering services. This is an oversimplification, but it illustrates a key point: there is a profound divide in perceptions about regionalism – its benefits, how it functions, how it might be evaluated, and where it is (or should be) headed. Some of this may emanate from a lack of a shared vision around policy and implementation, as articulated across all partners, stakeholders, outcomes and measures of success locally and at the state level. For the evaluation team, this gap in perception emerged as the principal barrier to achieving a successful regional system.

Opportunity to Re-set – Potential Impact on upcoming regional planning guidance

One early evaluation finding was that while most regions were complying with the basic requirements of RPI, the embrace of regionalism by local directors exhibited a wide range of enthusiasm and adoption. At one end of the spectrum were a small number of regions that appeared to have few issues with regionalism – for example, those regions which comprise only one local workforce board. At the other end were a handful of regions in which local workforce board directors were openly vocal in their resistance to regionalism. In between those poles lay the majority of regions, which made a point of complying but in candid conversation with the evaluation team expressed significant opposition to what they termed CWDB’s “prescriptive” approach.



‘The state has done some smart strategy work around regionalism. Unfortunately, they’ve sometimes shot themselves in the foot by not being inclusive or transparent. They tend to treat us like we are the problem.’
-- Local Workforce Board Staff Member

The evaluation team quickly identified the start of a new 4-year planning cycle (2021-2025) as providing an ideal opportunity to try to reconcile these issues in a collaborative manner. The timing seemed right to 're-set' regional efforts, strengthening the initiative through alignment regarding what is expected and how to get there, and the creation of a structure that could enhance the capacity of local systems to engage in regional activity. Key questions to explore were identified: What could be built into the initiative that would support the ability of local areas to act more regionally? What system support is needed to address the variety and unique characteristics of local boards to work together at a regional level? What measures could be adopted that clearly define expectations and outcomes?

Supporting Findings from Regional Interviews

Most regions noted that local boards in their part of the state had worked together prior to SlingShot. With a few exceptions, these efforts were typically rather limited and ad hoc, focused on a specific grant or project, and did not necessarily involve the exact same local boards the region comprises today. Interviewees tended to describe these partnerships as “organic,” coming together when and where it made sense. They contrasted these early, voluntary regional efforts (in which they included SlingShot) with RPI, which was typically described as “prescribed” -- something they were doing because they were required to, not necessarily because it made sense. Nearly all regions advocated for a less-prescriptive approach: *“Let us figure out what works for our region, instead of trying to dictate exactly how regionalism should work.”*

Nonetheless, despite their issues with the approach, nearly every region indicated there were some real benefits as a result of the “mandated” regionalism of RPI. Shared learning, regular communication between local boards which had previously talked on a much more random basis, and the adoption of best practices across regions were highlighted. In particular, the Regional Training Coordinator funding and related activities were given highly favorable marks. While this acknowledgement of the benefits of RPI was a bit grudging in some cases, the evaluation team noted that it offered an opening through which the relationship might be strengthened.

There was a general agreement among regions that RPI had in fact changed, for the better, the way major employers access services by coordinating the approach of multiple local boards. As a result, employers who cover more than one local workforce area are less likely to be approached multiple times with multiple requests. In contrast, few regions indicated that they felt RPI had changed the way job-seekers access services. This suggests that RPI has had some success in getting local boards to adopt a regional approach to business services, but has been less successful thus far in connecting AJCC services directly to regional sector work.

Based on interviews with regions and CWDB staff, there appeared to be considerable frustration on both sides about regionalism. Local directors support regionalism when it works for them, e.g. on specific projects, but balk at it as a driving concept for all discretionary dollars. They preferred the early days of SlingShot, where there was little direction beyond a charge to work regionally on a project of their choosing. In contrast, CWDB leadership felt not all local boards were taking regionalism seriously enough, and indicated a need for further action to push local boards toward working together in regions. Opinions among CWDB staff differed as to how many of the 14 regions were embracing versus resisting regionalism, highlighting the need for shared expectations regarding purpose, goals, and evaluative metrics.

While a few regions had identified things to measure in their regional work, most responded to the evaluators’ questions about measurement by asking: *“How do you measure something like ‘partnership’?”* One region noted (approvingly) that CWDB had allowed a high degree of flexibility in this regard by not mandating what the regional measures should be, which *“allowed each local board to work in its own way.”* Another suggested that it would not make much sense for a region to start measuring things that are not required by CWDB (or at least, it would not make sense to share those measures with CWDB).

The Regional Indicators

In 2018, building on work from a previous evaluation which attempted to assess levels of regional development under SlingShot, CWDB created the **Indicators of Regional Coordination and Alignment**, more commonly known as the ‘Regional Indicators.’ These ten indicators were subsequently



There is clearly a need to establish shared expectations, baselines, and measures between local boards, regional groups, state agencies and CWDB that can in practice leverage resources, meet local and regional needs, improve efficiency, reduce duplication, and enhance state agencies' work within regions.

incorporated into the 2019 Two-Year Regional Plan Updates, which required each region to self-assess its level of development using the indicators. In our interviews, the regions acknowledged that this represented a “soft” way of introducing the concept of measurement, along with an expectation that these would presumably become less soft over time. While appreciative of the fact that they were allowed to self-assess their progress on the indicators, some regions expressed confusion over the fact that there was little in the way of guidance or instruction on how to complete the self-assessment – leading some to offer very limited justification for their choices, while others went into great detail.

Having each region use the indicators to self-assess as part of their regional plan update served as a useful effort to codify where they believed they were in their level of development at the time. The indicators also offered an opportunity to build toward actual

expectations, as in the subsequent RPI 3.0 RFA requiring boards to pick one (or more) of the indicators and commit to showing progress on it.

CWDB asked the evaluation team to try to use the indicators to derive some possible expectations and measures, which proved challenging as discussed below. The team noted that, at a minimum, self-assessments would eventually need to be evaluated and verified in some way; when an entity simply self-assesses against general concepts, local definitions get applied, and are likely to differ from place to place.

There is clearly a need to establish shared expectations, baselines, and measures between local boards, regional entities, state agencies and CWDB that can in practice leverage resources, meet local and regional needs, improve efficiency, reduce duplication, and enhance state agencies' work within regions. Regionalism may not yet be at the point of having significant impact on the traditional WIOA performance measures, but there are things that could be measured. How many sector partnerships – jointly defined – are there? How many employers does each comprise? How active are those employers? How frequently do they meet? How many new training programs have been developed by each sector partnership? How many people have been placed in jobs in that sector? The evaluation team suggested that CWDB and the regions need to get to some level of agreement on (1) what is important and (2) what can be measured, and then translate that agreement into measures that can be timed and fine-tuned locally, with a standard for performance that can be reported on. At the same time, however, the team noted that the indicators tend to lend themselves more easily to process measures (“how many meetings”) rather than outcome measures (“how many people got jobs”).

Visiting the regions in person drove home the point that they are vastly different from one another. Geography, demographics, mix of employers and jobs, and types of organizational structures vary tremendously from region to region. A common refrain in the interviews was that “a cookie-cutter approach won't work.” And, in fact, no one we interviewed, from local directors to state leaders, advocated for a ‘cookie cutter’ approach. The evaluators suggested, however, that it might be necessary to move from the (understandable) desire to treat regions equally to an approach which instead explicitly acknowledges that regions are not equal, and then work independently and intensively with each region to determine what is feasible there. Such negotiations would be more time- and labor-

intensive than creating one set of rules and expectations for all regions, but might have a greater chance of success. Doing so would require an acknowledgement that regionalism in Region A will look very different than regionalism in Region B, and an acceptance that while regional efforts may be limited in some parts of the state, they can go much further in other parts.

Administrative Issues

The 14 regions exhibited a range of formal, semi-formal or informal decision-making processes and structures. Regardless of where they fell on that scale, most indicated that they thought their current practice was working reasonably well. (A few objected to the use of the term “structure” in the interview question, arguing that there is no WIOA requirement for a ‘regional structure’ -- just an expectation that local boards will work together for administrative and planning purposes.)

Every region indicated that there was a pressing need to reduce the administrative burdens currently faced by local boards and, especially, by the regional fiscal leads. There was appreciation of the fact that some duplicative reporting requirements have been eliminated, but a consensus that more needs to be done in this regard: *“Things have reached the point where administration is taking serious time away from our real work.”*

There was also a general view among local directors that CWDB did not fully understand or respect the complexities of local procurement rules, which play out differently in each region depending on local structures and the degree to which the local boards are embedded in county government. A technical assistance process concurrent with the evaluation (late 2019-early 2020) produced several promising strategies, most notably the concept of defining procurement as happening at the state level, which appears to have had some positive impact on these issues. The evaluation team participated in those TA sessions, and offered the observation that there will almost certainly be times when a local procurement is still advisable and/or required, requiring the policy to be flexible enough to accommodate a mix of approaches. The evaluators noted that it will also be necessary to convince local procurement officials of the acceptability of having procurement occur at the state level, and that doing so might require more stringent procurement processes than the state currently employs.

Mid-Evaluation Findings (May 2020)

Following the interviews conducted in late 2019 and early 2020, the evaluation team turned back to intensive document review to further explore questions that arose during the course of those conversations. In particular, the evaluation team focused on carefully reviewing the Indicators of Regional Coordination and Alignment and the related self-assessments submitted by each region as part of the Two-Year Plan Update process. Stemming from that review, the team made several recommendations for CWDB to consider as it moved forward with the regional 4-year plan process.

The evaluation team’s fundamental recommendation involved a shift from process measures to outcome measures. Because they are not directly tied to results, process measures are of relatively limited value to the state; the regions, meanwhile, chafe at continually being told ‘how’ to do their regional work (i.e., the processes they should use). Our interviews with the regions made us think they might be agreeable to trading the Regional Indicator’s ten sets of process measures for a handful of concrete outcome measures. While it is fairly easy to derive process measures from the Regional Indicators, the indicators don’t lend themselves very well to the kinds of outcome metrics that would be particularly meaningful or productive. However, the team saw potential for a path directly tied to State

Plan goals and aligned with the ‘north star’ of better jobs and higher wages. We recommended a participatory process to bring regions into discussion on how the Indicators and the self-assessments could best be shaped to support outcome achievement.

Outcome Measures

The evaluation team encouraged CWDB to work with the regions to develop a few critical outcome measures tied to the indicators and the State’s goal of moving the needle on good jobs and higher wages, instead of a lengthy set of process measures. Long-range, the idea would be to explore how discretionary funding controlled by the State could be used to not only get regions to work together, as is the current aim, but to do so on relevant outcomes that can be measured.

CAAL-Skills would appear to have potential to move the needle on how discretionary funding is framed. While CAAL-Skills currently has limits on the range and timeliness of data it is able to share, we suggested that eventually CAAL-Skills baseline performance across workforce programs in a region could be established on selected dimensions such as target group or industry. CWDB could then use those relevant baselines as the starting point for negotiations with regions on expected levels of improvement from discretionary investments. The Regional Indicators and the self-assessment process then become helpful TA tools to support regions in achieving the designated outcomes.

Additional Recommendations to Help Guide the Participatory Process

The evaluation team encouraged CWDB to further refine the Regional Indicators document to clarify points that may be confusing, and to trim the indicators down to those which CWDB deems most essential. In response, CWDB staff worked with the evaluation team to identify four of the ten indicators which were deemed to be most critical and most closely associated with the State Plan goals.

The evaluation team also suggested making the revised self-assessment a centerpiece of the regional 4-Year Plan, not an appendix to the plan. Our observation was that having the self-assessment be an appendix to the previous 2-year plan update led some regions to treat it as an afterthought to the plan, not a key component of it. We also suggested CWDB provide guidance on the level of back-up detail regions are expected to give for the self-assessment ratings, and clarify that the regions are expected to provide a response for each of the indicators, rather than simply choosing which indicators to address.

The team urged CWDB to develop a system for verifying the self-assessments, possibly involving a peer review among regions. It made sense, in the initial “soft launch” of the Regional Indicators, to take each region’s self-assessment at face value. Moving forward, however, it becomes necessary to provide feedback to the regions regarding their self-assessments, particularly about any aspects of the assessment that CWDB finds to be unclear, lacking in support or otherwise inadequate. We suggested CWDB could use that feedback as the starting point for an individual discussion with each region regarding what expectations are reasonable and achievable for that region.

Analysis in Support of the Recommendations Goals and Measures

From the start of Slingshot, there was a working hypothesis that regions would need time to figure out exactly how regionalism would work in their part of the state. There was, therefore, little expectation that they would have a measurable impact on the big goal of impacting their regional economies. That has held true to this day, and likely is still accurate from the standpoint of impacting overall economies. But the evaluation team found that both CWDB and the regions might be ready to explore goal achievement in more focused ways.

We looked to the (then-draft) 2021-2025 State Plan for guidance on what is important to CWDB over the next few years -- assuming things return to something resembling 'normal' fairly soon. A few key concepts, paraphrased from the State Plan, about potential measures and goal attainment include:

- Capacity to grow sector-based high road training partnerships impacting traditional WIOA measures.
- High Road Initiative Components: job quality, worker voice, equity, and environmental sustainability.
- Improved equity through better outcomes by investing in retraining and career pathways.
- Industry-specific standards of growth in prevailing wage levels and impact on scheduling predictability, benefits, and safety standards.
- Public investment paths: fostering demand-driven skills attainment with increasing apprenticeships as a key strategy; enabling upward mobility with emphasis on immigrants, justice-involved individuals, homeless and the housing insecure.
- Aligning, coordinating, integrating programs and services with CAAL-Skills as a critical element to gather data across all workforce programs and partners.
- Creation of a Workforce Commission.

Given that California is focusing workforce development investments on the 14 regions, CWDB has opportunities to incorporate State Plan elements into the efforts to promote regional development. The state has moved to form a high-level commission charged with promoting workforce efforts that can help achieve the State Plan goals, which seem to be captured primarily in job quality and equity terms. Worker voice is seen as a critical means to get there, while environmental sustainability is clearly an overarching direction for the whole state, integral to everything CWDB and the Labor Agency plan to do. The direction of discretionary funding from many different partners has largely focused on providing support to the regions, rather than individual or local entities. Those efforts are a key element of driving toward more regional cooperation.

CAAL-Skills offers a rich data resource to track future progress as well as past performance on key indicators. It could also provide data to set baselines regarding how elements of the workforce system have performed in the recent past, on multiple levels, for various target populations. An expanded CAAL-Skills data-sharing arrangement offers potential to help the state set goals.

As an example, it should be possible to see all of the aggregated funding that has served a population in a region, examine what the outcomes have been on key indicators related to the 'high road' agenda, and then ask the regions to set goals for baseline improvement over the course of their grants. Setting expectations for outcome improvement tied to discretionary funding is a key next step in defining what is important and promoting movement at the regional level on the things that matter.

The evaluation team suggested, at least initially, using positive incentives as the appropriate way to build support for this approach, perhaps holding back a portion of the funding to reward high achievers or those who meet negotiated goals. Positive incentives can be more effective than negative ones, while allowing you to build support for the outcomes you want in the long run. Toward this end CSW developed the following hypothetical scenario illustrating a process to implement what we've outlined above.

How Positive Incentives Might Work An Example	
1.	The State intends to provide funding to regions to increase the number of apprenticeships in demand occupations filled by individuals who meet the definition of low-income workers.
2.	Request for Applications (RFA) for these funds requires regions to designate demand occupations with current apprenticeship programs in high growth sectors.
3.	RFA requires regions to have sector partnerships for those sectors selected and to demonstrate that those partnerships will have an active role in designing the regional initiative.
4.	RFA requires that regions negotiate with the State a performance plan that incorporates a baseline of low-income individuals accepted into the relevant apprenticeship programs over the past five years, calculated as a percentage of the total new apprenticeships filled.
5.	The negotiations use CAAL-Skills or other regional performance data to create the baseline and to assess the potential for increasing that percentage over the life of this funding.
6.	Regions are eligible for additional funding if they meet targets set for entry and completion of apprenticeship milestones relevant to the selected apprenticeship program.
7.	Targets are set based on past data; progress is tracked using the same data tracking process.
8.	Periodic review of targets and progress are conducted jointly by the State, the region, and the relevant partnership. Opportunities for renegotiation of goals are provided based on issues that all parties agree warrant re-structuring the goals.
9.	While the Indices of Regional Coordination and Alignment remain as guides to the regions on how to move toward better outcomes, the outcomes themselves are the test of meeting the State's expectations for regionalism.

State Partner Interviews

During this same period (late 2019-early 2020), CSW also conducted interviews with CWDB's state-level partners, including the Employment Development Department, the Department of Education, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, the Department of Social Services, and the Department of Rehabilitation, as well as a representative of the Chancellor's Office at the California Community Colleges. Taken as a whole, the interviews highlighted the fact that the agencies found real value in the partnership. The interviewees evidenced a clear understanding of the workforce development system and their agency's relationship to it, and indicated a belief that partnering with CWDB helped to ensure that their specific populations of focus (adult learners, ex-offenders, persons with disabilities, low-income residents, etc.) would be well-served by the workforce system.

Most of those interviewed noted that, following an initial burst of sustained activity at the start of the partnership, inter-agency partnership meetings had become less regular over time. This was generally attributed to the natural cycle of such relationships, with



State agency partners suggested that it might be time to hold more regular meetings and reinvigorate relationships, bringing the agencies together to focus on the Four-Year Plan process.

less frequent communication required as things begin to work more smoothly. More than one interviewee suggested, however, that it might be advisable to hold more regular meetings and to reinvigorate those relationships, using the Four-Year Plan process as an opportunity to bring the agencies together in a more focused way. Respondents also highlighted the need to achieve alignment on data and outcomes, and mentioned CAAL-Skills, the data workgroup, co-enrollment, common intake processes, and co-location as critical factors: *“We need to reach agreement on what data is critical, what a successful employment outcome is, what the partnership should look like when it is fully developed, and what success looks like for the whole system.”*

Further Actions on Interim Recommendations

CSW has engaged in bi-weekly conference calls with CWDB staff responsible for oversight of the evaluation throughout the course of this contract. Those calls have served as a forum to discuss, refine, and create final versions of these recommendations in an interactive and iterative process that allowed for free exchange of ideas. Further, it has served as an opportunity to offer next steps as CWDB’s leadership has digested and reacted to the initial recommendations.

CSW has participated as a resource during many of CWDB’s internal and external discussions about how they might adapt and operationalize the recommendations. In some cases, this resulted in additional written recommendations targeted at specific implementation steps. For example, the recommendation on moving to outcome measures had direct implications for upcoming CWDB guidance on new regional plans. There was a series of internal calls where CSW gave feedback on procedural issues and provided written comments on various drafts of the regional planning guidance, particularly as it related to the outcome measures issue. CSW also gave feedback on the process of obtaining input from the regions regarding the new direction, and joined in those exchanges as observers.



‘The state needs to trust the regions to do the planning process, and then trust us to implement. The regional plan is not for the State Board; it is for the region.’

-- Local Workforce Board Director

Conclusion

Over the course of the RPI 2.0 evaluation, CSW has responded to its role as evaluator in a real time mode, holding bi-weekly meetings with CWDB staff as well as periodic meetings with leadership. This formative approach was always intended, but it took on added significance as we went along, with staff clearly seeking iterative input, not just a final report. The early evaluation findings were based on the extensive interviews CSW conducted with all regions and a wide variety of state employees, both inside and outside CWDB. The interviews uncovered some clear contradictions between the respective ways that the regions and CWDB viewed regionalism.

Those early findings and recommendations evolved as we reached a deeper understanding of what was possible, and what some of the constraints were likely to be. For example, a recommendation that measures be developed for the ten Regional Indicators eventually became a recommendation to narrow the Indicators to four. The interviews, along with the review of regional self- assessments, also had an impact on the second major set of recommendations, focused on shifting to an outcome-based approach to regionalism. This was based in part on a deeper dive into the Regional Indicators and how they had been utilized over time. Feedback from the interviews and from the Regional Indicators research can be found in the Appendices.

As we write this, in December of 2020, California's 15 workforce regions are midway through their RPI 3.0 grants, and are writing their proposals for RPI 4.0 funding. The 3.0 Request for Applications asked them to select one or more of the Regional Indicators on which to focus and demonstrate progress. The 4.0 RFA takes this a step further, zeroing in on four of the indicators and asking them to begin to establish baseline metrics, tracking systems and aspirational goals for their industry sector work on things like the number of credentials attained, number of people placed in jobs, and wage gains. Regions will shortly begin work on their 4-Year Regional Plans (due April 30, 2021), and have already reviewed in draft form the guidelines for those plans, which are also built around the need to develop concrete outcome metrics and demonstrate progress over the next four years, with specific measures due as part of the 2-Year Plan Update in 2023. CSW continues to advise CWDB throughout this process, helping to identify ways in which outcome measurement can be implemented in a collaborative manner that meets the needs of the state, the regions, local workforce boards, employers and job-seekers.

The need for greater collaboration with the regions emerged a key recommendation of this evaluation. Our interviews left us convinced us that while CWDB's efforts over the past several years to promote regionalism have had significant impact and some real success, the state's then-current approach had was not likely to be successful in taking things much further. Regions were largely 'in compliance' with the various regional directives and requirements, but were not likely to fully embrace regionalism and make it a major priority of their own unless they could be enlisted in the effort in a more collaborative way. We suggested that CWDB reach out to the regions, and the local directors within them, acknowledging that they had some legitimate issues and seeking to find enough common ground to establish a mutually agreeable path forward. This process has in fact begun, starting with a pair of June 2020 conference calls aimed at soliciting early input from local directors on the upcoming regional planning process and the idea of shifting from process measures to outcome measures, followed by similar calls in the fall as the plan guidance was being finalized. The end result is a compromise which moves toward measurement of the regional work but places it on a more gradual timeline. We believe the evaluation has helped to put regionalism on a new path forward based on a stronger partnership between CWDB and the regions.

Final note: the COVID-19 pandemic, shutdown and recession arrived grew as we were developing these recommendations; obviously, the way in which those things play out over the months ahead will impact what is possible. Some things may need to be modified or temporarily deferred until California arrives at its new normal. What is clear, however, is that for better or worse, COVID-19 is already transforming the workforce development system. The challenge will be to understand that transformation, and learn from it how to move the systems towards greater equity and higher quality of service.



Appendices

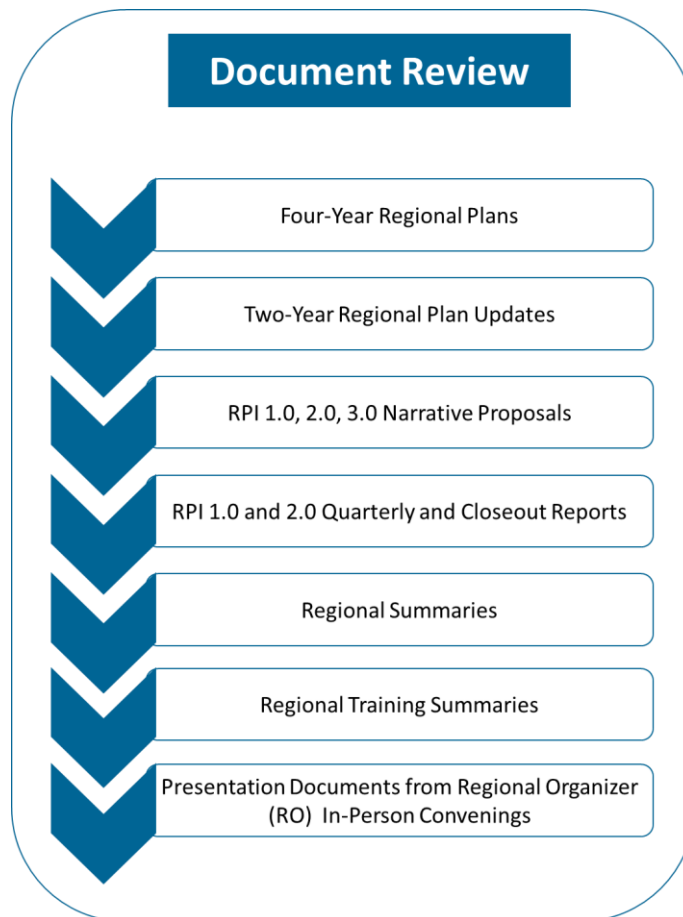
Appendix 1: Methodology

The RPI evaluation was designed with a formative approach to the implementation of regional planning across the 14 regional planning units (RPIUs). The goal was to better understand how each region is approaching the regional work, and how their efforts to date align with CWDB's overall vision. By examining the implementation process in each region, the evaluation team identified promising practices currently used in various regions, as well as a number of gaps and challenges in implementing regional strategies and structures.

Qualitative research methods were used to identify common elements of regional work across the fourteen diverse regions. Data collection activities involved participation from lead project staff, decision makers and regional partners. Two primary methods of data collection were used in this evaluation: 1) document review and 2) in-depth interviews.

Method 1: Document Review

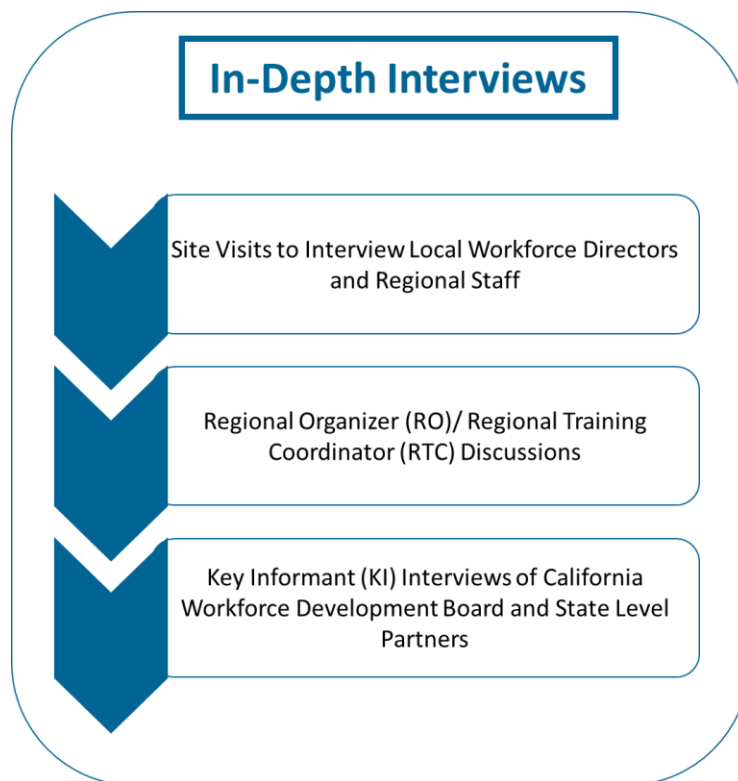
To form a solid understanding of the policy rationale for regionalism, how it was communicated to regions, and how each of the 14 regions articulated their regional goals and strategies, the following documents were reviewed by the evaluation team:



Documents were provided by CWDB staff or retrieved from state or local workforce area websites. Information gleaned from these documents was used to gain context as to the unique efforts of each region and to tailor regional interview protocols. After the regional interviews were conducted, a more detailed review of documents was conducted to search for answers to outstanding questions; the self-assessments on the Regional Indicators provided by each region as an attachment to its 2-Year Pan Update became a particular focus.

Method 2: In-Depth Interviews

Four distinct stakeholder groups were engaged as part of this evaluation: local workforce area directors (interviewed as a group by region), Regional Organizers and Regional Training Coordinators, staff of CWDB, and other state-level partner agencies. The goal of interviewing the first two sets of stakeholders was to learn how regionalism was being implemented by the regions, and to hear directly from the regions about what worked well and what challenges they encountered. The remaining two stakeholder groups, CWDB staff and the state agency partners, were interviewed as key informants to help better understand the state-level perspective, the rationale for regionalism, and the degree to which multiple state agencies are participating in the effort.



Site Visits to Interview Local Workforce Directors and Regional Staff

Between August and November 2019, the evaluators conducted confidential group interviews of RPU local directors. Invitations were sent to directors and the RPU Regional Organizer. Ten interviews were conducted in person on location in the region; the remaining four were done over the phone at the

region's request. Some interviews were conducted as part of standing regional meetings, and other individuals were often in attendance alongside the local directors, including subordinate staff, Regional Organizers, and regional partner agencies. Interviews focused on how the local workforce areas came together to work regionally, their strategies, their administrative processes, and accomplishments to date, as well as any challenges or areas for improvement. Interviewees were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. Notes from these interviews were analyzed by common themes across the RPU's and are presented by these themes.

Regional Organizer (RO) / Regional Training Coordinator (RTC) Discussions

The positions of Regional Organizer (RO) and Regional Training Coordinator (RTC) were created by CWDB to support the coordination of efforts that fall under 'regionalism,' including activities supported under Slingshot, RPI 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 and related funding opportunities. Many of these staff participated in the regional interviews; a further discussion took place during the December 2019 in-person RO/RTC convening. At the time of this discussion there were 21 Regional Organizers and a similar number of Regional Training Coordinators. The ROs and RTCs were provided with a summary of the main themes emerging from the regional interviews, and then led through a discussion of the extent to which those themes corresponded to or differed from their own experience.

Key Informant (KI) Interviews: California Workforce Development Board and State Level Partners

State level key informants were interviewed between November 2019 and January 2020. They included several program staff and senior leadership team members at CWDB, in order to gain a better understanding of the rationale for regionalism and its goals, as well as perspectives on its achievements to date. In addition, several key state agency partners were interviewed to better understand their level of engagement and participation in the regionalism initiatives and the workforce system in general. State partners were interviewed from the following agencies: Employment Development Department, Department of Education, Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Department of Social Services, and Department of Rehabilitation. A representative from the Chancellor's Office at the California Community Colleges was also interviewed.

Appendix 2: Findings from Visits with Local Directors and Staff in All 14 Regions

Organized by question section (Green headings)

Italics = paraphrased statements from interview notes (de-identified)

As noted, interviewees were encouraged to be candid, and were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. This section, therefore, attempts to identify themes from those interviews without identifying individual respondents or regions. Quotes are not necessarily verbatim; they have been edited for clarity, and in some cases to protect confidentiality.

One limitation of the approach quickly became apparent during the interviews. While the evaluators used the same set of questions in each interview, having multiple local directors in the interview meant that the conversations often took lengthy tangents, and not every question received an answer. A number of interviewees used the interview as an opportunity to outline their issues with the state's approach to regionalism; in some case this topic dominated much of the interview. The evaluators determined that there was value in allowing respondents to take the conversation in this direction, and in any event were not really in a position to shut down such discussions and insist on sticking to the protocol. In addition to the benefit of giving interviewees an opportunity to express their concerns, much valuable information was obtained regarding the frustrations experienced at the local and regional level, along with many suggestions for improvement.

General Questions—Current State of Regional Planning Initiative

In this section of questioning, local directors from each of the fourteen regions were asked about the extent to which they worked together regionally prior to the State's focus on regionalism, and how that work evolved with the introduction of the Slingshot and RPI initiatives.

Most Local Workforce Development Areas Were Already Working Regionally—But It Looked Different

In most regions, directors indicated that they had, in one way or another, worked together previous to Slingshot and RPI. Some regions had formal structures (e.g., steering committees or regional networks) that had worked together with some regularity for decades, while others reported only occasionally coming together for a specific opportunity such as a DOL grant. A common refrain in describing their regional work pre-Slingshot was that it was “organic” regionalism.

While many worked regionally with the same neighboring local workforce areas that eventually came to make up their RPU, there was considerable discussion of how past regional projects often would include other local areas from outside their current region when it made sense. Regional boundaries were not rigid, and partnerships between two or more local areas formed at various times when there was a mutual community need.

How regions described their pre-Slingshot regionalism:



Ours was a natural partnership; the workforce really does commute across the workforce areas. The personalities of the directors blend really well. We're collaborative.



For us, regional work was all about accessing pre-WIOA funding opportunities.



Previously, our several boards pooled funds for a coordinator (which eventually evolved into the Regional Organizer), who helped with joint messaging, marketing materials, and regional trainings. The coordinator helped bring us together when we wanted to work together.



Prior to Slingshot, we had worked regionally but it tended to be based on specific grants.



We've worked together regionally for many years; we have met regularly since the 1980s and JTPA. Regionalism took the form of various groupings over those years. It made sense because it made us more competitive in going after national and state grants.



In early days it was more organic. Calls in those days really focused on what we were interested in doing, not what we are required to do, which is how it feels now.

For many, the RPU's regional work post-Slingshot evolved out of these existing regional structures or arrangements. As an example, one region spoke of a steering committee made up of local workforce directors and their staff, and the fact that while that committee formed for an alternate purpose, they were able to re-purpose the structure when RPI came along. In another example, a region described having a grant-funded coordinator role that they were happy to transform into the Regional Organizer, freeing up funds for service delivery. Likewise, other regions spoke about how regional grant opportunities like Slingshot or RPI allowed them to expand upon existing work, most commonly in sector strategies, business services, and stakeholder engagement.

Only one of the fourteen regions said they didn't believe they were working together in any substantive capacity prior to Slingshot/RPI. Most regions were at least able to point to a couple instances of prior partnership over the years.

Differences in Regionalism Then Versus Now

When discussing the evolution of regional work from the pre-Slingshot era to the current iteration, a few themes were heard across the 14 RPUs, with terms like 'flexibility,' 'capacity-building,' 'State-driven' and 'administrative burden' recurring over and over.

Flexibility

Flexibility came up in nearly all interviews with local workforce directors. There was an appreciation that, prior to RPI, the ability of local areas to self-select regional partnerships was the norm. The first iteration of Slingshot was generally cited as an extension of this flexibility. However, since that first Slingshot grant, the regions felt that this flexibility to ‘pick regional boundaries and goals’ has diminished, something that regions across the board felt was an impediment to regional work.

As one director put it:

There are sub regions, as well as “in-between” areas that may tap into other areas outside our region’s boundary. How efficient are these regions if they are overly rigid? Can there be flexibility to create regions as we go, around industries, demographics, etc.?

Capacity Building

While regions felt that RPI restricted the *geographic* flexibility of their regional work, there was a general appreciation for the Regional Training Coordinator funding, and for the flexibility in RPI funding that allowed for funds to be used to build regional capacity. One director talked about how even though their region had worked regionally prior to RPI, the State’s regional focus and the accompanying funds helped to “validate” that work and “provide the funds to do it right.” Others said:

Having the money to open up capacity helps enormously.

It helped tremendously that we were already working together when the funding opportunity came along.

There is money tied to it now; that is a benefit.

State-Driven

Obviously, a key marker of regionalism pre- and post- Slingshot concerns the role and policy directives of CWDB. The RPUs articulated an evolution from the first Slingshot initiative, which as a first-of-its-kind grant allowed for a great deal of flexibility and ‘risk taking’ in the name of innovation, to the subsequent RPI 1.0, RPI 2.0, and the regional Prison to Employment (P2E) initiatives which came with progressively more explicit expectations. For many local directors, the direction feels increasingly top-down. Words like “prescribed,” “mandate,” and “imposed” were heard often in our conversations with the RPUs. Chiefly, regions spoke of feeling constrained by rigid geographic boundaries, by directives on partnership and contracting, and at times by what seem to be irrational reporting requirements.

Regionalism today feels like we’re required to structure the program in a way that works for them [CWDB]. It all feels very prescribed, with mandates on who to meet with, when to meet and who to contract with.

The work now is more of a formal mandate. Previously regional work was done when it made sense. It is still true that it makes sense to work regionally, but it’s more and more of a mandate. It has been formalized by the way the State allocates the funding.

Since we already worked together, the RPI imperative to do more of that made sense. However, some of the stuff from the state feels imposed. At times it feels artificial and forced.

We lost some the innovation and free thinking now that we’re focused on ‘What’s the next state requirement?’

The driver of such negative sentiment stemmed in part from the pressure they felt as local workforce area directors accountable to local elected officials, but now also tasked with regional work that (to them) felt in competition with their local directives. This is addressed in more depth further in this analysis, but during this initial line of questioning, one director put it this way: *“Regional planning and funding have been challenging from the local perspective. Our local officials don’t ‘get it,’ and that has created a ripple effect in the region.”*

Administrative Requirements

Regions also cited the additional layers of administration required of the RPI initiatives as a burden to their work. While many appreciated the big picture rationale for working together regionally, even those most ‘on board’ with regional work brought up the increased administrative workload required of them and their staff. In particular, local workforce development areas that were housed inside a county entity feel a particularly heavy burden, as many are beholden to county procurement processes that do not readily align with what is asked of them by the State. Additionally, some spoke of the multiple quarterly reports and meetings as taking away from the substance of their regional work.

There is extra work involved in funding allocation, contracting, and oversight. This is harder for some than others; every county is different. For example, we are within county government and also inside the Department of Human Services. It can take as much as 2 months to get something in front of our County Board of Supervisors for ‘Apply, Accept and Expend’ votes. As a result, we can’t be the lead on RPI.

With the increased state involvement in regional work, it’s more compliance-focused, more administratively heavy, as opposed to organic organization by local directors.

It’s hard to manage the mandates that come with the funding. As a small board it’s hard to take that on.

Single Local Workforce Area Regions

Of the fourteen regions, four comprise only a single local workforce area. Of these four, two are also single counties, while the other two comprise multiple counties. These four provided an interesting perspective, as they do not have the additional layer of needing to coordinate between local workforce areas. Interestingly, while it was true that single-board regions appeared so have an easier time with some aspects of the RPI requirements (notably, the fiscal agent and funding allocations), the single-board regions’ description of their pre- and post-Slingshot work reflected similarities to the multi-workforce board regions.

We are a purely regional organization. The advent of RPI hasn’t impacted us on the substantive side. It has, however, definitely impacted us on the bureaucratic and administrative side.

Basically, regional work and local work feel the same. It just feels like “the work.” It is easier for our [local] board members to understand the work if local/regional is treated as one and the same.

We also heard from these regions that they valued the fact they were not lumped into larger regional planning units. This was particularly true of regions that had more diffuse rural populations.

It is crucial that we not be just an afterthought in a larger region

For us to partner with another region would be really challenging. Our region is challenging enough geographically as it is. We need to pay attention to our rural areas, which would get lost otherwise.

Significantly, we heard from the single-board regions that prior to Slingshot they would work with other local areas as needed on specific projects, but that post-Slingshot much of that cross-regional collaboration dried up with the rollout of RPI.

Local Directors Ideal ‘Vision’ of Regionalism

Regions were asked what their ultimate vision for their regional work looked like and how close they were to achieving that vision. Answers varied among the local directors, though many averred that there is no ultimate iteration, that the needs of the region will continually evolve and so too should their vision of success.

Ideally regionalism should align and enhance our service delivery across the region – people should get the same high-quality service regardless of which AJCC they walk into.

Industry roundtables are the goal; we’ve come together to work on our industry sectors, and it is important to work on that not only at a local level but at a regional level. We can’t be siloed in our approach on that.

We can’t share everything; we’re too different. But we have found structures and systems that can benefit everyone. A uniform programmatic approach is not possible, but structures and common systems are.

In some instances, it makes sense to work together sub-regionally, where not all of our local areas need to be involved. Ideally regionalism should be able to expand or contract depending on the need.

The lesson from the first round of Slingshot is to have a regional goal but allow for different paths to get there. We can’t all just do the same thing across the board; we can’t all walk in sync together. Over time we learned a little more about how to have a common goal while allowing local nuance on how to get there.

The regional effort builds the scaffold for other work. Our partners are aware of how the counties are working together regionally. As regionalism gets more headway, we’re seen as more of a united front.

Organic regional partnership is the vision. We don’t need to be told what to do. We’re skilled in seeing an opportunity and bringing it to fruition. We are communicating more, coming to the table more often.

Some of us are also economic development agencies, and as such we share some common bonds, such as industry retention and expansion – so we could share with each other in that respect.

Challenges to Forming a Unified Vision:

We don’t understand the state’s vision for regional accountability. What does that look like?

It was a good idea to designate regions, but incentives keep us from partnerships between regions.

It was not clear at first how regionalism made sense. Regional projects are fine, but it's hard to build momentum when it is an isolated thing.

How do you get your local board and community to feel like regionalism benefits them?

We don't exist in a vacuum. Regional work exists in addition to local initiatives, local boards, accountability to chief local elected officials. At the end of the day, it's about how we provide service to our customers.

It seems like the state is often reactive, and it's hard as a region to have the time to align a vision to that.

We don't want regionalism to lose sight of creativity and knowledge-sharing. Regionalism has to make sense; it can't be dictated.

Regional Plan Goals and Measurement

Regions were asked about the processes they went through to determine regional goals and industry sector priorities, and how they thought about or measured success in their regional work. Since CSW previously reviewed RPU's regional plans and other summary background material, the primary focus of these questions was on *how* regions work together on goals and measurement instead of simply what they had accomplished.

How Goals and Priorities Were Set

When we asked how the local directors came together to prioritize regional goals, three common themes emerged: regions looked for areas of efficiency and alignment; they sought flexibility in how the goals were executed locally; and they looked to use the RPI funds on innovative activities.

For most regions, the RPI goals came directly out of the regional planning process. One director described a process which involved extensive external convening of stakeholders and community members to gather input:

We had many stakeholder meetings that led up to the regional plan, well before we started writing the plan. We brought in partners for that, and are still meeting, going on 4 years now.

Efficiency & Alignment

During those regional planning processes, most regions set goals that either aligned with the current work they were doing together or aligned with similar work the local areas were doing separately but which could now be lifted up to a wider regional effort. Examples of such goals included reviewing referral protocols, aligning business engagement outreach, and setting up regular meetings (for example with the various business services teams across the RPU) for opportunities to open up lines of communication and facilitate shared learning.

Each local board held community conversations, then came together and found themes or "pillars" that were doable for all local areas, and that aligned with what the state was looking for.

Aligning policies: meeting with partners for referral, creating avenues for staff to communicate with each other and be in the loop across boards.

We aligned systems and protocols: a system to take a referral from one service provider to another, making sure in the end that the business got the service they needed.

Prior to RPI we were already having conversations around regional issues, and it flowed into the regional plan. Had we not already been having those discussions it would have required much more work.

Flexibility in Execution of Goals – “Plan Regionally; Act Locally”

Most of the regional goals reviewed in preparation for the interviews were articulated in broad and at times vague language (e.g., “strategic regional alignment.”) In talking with local directors we learned that the broad language in these goals was often intentional. There was consensus across the regions that, even within a fairly homogenous RPU, local areas and local relationships all work differently. Because of this there was a need to have regional goals that allowed for some flexibility in how the local areas achieved them. As one director put it, “we plan regionally, but act locally.” A few regions were appreciative of the lack of required measurements from the State in the initial RPI grants, which allowed for them to have flexibility in their local implementation and to test where they could make progress (even if only incremental progress). At the same time, there was a recognition that RPI 3.0, which was released at the time of these interviews, appeared to move more toward more concrete measures.

Very broad goals allow us the flexibility to go after other objectives as needed.

Taking broad themes but doing it in a local way. Business services are an example: we bring them together regionally more, but we still have our unique local approach. Local flavor is still very important.

The state not setting metrics allowed us flexibility to make incremental progress on challenging issues, or to put effort into areas that are difficult to measure -- which tend to be areas that are difficult to gain other support for.

We came up with themes we all want to work on, but how we do it locally may look different. We’re taking those themes and doing it in a local way.

Importance of Innovation

In developing regional goals, a few regions saw the RPI as a way to try out new and innovative work that they would not have been able to cover with other funding sources. A few RPUs talked about pursuing partnerships at a regional level that would ‘elevate’ their positioning in the community. Interestingly, many regions drew a distinction between their ability to pursue innovative projects under Slingshot versus subsequent iterations of RPI. Many suggested that Slingshot allowed for innovation and risk taking, while the requirements written into RPI 1.0, 2.0, and now 3.0 have ratcheted back how innovative or strategic a region is encouraged or allowed to be. Instead, they feel they are shaping their goals around what they see as mandates from the State.

It was an opportunity to try new things. We partnered with our economic development entity. No money in it for us, but it gave us “permission to play” in the community. That’s where we get creative.

The original philosophy behind regionalism (Slingshot etc.) was experimentation – it allowed us to do our more interesting work. Sometimes it is good for the State to say: “Really, it’s OK to try something new.”

We're less strategic today -- more focused on how we hit this latest mandate from the state.

Commonly Set Goals

When speaking with the regions, it appeared that RPUs more typically developed regional goals around business services rather than job seeker services. While much of this was dictated by RPI requirements (a focus on sector strategies and 'supply-side' engagement), there was a sense among RPUs that supply-side efforts were more conducive to regional coordination rather than local job seeker services, which were seen as needing to be localized to ensure they were tailored to community needs. Examples of activities pursued by regions under the RPI grants, as described by the local directors, included:

Business Engagement

We found it difficult to identify a project we could agree to do as a region. Business services appeared to be something we could come together around.

Our project was intended to improve collective business engagement coordination. By coordinating the WDBs, business associations, and other partner agencies, we can maximize value of each business contact.

Similar work is being done at CBOs, community colleges, etc; we're trying to partner with them and collaborate so they aren't duplicating the work and causing business fatigue.

Co-Location

Co-located w/ Chambers of Commerce in nearly each of the RPU's counties.

Marketing/Outreach

What was practical for the region? It turned out to be a joint marketing strategy to businesses.

Apprenticeships

We saw Slingshot as an opportunity to expand apprenticeship and pull resources and talent from across the region. The money hook was pretty successful to give incentive to develop partnerships.

We benefitted from others' apprenticeship experience; learned a lot from them, shortening our learning curve.

Customer Experience

On job seeker side, our goal was trying to get a handle on the workflow and the job seeker journey through the system -- for services we provide as well as services provided by others.

Challenges in Goal Setting

Interviewees reported that the goal-setting process was not without its challenges. In particular, the distinction between local planning and regional planning was confusing for some RPUs, and felt artificial and contrived to others. While each region developed its own process for determining regional goals, there was an undertone among most that their regional goals were really created to align with state requirements for RPI funding.

Prescriptive Requirements

The key challenge in developing regional goals was the feeling that regional work felt overly prescribed by the state. As an illustration, one region described the frustration of feeling like the priorities they had identified during the lengthy and inclusive process for developing their regional plan did not align with what the state wanted them to focus on with regional funding:

In developing the regional plan we held listening sessions and worked to get employers there, so we could ask about their needs, obstacles and challenges. That was followed by many sessions with the boards, resulting in not just the regional plan but our own organizational strategic plan as well. The state needs to trust the regions to do the planning process, and then trust us to implement. Their current approach is too rigid, and not respectful of the people who took the time to do all that work to develop the plan. The regional plan is not for the State Board; it is for the region.

Others described how, rather than strategically setting goals, more and more they feel like their goal-setting process involves “checking boxes”:

A lot of it has been prescribed. In order to receive regional funding, the state set criteria, so we said “what can we do to fit that criteria?” We felt we had certain boxes to choose from versus being more creative and free thinking. We’ve got Slingshot 2.0, P2E, all of these outcomes.

Set goals based on the self-assessment and Slingshot. It’s all state-grant-driven now.

Sustainability

Since regional funds go toward work that most regions could not afford with other funds, there was also some concern about the sustainability of the regional funding, as described in a later section. These worries influenced the how goals were set and the thinking of regions about what was achievable.

Thoughts on Measurement

Measurement of regional activities varied greatly across the RPUs, though it was clear that most regions are not yet in a place where they are measuring outcomes with rigor. While some regions might be collecting certain output data, taking the next step to measure outcomes or impacts generally does not appear to have happened yet. Some of this is likely due to CWDB not yet requiring this level of measurement, although the most commonly heard theme is that regions struggle with figuring out how to measure nebulous concepts like “collaboration” or “engagement,” particularly on a regional scale where the activities of individual local workforce areas are likely to look different across the RPU. There was also a concern among a few regions that measures could be used punitively against them, and so there was reluctance to put metrics to goals before it is required by CWDB.

Hard to Measure Activities Cross-Regionally

Most regions lacked regional performance metrics because of what they saw as the challenge of defining what successful regional work looks like. Many felt the concept was ambiguous and therefore hard to measure. Another common response from local directors was the challenge of figuring out how to collect data in a diverse region—suggesting that impact/success in one local area within a region could look different from another area in the region.

These types of measurement have always been a challenge. How do you measure 'regionalism'? We can talk about the folks in training, industry-valued credentials, etc. It would be helpful to have those metrics, but it also goes back to so much of the work being about relationships, which is fuzzy and ambiguous.

Have not been as successful at data collection. How does data collection differ from region to region? Operational efficiencies, data tracking, and service delivery are harder to track & measure regionally.

We do the work, but don't come back and look at metrics after the fact; we're too busy doing our regional work.

Not sure that this work is the kind that has rigid measures. We need some level of flexibility. How do you measure interconnection in a flexible way?

We developed deliverables we aim to achieve, but not really impact metrics. That's reflective of the fact that it's hard to define impact to customers across the region

Lack of Guidance

There was some suggestion that this uncertainty could be remedied by more guidance from the State. Some pointed to the Self-Assessment tool as a start, but the tool itself was felt by others to be somewhat unclear.

It's still a challenge for the RPU to self-evaluate our work. There's no clear guidance on what each level really means. The self-assessment indicators feel rather subjective.

We have to defer to the state on that; the indicators document is pretty soft, not quantifiable. The state so far has not compelled regions to formulate measures. It's clear that they intend to, but not clear how or when.

Confused about what the state is looking for and what they're measuring. It feels squishy, which is OK, but we're not sure what we may be judged on in the future.

The ability to be innovative is great, but an obstacle is training people and aligning them to performance measures. Are we able to take risks? Will these performance measures count against us?

What Regions are Measuring

A small number of regions felt more confident in their ability to set performance metrics and collect data. These tended to be regions where one of the local boards, or a partner organization, had a dedicated research and evaluation team – or in regions that comprised a single local board, as regional outcome measures were therefore nearly the same as local outcome measures. Additional capacity in the form of Regional Organizers skilled in developing performance measures was also mentioned as a way some have been able to make progress in this area.

Our education partner runs a data evaluation center focused on metrics; we're always measuring along the way. These programs are easy to metric; we have both transactional and transitional metrics, and obtainable goals. Official outcomes are very operational: how many students; how many schools; retention.

Our Regional Organizer is good at coordinating activities that we count in our measures. Took a while to get buy-in initially but it has worked out.

Our local workforce agency has a research department which provides the background of so much of this work; research and data-informed conversations. We use LMI data to help with developing relevant metrics (i.e. employment trends/sectors).

Effect of Geographic Boundaries in Regional Priorities

In talking to RPUs about how they chose their priority sectors, the question of regional geographic boundaries came up. Most local directors acknowledge that their customers – the businesses and job seekers in their communities – do not pay attention to geographic jurisdictions, and from that perspective it makes sense to work together regionally. As one director put it:

There is an imaginary line between the counties. Our customers don't see that line -- they just want a job. RPI has helped us identify what's not in alignment, and see how it could be in alignment.

At the same time, most directors interviewed spoke of how, even if they work together on a core set of industries, there is tremendous diversity and variation *within* the region:

"Agriculture" and "food production" are not really adequate labor categories; there is a vast difference in the jobs depending on the crop, the season, etc. – even between the two ends of the region.

Much of our work is just getting employers to see that they have similar issues, as opposed to finding a major employer partner and trying to meet their needs.

There is a distinction between sectors that truly cross regions, and sectors that are unique to a certain area but that are important to work on with a regional lens.

These differences did not imply that local boards were not still trying to work together regionally, rather that there was a recognition that a uniform approach did not seem possible. In particular, partnerships with agencies or networks with conflicting jurisdictional boundaries was difficult. Most regions found that the solution to working with those entities was to move them down to the local level.

It gets difficult because industry associations, community colleges, etc. don't match our regional boundaries. We tried to have broader conversations but end up dealing with these complexities by focusing on the local.

Working with probation is local, local, local – despite CWDB putting it in the regional 'bucket'.

Our leadership role can become minimized as we become more employer-led. And those employers aren't bound to working within the designated RPU.

Additionally, a couple of regions spoke about the variation in regional needs *along regional borders*, saying that for certain cities or counties it could be conceivable that they work with the RPU they've been assigned, but that there may be more alignment in certain regional needs with an RPU it shares a border with. One local area said they used to partner with their neighboring local area (now in a different RPU) on apprenticeships, but since RPI that partnership has fallen apart.

A few regions brought up a desire to work cross-regionally with boards outside their region, but said that that while they've been told by the state it is possible, they felt the RPI guidelines are worded in a way that would result in them being penalized.

Once we were in regions, it felt like the state put up a lot of walls. No flexibility or incentive to partner with others outside the region. We once asked if we required to participate in a particular regional project; the state said “technically, no, but that we could get could dinged because it was a requirement.”

In the north of the region there is overlap with the RPU across that border, and in the south some overlap with the RPU to the south of us.

Commuters

Commute patterns came up in the interviews as one way regions think about their shared laborshed (and in fact were data used by the State in determining RPUs). For local areas with a large in- or out-commuter population, working in a region where those commute patterns synced seemed to make logical sense.

Ours is primarily a commuter workforce: 60% of our workers commute out of the area to employers who may not be in the county but are within the greater region.

We’re uniquely centered in the middle of the region, and our board focuses on employer engagement. We accept job seekers from anywhere.

One region with a high population of outbound commuters wondered how the conception of regional boundaries might shift if there was a better understanding of the skillset of those moving in and out. Likewise, they acknowledged that demographic and mobility trends across the State continue to change and evolve, which raised questions for them about how they could work more cross-regionally.

Around a third of the population commutes out of our RPU, and more people are moving in. The fluidity of the borders can be overwhelming.

We know a lot about the bodies moving in and out of the region but less about the occupational makeup and skillsets of those moving in and out. We need more data mining to understand it better.

Service Delivery/Equity and Mobility

In this section of the interview, interviewees were asked directly about how the RPI has changed or influenced the way job seekers or business customers access services, and whether the way they work with their partners has changed.

Have Job Seeker Services Changed as a Result of Regional Collaboration?

Five RPUs believed that there have been some changes to the way job seekers access services as a result of work they have done regionally. Six RPUs said there had been no (or very minimal) change. Three single-board regions were not asked this question.

Yes/Somewhat

For the regions that said job seeker services had changed, most commonly this was due to some kind of shared or aligned methods for service access. For example, a few of the regions invested in technology, resulting in the creation of an online website or portal housing shared information, or in video conferencing systems that allowed for remote access for training. Streamlined referral processes and a

shared training provider list were also cited as enhancements to job seeker services. One region shared how, prior to regional plan implementation, there were strict enrollment rules for out-of-county participants, and noted that those have loosened, resulting in a streamlined co-enrollment protocol.

No/Minimal

Many regions said that there have been little or no change to how job seekers access services. Most said their regional strategies did not focus on this aspect of the work. However, even among this group some suspected that shared learning among their staff resulting from regional staff trainings and opportunities to share best practices had had some impact. One region suggested that training may have contributed to new human-centered design practices, but acknowledged that they had no strong evidence for it yet.

Concerns over Duplication

One RPU felt that one consequence that could affect job seekers was what they saw as duplication of the training efforts of community colleges, given a rigid definition of the direct-training requirement. They advocated for a more thoughtful approach to this partnership that avoids duplication and provides value to job seekers/students.

If work readiness training counted, it would be more manageable. Community colleges fund us to collocate staff at a couple of campuses to do job development/placement to continuing education students. A good example of system alignment and how we can bring strengths to the table.

Have Employer/Business Services Changed as a Result of Regional Collaboration?

In contrast to the above, nine regions felt that there had been significant change to how businesses access services as a result of the RPI initiatives. One region was unsure, and only one region said they didn't believe there had been any change. Three single-board RPUs were not asked this question.

Yes/Somewhat

The biggest change RPUs pointed to was the increase in collaboration around business and industry needs. Sector convenings or summits were common activities that brought together businesses in a new way. Some pointed to employers who used to be regional competitors coming together to discuss their needs and contribute to regional curricula, and in one instance have been looking into job sharing models for certain healthcare positions.

In some regions, business services staff from across the region come together on a regular basis to share resources and develop common messaging and outreach materials. Two regions have created websites that drive employer traffic across the region to one single space. One region said there has been coordinated administration of rapid response services when there is overlap between local areas.

Two regions said RPI funds helped them use data more effectively to service employers—with traditional labor market information as well as the capacity to conduct a survey of businesses and their needs in one region.

No/Minimal

One region reported that, beyond the fact business services coordinators had each other's contact information, there was not much coordination happening.

Not sure

One region said their current RPI project had the ability to impact business services but did not want to speak to the end results yet.

Differentiating Between Regional Partners and Local Partners

Local directors had a unique view of partnership, given they have local requirements for partners as well as (with the introduction of RPI) directives regarding regional partners. They were asked if or how their perceptions of their partners changed depending on what “hat” they were wearing. There was a strong consensus that most partnership work happens at the local level, and that even “regional” partners tend in some sense to be localized relationships.

All good partnerships are local; that doesn't mean they're not also sometimes regional by nature. But partnerships by agencies are with local area directors.

Don't really talk to partners on a regional level. We may do it sub-regionally, like across two nearby counties, but it is difficult geographically to bring them all together. We're planning regionally, acting locally.

Regionalism has made us more aware of our local partners. We've done more local partnering than in the past as a result of RPI.

Regional work opened new doors and information, and opened our view to partners we may not have considered before. However, that came with some pushback from the county, which didn't want to contract outside the county.

Employer engagement happens at the local, not the regional, level. There is higher-level integration at the regional level with EDD and Department of Rehab, but everything else is local--even Prison to Employment relationships are local.

The local workforce areas in the region are so different. The various counties are very different, yet important players in each area. We can't share a lot of those relationships regionally.

The city has its own autonomy so it's our job to see that the residents and businesses of city get what they need. It's a balancing act.

Sometimes you can respond at a regional level; otherwise it happens locally. Seems like the state is forcing a choice between regional or local work, but it doesn't feel like that in reality.

Procurement

A major challenge in trying to partner at a regional level involves the respective local procurement processes workforce boards must abide by. For local boards which reside in county structures, these procurement standards are particularly thorny. This issue is covered in more detail later, but in response to questions in this section we heard:

County/procurement challenges are the largest pain point. County counsel is the legal department and they keep objecting to regionalism. They don't quite get it. Industry partnership creation makes sense, but it's not really conducive to contracting.

It is a real problem to have the state require us to tell them in advance in our proposal who our partners will be – and then after we get the funding, we have to essentially run a 'sham'

procurement to select those partners. The community is watching us, and eventually will cry 'foul'.

System Alignment/Administration

Questions in this section focused on the structures and systems RPU had put in place to manage their RPI work. Responses ranged from informal consensus-based decision-making models (most common), to formalized boards with Joint Powers Agreements.

Regional Administration Models

While a number of regions had some form of MOU or service agreement in place, they appeared to range in their scope and degree of formality. Most regions stated that their processes tended toward the informal. Regions with more formalized processes belonged mainly to single workforce areas, or regions which had existing formal structures (for example, a Joint Powers Agreement between counties as part of a single-board region).

Consensus

Nearly all regions said they meet on a regular basis (typically monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly) to discuss regional issues and opportunities. Some of these meetings are limited to just local workforce board directors (saying they found this to be more streamlined) while others include deputy-level or program staff and Regional Organizers. In these meetings, consensus was the predominant model of decision-making used among regions.

Each county director brings their ideas to the call and we hash them out as a group. We go out and do research, come back to discuss and try to come to a consensus.

We talk through grants, how to divvy the money, services in each area, etc. until there is a consensus.

It's a work in progress, but the consensus-based model seems to work for our group.

We have regular discussions and respect each other's decisions. Never felt we needed a formal MOU or structure.

Never really been formal; we talk amongst ourselves and arrive at a consensus. No formal structure or MOU; not needed at this point; we're small.

Flexibility

One thing regions cited as a reason for informal regional structures was the need to be flexible in how they work together regionally. Part of building mutual respect among the local directors, one region said, was acknowledging that the work they do as a region does not need to be uniform.

Flexibility: we respect each other's local area and know that things don't have to be uniform.

The decisions made at the regional level are a little different; it doesn't get down to the local level. P2E for example: it was a regional proposal, we came up with a nice overarching strategy on how to roll it out, with the understanding it will play out differently in each local area.

There's no need to do it in lock step all the time. Some things are transferrable to all boards, but some partnerships not.

Flexibility is a must. It's a large and diverse region. One area may not have much in common with another; different industries and demographic groups. Logical that certain counties may team up to do one thing that all counties may not follow.

Some Formality

A few regions had more formal structures in place to help manage and administer their regional implementation efforts. Roughly half of regions had an MOU of some sort, while most of the rest were in various stages of MOU development. As mentioned above however, the degree of formality in these MOUs varied. Here's how regions with more formal structures described them:

We have an advisory steering committee which evolved from a pre-Slingshot project. Staff bring ideas and recommendations to the group. Decisions are made, but it's not as formal as a board. Some items needed approval from the respective local boards. Works well; we used to be more territorial than we are now.

Our MOU helped to put that all into perspective. Decision making is in tiers. There is a high degree of trust among directors and staff.

Worked with outside facilitator to figure out what each director wanted to get out of the partnership. Came up with an MOU with working agreements.

The MOU between the local boards has eliminated some of the bureaucracy; the next step will be to have County Counsel add some boilerplate to the contracts, for all four boards to review and approve. There is a cap of \$100,000 on how much money can be 'assigned' to partners.

Our MOU helped solve some admin issues -- but not procurement. We started with conversations between county counsels and workforce directors. Both county counsels said no at first; it took a joint meeting and a lengthy conversation, nearly a year, to reach agreement. Tied MOU process to annual allocations. For things that fall into the subgrant, there is a clean, simple process to move the money. P2E not covered because it doesn't come down through the subgrant agreement.

Tiered Decision Making

Finally, a couple regions described how they used tiered decision making in their regional work. Notably, these were regions where the Regional Organizer took on more of an implementation role (in addition to a coordinating role) and was instrumental in working with both local directors and mid-level staff in each respective local area.

Regional Organizers talk to each other, as do directors and the boards. A lot of communication and different levels of decision making.

Our second-tier staff meet regularly with Regional Organizers, in addition to directors who also meet regularly.

Local Conflicts with Regional Structures

In discussion of how local directors create structure and decision-making models around the RPI work, we ran into pushback to the concept that there should even be "formal regional structures." In fact, this line of questioning presented pushback on the language we used in our questions -- a strong indicator that this is a particular pain point for local directors within RPUs.

Conflicts with Local Elected Officials and Legal Structures

Most local directors brought up the fact that as a director of a local workforce area they were directly accountable to their local workforce development board and their chief local elected officials (generally a mayor, a county executive, or a county board of supervisors). They say they are often questioned by their local boards and officials about why they are pursuing regional work.

No chief local elected official will give up his or her local authority to a regional entity; nothing of the sort is envisioned in WIOA, and they know that.

Boards partner and work together for mutual benefit: they don't make decisions for one another.

Luckily the local, county, and regional goals are all similar enough. We haven't run into major issues with local elected officials, but we have gotten some questions about investing regionally versus investing in services. We do have some challenges with Joint Powers Agreements.

Our local board of supervisors does question some of the work, but so far, we have been able to respond and show how the regional work benefits the county.

Our procurement officer said: "Sure, you can do this regional project -- as long as you contract with a provider based in and providing services to the county." It makes it very complicated if the regional service provider is in a different county within the RPU.

Partnerships are really local to begin with; they then have to be funneled up to the regional level. We often end up having to force partners to work together who have no interest or reason to do so.

Administrative Burdens

Local directors spoke of the additional burden that regional work adds to their plate—and, as some noted, in a time when their local service delivery resources are being stretched thin. This burden is particularly true for local directors who have taken on the role of fiscal agent for the RPU. In one region, the director who took on the fiscal agent role estimated that 50% of their day-to-day work was on regional implementation administration, whereas another director in the RPU says their day to day regional workload is minimal. In one instance, a region told us of actually being charged significantly more by their county's legal department as a direct result of the increased administrative workload tied to RPI.

I feel I spend more time working on regional stuff and have to push down local issues to program staff. Coordinating regional efforts and reporting across the region is challenging and difficult.

The MOU process was a burden. The county supervisors don't like the accountability language in it, and the back and forth there increases our work load.

Too much of my work as director is regional, in terms of contracting, reporting, four quarterly reports, redoing the P2E budget. Work is 50% regional, 50% local, but the regional work is mostly administration.

We used to do regional activities to build opportunities for the region and its residents. Now we do it to satisfy administrative requirements.

County counsel is charging our regional fiscal agent an additional \$60,000 this year due to the added workload of their department related to workforce board's role as fiscal agent.

One commonly-cited illustration of this increased burden that has ramifications for local partnerships and relationships is the requirement in the P2E RFA that regions submit names and award amounts for the partners they planned on engaging. This was in conflict with local rules in many areas mandating a

competitive procurement process. On top of that, interviewees noted, the end result of awarding a far lower dollar amount than the original request led to resentment among the very partners that P2E required them to engage.

P2E was a perfect example. We did all this stakeholder engagement to apply for funding, but they just divided it up by region anyway. It really tarnishes our local credibility. We built up a lot of expectations and political capital but the state didn't deliver the amount of funding we had written our partners in at. Such a small funding award made the regions/localities look bad.

Improving the Local/Regional Roles

While there was criticism of the administrative impact of RPI by local directors, many acknowledged that there is still a lot of merit in the regional approach. (*"Where things go astray is when they are forced,"* said one.)

The main things regions said they would like to see to improve how local directors work together is flexibility in determining their partners, along with streamlining of allocations and associated procurements of those partners.

Flexibility

Partnerships should be fluid and natural. We would like to be able to select which partnerships are appropriate to work on.

Regionalism should be organic and innovative. Don't think it can be pre-set; it needs to be allowed to evolve.

We shouldn't be penalized when we don't do what they want. Our best work happens organically.

What works is flexibility and modification. What doesn't work is "You said you were going to do this, and you can't change the path." Need to be able to say "TBD". What happens if we decide to partner with another employer who's a better fit?

Is there a way to better incentivize the work? To allow local areas to determine when, where and with whom its most appropriate to work regionally?

Allocation

If we submit a proposal and come up with the proposed allocations and outcomes, the state should have it allocated to our formula grants, as opposed to having to create a whole other layer of administration.

State procurement practices are screwing up local procurement practices. They should just award us the funds and let us run our own procurement process as required by local government.

Challenges, Successes and Feedback for Future RPIs

The final section of questions asked local directors to reflect on their experience working regionally and share what has worked, what has not worked, and what suggestions they had to improve RPI going forward.

What Did You Do with Regional Funding that Would Not Have Happened Otherwise?

Local directors were asked what they did with their regional funding that they likely would not have done with their regular WIOA money.

Capacity Building – Nine RPUs said they wouldn't have been able to add the capacity they did with other funds

Gave us a little more capacity to strengthen what we were already doing. Helped us better reach the healthcare sector. Our local board would probably have done it, but only on a local level.

RPI helped with the regional coordinator/organizer. We had a similar role in the past using formula funds. Now we can pay for that with regional money and free up those other funds for local delivery.

We would probably not pursue this with as much passion without the regional funds. Regional funds have supported staff to enable us to partner.

Bringing consultants in to help on apprenticeship made the difference in getting the community interested.

Funding to business services was cut, so when the regional funding came from the State it allowed us to add capacity to build it back up.

Sector Strategies – The resource-intensive work to develop sector strategies would not have been done by six RPUs without regional plan dollars

Sector strategies would not be able to continue without regional funds. We just don't have enough funds. We now feel very close to getting to deeper conversations about service delivery and training.

We still would have done industry engagement but would have done it locally.

We definitely could not have done the trades program without these regional funds.

We would not be doing sector partnerships, given the amount of effort we are putting into those now.

Structural work like creating and maintaining sector councils and business collaboratives would suffer. Hard to say what we'd keep because funds are so tight. If anything, we would likely just be local in scope.

We wouldn't be planning a regional industry conference without regional funds.

Technology – Investments in technology were made possible for five RPUs

Build-out of the admin and backend tools (API interface)

Video conferences

Web portal for employers and job seekers

Regional Training – Four RPUs said RTC-organized training would not have happened

Wouldn't have been able to attend trainings or convenings.

Efficiencies – Two RPUs said their work towards creating organizational efficiencies was the result of regional funds

Had long been a dream to have a funding source that allows for deliberative thought on finding efficiencies in coordinating business services. RPI has proven to be a good source of those funds. Without this funding we would have to do more prioritization. If WIOA core funding doesn't have

a process/service improvement function your services will decline over time; you need the opportunity to sharpen the saw so that services don't dull. RPI funds provide an avenue for this.

Outreach – Two RPUs credit regional funds as allowing them to invest in outreach and engagement strategies

We couldn't have done some of the healthcare outreach without RPI.

Community engagement and outreach; the ability to bring employers to a single location (website).

Research – Regional funds allowed two RPUs to conduct in-depth research

Job quality research; research for veterans.

Being able to do the research and learn from employers what is valuable for them via a survey.

Successes and Strengths of RPI

The key benefits RPUs saw from the regional plan implementation work was how it allowed the local workforce boards to come together and learn from each other. This shared learning happened at all levels, from local directors and regional organizers to business services and front-line staff.

Shared learning

It is good to talk to and learn from your neighbors. As a professional development group, it's great.

Bringing partners together in regional convenings helps us share best practices among the multiple counties.

Business services began to meet regularly; it was happening pre-SlingShot, but we're much closer now.

Learning about each local board's individual strengths was key. For example, one local board has expertise in working with individuals with disabilities in manufacturing. We can all tap into those kinds of strengths to support the region.

Finding Policy Alignment and Areas to Share Resources

Another strength of the RPI funding we heard about from regions was how it allowed them to work together to find areas of policy and program alignment and let boards more easily share resources. Shared resources included space in training programs, outreach and marketing materials, and use of a shared website, among others. This was seen as a strength, particularly by local workforce boards that are small or under-resourced and which benefited greatly from being able to share and leverage resources from peer workforce boards in the region.

Local Board resources are stretched, so RPI is a great opportunity to work in collaboration with other boards to leverage their resources with our own.

The money broke down silos between education and workforce, which has been incredible to see. As an educator and board member, I'm in awe of what it has done for our region to be encouraged to align with the workforce system.

A benefit of working together: in one recent instance, when a new program started and the local board couldn't fill the cohort, three WDBs quickly came up with the requisite 25 people to fill the seats.

Ability to Build Capacity through Funds and Training

Both the ability to fund new staff (including Regional Organizers; more on that below) and to train existing staff was an increased capacity benefit that regions said they greatly appreciated. For large or remote regions, though, it was difficult factoring in travel to specific training opportunities—with the directors citing not only the cost of travel, but also of the time lost by having a key staff person travel to training, and in the case of large group trainings, occasionally having to close a center for services while staff is trained. Some recommendations were for more opportunities for virtual training, more availability for trainers to travel to more remote regions, and to offer the same training more than once, so staff can be staggered in a way that prevents having to suspend center operations.

We all worked regionally before the state offered up money. But now we're doing the convening with the grant funding, and that's been helpful.

When it comes to trainings, some economy of scale makes a lot of sense. The state giving funds for regional training has been very effective.

The RTC-organized training is very good and well worth keeping, even though it is challenging to pull together due to the geography etc.

Training has been very beneficial, although it is a lot of travel. Would appreciate more options than always going to Sacramento or Southern California (for RTC trainings as well as RO/director travel out of the region).

Regional Organizer Plays an Important Role

Having an individual dedicated to coordinating regional activities (the Regional Organizer) was cited as a strength of the RPI by many (but not all) RPUs. The extra capacity the RO created was credited as useful, though these tended to be RPUs whose RO was an individual staff member, rather than a portion of a local director's time. Regional Organizers' role in regionalism also varied across the regions. For some, their RO (or the time they allotted to RO duties) was purely a coordinator role, while in other RPUs, the ROs were more intertwined in the implementation and management of regional activities. Because of these variations, while the concept of the RO role (and the capacity funds) was appreciated, there were still questions about what the intended role of the RO should be.

The idea and concept around Regional Organizers is a good one. Historically we had asked for one, seeing that the community college system had a similar navigator position. One of the adjustments in our RPU now is having 2 ROs, because one cannot cover all the work or the entire geography.

With RO connection across regions, there is a lot of regional sharing. We're able to pick up the phone, compare notes and ask questions. We regularly talk informally with other ROs about specific issues.

We only have two ROs, but more and more regional projects, and everything falls onto them. Not sure how ROs work in other regions, but here they have an implementation role on top of organizing.

Slingshot

Of all the regional funds provided by the State, the initial Slingshot project was favored by the majority of interviewees, who said this was due to the flexibility in Slingshot that allowed them to choose a project based on their assessment of regional need, and the freedom to choose which local workforce boards they could work with. They felt this level of flexibility in Slingshot allowed them to be more innovative and forward-thinking.

Slingshot was done well, in part because it wasn't a pre-designated geographic area.

Flexibility is great. The state told us: Be audacious; try something that might fail. Without this project, we would not have been able to rebuild a major program that closed.

Slingshot gave us the opportunity to work cross-regionally. It introduced us to a large regional business association and opened the door to work with them. Having the money to build capacity helps enormously.

Slingshot was beneficial and effective. Some of the outcomes were squishy but overall it was innovative and showed signs of making a real impact.

Benefits to Small and Remote Workforce Boards

Finally, smaller workforce boards and those in remote regions saw additional benefits from RPI. Smaller boards said they appreciated being able to come together with their peers to leverage resources and have a unified voice. They also spoke about how previously, as a small board in a large state, it was hard to be seen. Now, in an RPU, they appreciated having an equal voice at the table.

Remote regions where the local workforce development area was also the regional planning unit described a phenomenon of 'seeing their workforce area as a region' in a way they previously had not. While RPI did not change their geographic service area, these boards talked about a shift towards a more expansive mindset, changing how they worked and how they engaged with their partners.

Smaller WDBs feel equal as part of a region. As a region, we have the same voice as every other region.

The last building trades program in our area closed, which led to brainstorming on putting something together. Multiple trades said they wanted to grow, but there weren't enough students coming through their front doors. Thinking regionally instead of locally led to amazing results: the trades program used to be one program, in one school district, serving small numbers; now it covers the region, serving thousands.

Challenges and Obstacles to Regional Work

The major challenges local directors cited regarding regionalism had to do with the structure of funding opportunities they say have led to less efficient systems, conflict with local policies, and a great deal of confusion and resentment. When talking about these challenges, many directors wanted to underscore that they did not disagree with the concept of regionalism, but rather with the way it has been rolled out, which they say has not worked for them.

Heavy Administrative Requirements

The sheer increase in administration and reporting was mentioned by every RPU. In particular, quarterly reporting was cited as a burden, one which directors say increases with each additional grant. A few regions noted that their administrative workload ends up being far beyond the 10% cap, and that they have to get creative in getting their budget numbers to line up. Administration has had ripple effects for some regions as well. As noted above, we heard from one local director who said that as a result of their board taking on the fiscal agent role, their county charged the board an additional \$60,000 due to the increase in administration and contracting work. Other directors spoke about how they are starting to feel that the increased administrative work comes at the expense of their core service delivery, something they are very concerned about.

Regionalism has resulted in less efficient rather than more efficient systems: computer system requirements; regional procurement pain points. The state is focused on compliance; it takes away from our core business.

Reporting is killing us. Instead of reporting separately on 7 little pots of money, it would be great if it could all be in one pot – one big ‘Try to Do a Good Job’ grant.

Regional projects come with a significant burden. It’s well beyond the 10% admin cap, but we can only earn 10%. It’s a knowledge issue: they don’t seem to understand what indirect costs are and that they are federally negotiated. DOL understands that, but CWDB does not.

Pleased we could add staff through funding and prioritize projects like the business services marketing and scaling, however we have to devote a significant amount of time to tracking the admin requirements.

We see the state moving more funds to regionalism as an incentive to work together, but it’s not that simple. Regional work comes at the expense of core operations.

The regional fiscal agent role causes discomfort, strife, and administrative burden. Procurement and invoicing are huge. We’re supposed to be colleagues, but now we’re trying to manage other directors. State is really tied to this fiscal agent idea – a very difficult scenario that threatens to pull regionalism apart.

Allocations Cause Headaches and Raise Questions about Core Services

After reporting, regions point to the allocation structure of RPI as causing major administrative headaches. Local directors in the region feel like they are being put in an impossible situation, in which the way the State wants to allocate regional funds runs into hurdles with local government structures, causing delays as workforce boards, city counsels, boards of supervisors, and contracting staff go back and forth on procurement and contracting. While some regions have developed MOUs to get around some of these hurdles, even regions with more robust agreements still are burdened by the local realities they face.

Please funnel grant agreements to local boards so we aren’t forced to procure each other.

Find ways to make the funding simpler, rather than having to deal with subcontracting, county counsel, city attorney – especially for modifications, or for adding funds to an existing grant.

Outside allocations promote innovation, while the benefit to formula funds is that they are predictable and you can plan for them. Too much chaos, not enough strategy is often the feeling these days.

Over the last several months it has felt like the state doesn’t consider how things affect local areas. They say: “This needs to happen; let’s just have the locals do it” -- without acknowledging how difficult what they’re asking is. They need to understand local areas and processes better.

We’re not trying to be intentionally argumentative. We just want the state to understand what they’re really asking RPU’s to do. Monthly reports for small grant amounts are very burdensome, especially compared it to the simple reporting required for multi-million dollar formula funds. The ratio of admin time spent to program dollar amount is ridiculous.

Another concern about allocations was the feeling that regional funding was coming from a pot that otherwise would have been going to local service delivery. At a time when local directors are seeing

their core budgets reduced, the feeling that regional funds are being ‘diverted’ from their core services is further exacerbating their discontent with RPI.

As local budgets diminish, and it becomes harder and harder to do adequate local service delivery, the state is adding staff, and it feels like a conflict with emphasis on regionalization.

Competitive Procurement

As mentioned above, the procurement of partner agencies was a key example cited by most RPUs as a pain point. Local directors noted a lack of understanding by the State regarding the complexities of local contracting and procurement rules. As one staff member stated, “Someone at CWDB actually told us ‘It’s not our fault you have local procurement requirements.’ That’s just disingenuous.”

RPUs have to ask partners for subcontracts before there we even have a contract from CWDB/EDD. The state wants us to push boundaries; they need to have a commonsense recognition of what they can and can’t control. We have our own local procurement process, and we can’t get around it no matter how badly the state wants us to. It’s just not in our control. The state needs to stop fighting that; it’s very damaging.

Prison to Employment was cited as a prime example of with what local directors saw as the State not understanding local competitive procurement rules:

We have major challenges with P2E. We agree with the spirit of including local partners, but the requirement that our proposals say who we’re working with and how much they will get is a huge problem. We had a stakeholder engagement process, as required, but then didn’t have the opportunity to go back and say, “Hey, we got this grant, who wants to work with us on this?” Not good from a local relationship perspective.

In P2E, we had four convenings; the first one had over 100 attendees. How does a vendor know how to respond to an RFP in this scenario? Identifying partners prior to the RFP creates way too much liability for us.

Time Constraints and Requirements

Two obstacles relating to time came up in conversations with directors. The first had to do with the increase in time they and their staff needed to devote to meetings, phone calls and reporting. To them, all the increases in the time they spent in these “communities of practice” was becoming untenable and came at the expense of working on direct regional or program work.

Every grant requires a ‘community of practice’; now there are five. It takes time – days -- to fly to LA or Sacramento for an all-day meeting; is it really necessary?

Lots of deadlines, plans, modifications, MOUs. Lots of admin tasks to complete while still trying to focus on regionalism and the real work to be done.

The second time-related challenge was the short periods for each grant, and the short turnaround to respond to RFPs. Coupled with the fact that contracts from the State have been taking, in some instances, months to turn around, local directors say that when the funds finally come through, they have an absurdly short window to execute their projects. A few directors spoke of how it can be hard to plan for these projects since they feel like the grant opportunities come at them in quick succession.

Our biggest challenge is the time constraint; the duration of grants is just not long enough. On a recent grant, we were under real pressure from the state to push our industry partners. Then, the

state sat on our contract for months; our industry partners couldn't wait that long, so we had to drain other grants to get started in order to avoid losing employers.

So many grants at once; it takes staff time to plan and respond to those. It's hard to not feel like we're chasing the money. Ideally, we would plan for what we need and act on that. Anxiety about what the resources are going to be, and when we will see them, detracts from the overall strategy.

Confusion over the Roles of CWDB and EDD – “Dual Management”

Underlying some of the administrative obstacles cited by local directors was confusion over State oversight. Many directors and their staff said they were not clear on who they are accountable to (“Is it EDD or CWDB? Who does what?”) They also sensed that this confusion exists at the state level too. For the regions, the this confusion results in contracting delays, duplicative work, and in the words of one local director, “chaos.”

P2E invoices, etc. go to CWDB, not EDD, creating a time delay in getting funds to subcontractors. CWDB needs to come up with an agreement with EDD around funding and reporting structures. They really need to streamline on their end.

We respond to an RFP from CWDB, but funds are awarded and managed by EDD. Then we discover EDD staff don't really understand the purpose of the project. We have to rewrite all of the outcomes and workplans to give EDD what they want.

Who is in charge? EDD or CWDB? Dual reporting? Multiple local boards reporting independently? The State Board should do policy, EDD should do administration.

Misalignment between EDD, workforce board, and even CWA. We can sense a lot of tension between EDD and CWDB -- which doesn't help our regional efforts.

For P2E alone, we have 3 pots of funds, each one assigned to a different individual (at EDD? State Board? We're not even sure). Structurally, this confuses the distinction between EDD/State Board.

Challenge Balancing the roles of Local and Regional

Many local directors were candid about feeling that some of the RPI structure seems to be bypassing the province of local workforce boards, which poses an accountability problem for directors. Directors say that they are not opposed to regional partnership, but that they would like more recognition of the local authority of workforce boards. As one said, “If the State wants us to partner with them, they need to listen to us. We don't feel heard.”

We're torn between local services and regional efforts. It might be different with full-time staff dedicated to regionalism so that we could focus on service delivery, instead of being pulled in two directions.

Local boards are supposed to have agency over programming. But now we see a move towards the state trying to do programmatic work -- with less money and less admin funds. When did these roles change?

The state has lost sight of the fact that local elected officials have the responsibility for these funds. Everything must go through a local board of supervisors or workforce board. Politics is local. That's the reality.

A related obstacle for some local directors was the awkward position they felt the fiscal agent role put them in with their local director peers. As the fiscal agent, some directors were uncomfortable with what they felt was a monitoring position regarding directors they are meant to be collaborating with.

Accountability seems to be focused more on the regional fiscal administration than on the actual region. This puts a lot of pressure on the fiscal agent to be the one to hound other directors, creating a dynamic where instead of feeling like we're a part of a team, we're monitoring our colleagues. Adds a significant administrative burden but also impacts working relationships; not conducive to regional partnership.

Local Director Feedback and Ideas

As mentioned elsewhere, many directors we interviewed spoke about how they agree with the philosophy of regionalism, and see the benefits of working together. With that, they offered some feedback on how the state could improve future regional efforts.

A Desire for More Transparency

Local directors seek more transparency around the larger strategy for regional planning. Some would like to have more clarity around the policy case for regional work: Is it in response to a particular problem or need the state has identified? A few regions brought up the fact that there have been efforts toward evaluation, but no conclusion. One director pointed to the Slingshot evaluation not being published, suggesting that it was because the results were unfavorable, while another wished there was transparency around the ROI for the State.

We sense the State Board has a vision of regionalism, and that it is the solution to some problem. But we are having a hard time understanding the problem. What is the historical problem they are trying to solve?

The state has done some smart strategy work around regionalism. Unfortunately, they've sometimes shot themselves in the foot by not being inclusive or transparent. They tend to treat us like we are the problem.

Be transparent about whether the state is getting a return on value for the investment in regionalism.

Flexibility to Choose Partners (and Borders) to Meet Regional Need

Regions hoped that the State would move back to a model similar to the first Slingshot project, where local areas were allowed some level of discretion over creating regional projects that they identified as meeting regional needs. This included some degree of flexibility in choosing the partners they work with and which local workforce boards will work together. As one director said, "Regional need should dictate the boundaries, not vice versa."

In the previous iteration [Slingshot] there was flexibility: we said 'Here's what we want to do, here's how much it will cost and who's going to work on it.' Now, it feels like they want to track it like it's WIOA Adult.

Can the state facilitate more flexibility? The funding is good, but there should be opportunities to submit proposals for regional efforts outside state-defined constraints. Different projects call for different alliances.

It would be very empowering to be able to 'call it like we see it'.

What works is to have our regional need determine our region, and collaborate based on that. In Slingshot, a county outside our RPU is included, because our industry partners operate in that county; we seamlessly coordinate. Collaboration needs to be based on the economics of the situation.

We would like to see incentive proposals, pay-for-play opportunities, based on the organic needs within a self-defined region. It shouldn't be tied to rigid boundaries.

Clarity Around Role of Regional Organizers

Some local directors showed concern that regional organizers were being asked to overstep boundaries, and sought some clarification on RO roles so that they don't ignore the oversight role of local workforce directors. Some local directors expressed a perception that the State was making decisions with ROs about regional work without consultation with local directors. For some, the solution lay in making ROs a director-level role, while for others it was having a clear process for local director input and communication directly with the State.

It's not that we are against regionalism. But you can't have Regional Organizers making decisions with no directors present – that just alienates the directors.

Perhaps the RO should just be a director-level role: Choose one director from the region to serve in that role, on a rotating basis. The current mixed structure causes too much heartburn.

Regional Organizers are inappropriately asked to make decisions for WDBs, and to deliver messages to directors. That is why directors increasingly go to RO/RTC meetings.

As a WDB director, every time I go to an RO convening, I hear something and think: 'I can't believe this is the first time I'm hearing about this!'

Data Sharing and Alignment

When asked what the State could do to help RPUs move regionalism forward, state-level data sharing and alignment came up as a suggestion. Regions are beginning to feel pressure to collect data from their regional partners, yet find it difficult or impossible to get these other partner systems to agree to data sharing. They suggested that the State could do more to either put those data-sharing agreements in place at the state level, or at least be able to provide strong guidelines for what local agreements could look like (ideally in partnership with state-level partners).

Some things (such as data-sharing) that have been pushed down to the local/regional level can't really be done there; we don't control that data and can't make systems share. The state needs to help here.

State could have helped by getting us good data from the partner systems to use in our 2-Year plan updates.

Alignment of outcomes across systems and departments would be one very useful thing the state could do.

Sustainability

Finally, local workforce directors spoke about their desire to see more from the State about the sustainability of RPI. Most understood it to be a top priority but hoped to hear more about sustainability. These directors recognized that much of their work could not be sustained without regional funding, or more time to build that out.

Sustainability is a concern. The idea of regionalism is great, but the state needs to sustain the commitment.

If state is serious about encouraging regionalism, there has got to be a continuing allocation of funds.

Slingshot started at \$1,000,000; subsequent rounds of RPI have been a fraction of that. What if this funding at doesn't continue? What would regionalism look like? We have some things in place that would probably continue regardless of funding, but sustainability is still a question.

State Workforce Board needs to communicate a long-term plan and strategy.

Appendix 3: Interviews with CWDB Staff and Leadership

Following the regional site visits and interviews conducted in the fall of 2019, CSW held a series of interviews with CWDB staff and leadership, as well as interviews with six state agencies currently in partnership with CWDB. These interviews took place in November, December and January, and surfaced several key themes.

As noted in the analysis of regional interviews, a high degree of skepticism was found among local workforce directors regarding the true purpose of regionalism. A number of directors stated that they were unclear about the ‘problem’ regionalism was intended to solve, while several others insisted that regionalism had no loftier purpose than simply reducing (from 45 local areas to 14 regions) the number of entities with which the state needed to engage. Given these sentiments, the evaluators were particularly interested in testing this by exploring with CWDB the reasons for investing such a significant amount of time, energy and resources over the past several years in promoting regionalism.

CWDB leadership noted that even when regionalism is fully operative, the local boards will not disappear, and that the state will in fact continue working directly with all 45 of them on numerous initiatives, even as certain other initiatives might have the effect of reducing the state’s administrative burden by focusing on smaller number of regional fiscal leads. It was clear from the CWDB interviews that the vision of regionalism is driven by a goal of increasing the system’s capacity to move large numbers of low- and moderate-income job-seekers from low-wage/low-skilled jobs to higher-wage/higher-skilled jobs. On the theory that such jobs are much more likely to be secured through major regional employers, CWDB believes a coordinated and unified strategy for meeting the needs of those employers is essential, and that a regional approach is critical to success. Regionalism, moreover, is designed to lift all boats at once by helping increase the workforce system’s capacity to help the State achieve its economic development goals via career and educational pathways at the regional level.

While acknowledging the good work that goes on every day in AJCCs across the state to reach and serve low-income populations and job-seekers with employment barriers, CWDB leadership contended that the outcome for too many of those individuals is an entry-level job with limited prospects for advancement. For the majority of customers, they argued, the result is a “low-road” workforce system. The fact that a significant percentage of those placed into employment end up unemployed within the year was cited as evidence of the problem. The goal, they proposed, should be a “high road” system that can move significant numbers of people into careers with good pay, decent benefits, and opportunities for advancement.

CWDB staff offered several caveats acknowledging the day-to-day realities faced by AJCCs attempting to serve high volumes of low- and moderate-income job-seekers. Interviewees recognized that many people come to an AJCC looking for immediate income in order to put food on the table; that many lack the skills to be placed into anything other than an entry-level job; and that many (at least initially) are not interested in training or education. Maintaining the capacity to reach and assist such entry-level job-seekers is essential, and will always be a component of the state’s workforce system. The state’s long-range goal, however, is to leverage that entry point as a platform to move a significant percentage of those clients, through education and career pathways, to better jobs and family sustaining wages. Regionalism is intended to provide a structure to move the system toward that goal.

Our research suggests that common ground can be found regarding this goal. No local director we interviewed expressed satisfaction with simply moving job-seekers into entry-level employment; all were interested in building a workforce system that achieved quality job outcomes and made a difference in the lives of the low-income residents of their communities. Some expressed frustration, however, at the sense that CWDB does not fully grasp how hard that task is; they suggest that state staff sometimes fail to appreciate the front-line realities. A shared acknowledgment of those challenges, combined with a mutual commitment to work together to improve workforce system outcomes, would appear to have the potential to form the basis for a stronger embrace of regionalism by local directors.

Appendix 4: State Partner Agency Interviews

Interviews with CWDB's six partner agencies (EDD, DOR, DSS, DCR, DOE and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office) also surfaced a few noteworthy themes. All six agencies indicated that they found real value in their partnership with CWDB. All evidenced a clear understanding of the workforce development system and their relationship to it. Most expressed the hope that partnering with CWDB would help ensure their specific target populations (e.g.: adult learners, ex-offenders, persons with disabilities, low-income residents) would be well-served by the workforce system.

The degree to which each agency was aware of RPI and regionalism varied, depending in part on how well their system's regions lined up with the 14 workforce regions. One agency adjusted its regions to align with the workforce regions; others aligned reasonably well, while some had little correspondence with the workforce regions. Not surprisingly, lack of alignment was cited as an obstacle to coordination at the regional and local level, although not an insurmountable one. Some suggested that a lack of regional alignment necessitated a refocusing on partnership at the local level. The arbitrariness of whether a particular system partnership was considered by CWDB to be part of the regional versus local workforce plan was noted by some respondents. Others indicated that it was an open question as to whether the emphasis on regional strategies helped or hindered their agencies' goal of ensuring good service to specific target populations.

Changes in agency leadership were cited by more than one interviewee as a factor that had at times slowed down the articulation and implementation of partnership strategies. The change in administration inevitably contributed to this, as multiple new agency directors needed time to get to know their own agencies and their new colleagues, and then needed to be brought up to speed and convinced to embrace collaboration with the workforce system.

All partner agencies indicated, to one degree or another, that coordination and partnership at the regional and local level was still a work in progress. Most suggested that the level of partnership varied from one part of the state to another, depending to some extent on how open staff in each system were to working with and including the other(s). Some interviewees stated that the process of bringing local and regional offices together and coordinating those efforts with state agencies was labor-intensive and resource-poor, and that coordination efforts meant working incrementally to pull things together.

While acknowledging that sometimes their own local offices were the problem, interviewees noted that the reception accorded by local workforce boards varied widely. One pointed out that in region A, their system's staff were fully *"at the table,"* while in region B, they had to invite themselves to meetings, and were literally required to sit apart from the official participants. Another stated that during the 2-Year Plan Update process, their local staff in a few workforce areas had little participation, and were merely invited to sign off on the document after it was developed. It was noted that *"County human service agencies are where a lot of this plays out, and that can be a challenge."*

Communication was cited by most of the interviewees as a critical issue, and one where improvements could be made. Some noted that, in the early days of the partnership, communication from CWDB felt rather one-sided: *"They tended to decide what they were going to do, and then tell us about it after the fact."* It was acknowledged, however, that this improved over time as the agencies began working with each other: *"Once we invited them to start participating in some of our decision-making, they began to reciprocate."* Another, however, stated that *"It can still feel a little one-sided at times."* One respondent

noted that communication issues are really time issues, suggesting it requires a concerted effort among all parties to make time. Another reported that *“It took longer than we’d hoped to get some tangible work products going; it took time for us to understand how each other’s system worked.”* One interviewee said: *“In the beginning, CWDB was a better partner than we were; they were patient when appropriate, but pounded on the table a little bit when we weren’t fully engaged.”*

Most interviewees indicated that inter-agency partnership meetings had become less regular over time. Some attributed this to the natural cycle of such relationships, with a burst of sustained activity at the start but less frequent contact as things begin to work more smoothly. It was suggested by more than one interviewee that now might be a good time to reinvigorate those relationships and hold more regular meetings. The current Four-Year Plan process was mentioned as an opportunity to bring people together.

Several respondents noted the critical need to achieve alignment on data and outcomes, and cited the data workgroup, co-enrollment, common intake processes, and co-location as key factors. *“We need to reach agreement on what data is critical, what a successful employment outcome is, what the partnership should look like when it is fully developed, and what success looks like for the whole system.”* As one state partner stated: *“We spend a lot of time focusing on what is missing, what is lacking, what we haven’t accomplished yet. It’s important to recognize the things that have worked, and the progress that we have made. We’re all interested in growing our own programs, but let’s focus on advancing our shared objectives.”*

Appendix 5: Review of Self-Assessments

While they are somewhat dated, portions of the self-assessments developed by regions in connection with their 2-Year Plan Updates are decent proxies for the core elements of regionalism. Those self-assessments were completed using the Indicators of regionalism developed by CWDB as key reference points. The indicators cover a broad range of activities. We believe that feedback on regional progress on many of the indicators can be found in more recent information sources than the self-assessments, such as quarterly reports. There are, however, four indicators that are directly related to the four goals of the State Plan and that appear to be best grounded in the self-assessments.

C – Region has a process to communicate industry workforce needs to supply-side partners.

D – Region has policies supporting equity and strives to improve job quality.

E – Region has shared target populations of emphasis.

F – Region deploys shared/pooled resources to provide services, training, and education, to meet population needs.

The four State Plan goals are:

- Fostering “demand-driven skills attainment”
- Enabling upward mobility for all Californians
- Aligning, coordinating, and integrating programs and services
- In 2017-2027, produce a million “middle-skill industry valued and recognized postsecondary credentials”

The last of these four goals is an ongoing outcome that won’t be fully realized for several years. The other three appear to relate well to the selected Indicators referenced in the self-assessments. While we recognize that a case could be made for all of the Indicators being related to one or more of the goals, we chose to narrow our view to those that are highly related to the goals and for which no other good resource of updated information exists.

With those parameters in mind, we looked across Indicators C-F and aligned responses from each region in its self-assessment so that we can more readily do some level of analysis and comparison. The attached table gives the raw data used in this summary.

There are some crucial caveats that must be noted:

- The directions for the self-assessments were quite clear, asking a series of sub-indicator questions to help regions formulate their own “scores”. However, many regions applied their own lens to how to respond to the self-assessment instructions, ranging from in-depth answers to all the sub-questions to brief overviews collapsing multiple indicators into one response. Therefore, it is difficult to compare regions on attainment since the base data varies widely in detail.
- There was limited follow-up from CWDB to verify or strengthen the data provided in the self-assessments, making it difficult to achieve a clearer picture of where regions were in terms of progress against the Indicators.
- The data in the self-assessments is not as current as some other sources. For example, the quarterly reports are likely to provide more current updates on progress on sector strategies.

- There may have been some progress on Indicators C-F that is not found in the resources at hand. In fact, we assume this is the case. But the self-assessments appear to provide the best data available.

Analysis

There are a few different ways we can look at the self-assessment data as proxies to answer the question: how close are the regions to meeting the State goals noted above. One way is to take the self-assessments at face value and see how the regions rate themselves. Through that lens, we take the liberty of making some judgments to define different sets of regions in terms of their own reported progress. We assume that if a region reported itself as being at the level of either Operationalizing/Doing or Growing/Expanding/Scaling on all four indicators, we can assume they deem themselves to be meeting the state goals. If the region self-reports as being at the Learning/Experimenting level for all four indicators, we assume they see themselves as not meeting the state goals. Again, please note that we believe the combination of these four indicators are good proxies for the State goals and thus we can use the reported levels as decent data to make judgments. It gets less clear as we look beyond the dichotomy of “yes” or “no”, since we have several regions that see themselves somewhere in the middle with variations by indicator. The table below captures where the regions see themselves on these four indicators.

Region	Indicator C: Communication to Supply-Side Partners	Indicator D: Equity & Job Quality Policies	Indicator E: Shared Populations of Interest	Indicator F: Shared/Pooled Resources to meet Population Needs
Bay Peninsula	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting
Capital	Operationalizing/ Doing	Learning - Doing (1.5)	Operationalizing/ Doing	Operationalizing/ Doing
Coastal	N/A	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting	N/A
East Bay	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting
Inland Empire	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting	Operationalizing/ Doing
LA Basin	Operationalizing/ Doing	Operationalizing/ Doing	Operationalizing/ Doing	Operationalizing/ Doing
Middle Sierra	Operationalizing/ Doing	N/A	N/A	Operationalizing/ Doing
North Bay	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting
North Coast	Growing/Expanding/ Scaling	Operationalizing/ Doing	Growing/Expanding/ Scaling	Growing/Expanding/ Scaling
North State	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting	Learning/ Experimenting
Orange	Operationalizing/ Doing	N/A	N/A	Learning/ Experimenting
San Joaquin	Operationalizing/ Doing	N/A	N/A	Operationalizing/ Doing
Southern Border	Operationalizing/ Doing	?	Operationalizing/ Doing	Operationalizing/ Doing
Ventura	Operationalizing/ Doing	Operationalizing/ Doing	Learning/ Experimenting	Operationalizing/ Doing

Note: some regions either did not report on some indicators or reported that they had chosen to not focus on a particular indicator. These instances are noted by N/As or a question mark. In our analysis

below, we count those as being at the Learning/Experimenting Level since we are grouping all of those in that category as not meeting the goals.

From the table above we see:

- Three regions report being at the Operating/Doing or the Growing/Expanding/Scaling Levels (hereafter OGS level) on all four indicators.
- Three regions report that they are at the OGS level on three indicators.
- Two regions report being at the OGS level for two indicators
- One region reported being at the OGS level for one indicator.
- Five regions report having no indicators at the OGS level – all are at the LE level.

If we do some further combining, we could reasonably say that six regions are at the ‘meets’ or ‘nearly meets’ level, while eight are generally not meeting the goals. This is arbitrary but does give some sense of how far the regions see themselves as progressing.

The next level is to look deeper into what the regions wrote to support their assignment of levels. We already know that nine regions gave either no or very limited information on which to assign a level. For the most part those regions stated they were not focused on that indicator or had nothing to report. For the others we need to go deeper into the supporting documentation. To give some level of grounding in such an assessment, we will use the definitions of the various levels by indicator and the guiding questions provided by the State in the April 2019 draft document provided to the regions with their planning instructions for new regional grants.

For reference, these are restated below.

Indicator C Levels

Learning/ Experimenting

One-Stop Operators/AJCC Service providers in a region are connected to Industry Sector Committees and training is provided to staff and partners on industry workforce needs.

Operationalizing/ Doing

Regional partners have a process to communicate industry workforce needs and train staff on targeted industry sectors and job quality and are developing a method of ensuring that AJCC and other supply-side partners provide work-readiness services to prepare job candidates for targeted industry sector jobs.

Growing/ Expanding/ Scaling

Region has developed communication protocols and professional development opportunities to ensure understanding of the targeted industry sectors and job quality framework by all supply-side partners (America’s Job Center of California staff and partners, WIOA core program partners, AEBG, Community Colleges and other State Plan Partners), has a concrete plan for preparing job candidates to meet the needs of industry; demonstrates ongoing meaningful activity to meet needs and achieve workforce goals; has achieved relative scale and diversity of dedicated resources and shares/pools funds.

Indicator D Levels

Learning/ Experimenting

Region is working to understand job quality and high road employment practices and is committed to creating and implementing a job quality policy.

Operationalizing/ Doing

Region has a job quality policy in place which requires business engagement staff to assess employers prior to providing services and targeting services to employers who support job quality in their workforce.

Growing/ Expanding/ Scaling

Region is engaged with employers that focus on internal/incumbent worker skills and retention and focuses services on employers with good scheduling and sick time practices, provides training and career pathways with income mobility.

Indicator E Levels

Learning/ Experimenting

Analysis of population in need is conducted by all partners in separate plans and each partner separately implements programs to meet the needs.

Operationalizing/ Doing

Relevant partners agree on targeted populations, begin using Statistical Adjustment Model to measure performance, and develop specific programs and strategies to meet their employment needs

Growing/ Expanding/ Scaling

Relevant partners meet regularly to ensure programs and strategies meet the needs of targeted populations, professional development opportunities are available to staff for serving this population, and regional partners communicate successes and challenges of serving individuals from target populations so as to better serve relevant individuals.

Indicator F Levels

Learning/ Experimenting

Local Workforce Boards in a region have executed an MOU that includes referral agreements, infrastructure cost sharing and commitment to target population of emphasis described in local/regional plans.

Operationalizing/ Doing

Regional Plan partners are in the process of developing a plan to pool/share resources to provide services to meet target population needs, have identified industry sectors to create regional career pathway programs for targeted populations.

Growing/ Expanding/ Scaling

Relevant regional plan partners pool/share resources, identify areas of strength/ leadership, create regional career pathway programs, share decision-making on deployment of pooled resources; and align services and programming across funding streams and partner programs.

Aligning the Regional Self-Assessment Rating with an Independent Comparison Using the Documentation Provided by the Regions as the Base

We have arrayed the regional responses by indicator in the attached four tables. We have added notes to the table for each region by indicator highlighting keywords or phrases that align with the definitions above. To the extent feasible we make a judgment based on the data provided as to whether the self-

ranking is supported or not. If there are questions left unanswered by the data, we note that as well. Often there are limits that arise simply from the dearth of information provided, making it very difficult to offer any judgments. This becomes even more of a challenge where a region has combined responses on indicators so that a few short sentences or paragraphs are intended to cover the whole breadth intended by the supporting questions. We can be most confident where a region gave a response to each of the questions, but there remains not only the datedness of the information but, perhaps more importantly, how the regions' rating were off the mark from the guiding questions and definitions.

The table below reflects our summary of whether the regions accurately described their own levels, based on the definitions and guiding questions. We freely admit there is a degree of subjectivity to this process, but we provide in the attached supporting four tables the language from the actual self-assessments that, in our view, either supported or negated the region's own rating.

Region	Indicator C		Indicator D		Indicator E		Indicator F	
	Level	Verified Y/N	Level	Verified Y/N	Level	Verified Y/N	Level	Verified Y/N
Capital	O/D	Y	L/E	Y	O/D	Y	O/D	Y
Bay Pen	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	L/E	Y
Coastal	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	L/E	Y
East Bay	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	L/E	Y
Inland Empire	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	O/D	N
LA Basin	O/D	N	O/D	N	O/D	N	O/D	Y
Mid Sierra	O/D	N	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	O/D	N
North Bay	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	O/D	N	L/E	Y
North Coast	GES	N	O/D	N	GES	N	GES	Y
North State	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	L/E	Y
Orange	O/D	Y	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	L/E	N
San Joaquin	O/D	N	L/E	Y	L/E	Y	O/D	N
South. Border	O/D	N	L/E	Y	O/D	Y	O/D	N
Ventura	O/D	N	O/D	N	L/E	Y	O/D	N

Discussion of the Table

We assigned all regions which put themselves at the L/E level explicitly or implicitly at that level. We say implicitly since there was no rating below L/E, when in fact several regions stated they were either not focusing on a particular indicator or had made no progress on it. Without a lower category available, these all became L/E. It is not surprising that there is excellent alignment between the state's definitions for the L/E level rating, with all but one having been found not to align, out of the total of 32 L/E ratings. In the case of the one discrepancy, our review put Orange at the O/D level rather than the L/E they assigned themselves. This is the only case across all the ratings on the four indicators where we found a region underrated itself. These L/E levels account for well over half of the total ratings (32 out of the total of 56). At the O/D level, 15 out of 21 incorrectly identified at the O/D level when their written documentation only supports the L/E level. This is slightly higher than 70% of the regions falling into this overrating category. At the GES level there were only 3 ratings and 2 of those were not supported by the documentation.

Evaluating the Self-Assessment Process/Recommendations to Improve Future Efforts

In preparing this analysis, we had a chance to dig deeply into the self-assessment process itself. We spent a good deal of time looking at how the process played out, and can thus make some recommendations for how future self-assessments might be more useful to the State. Perhaps this is a more relevant level of analysis than the attempt to find some way to determine how close the regions were to the state vision for regionalism. We decided to present the analysis above since it reflects where the regions felt themselves to be. But it is important to note that their own assessments, in many cases, do not align with the definitions given for those indicators.

Areas of Focus for Future Self-Assessment Processes.

Internal Consistency

We noted a difference between how the questions and the definitions aligned by indicator. For Indicators C and D, there is good alignment, meaning what is asked in the questions leads to the definitions. Thus, a region that answered the questions, which many used as their guide to respond, could be assessed in terms of the definition. For the Indicators E and F, the questions do not agree with the definitions very closely. Many regions that followed the questions did not respond to key elements in the definition. An example of this can be found in Indicator E for the Capital Region. The definition refers to not only designating target groups but also using the Statistical Adjustment Model to measure performance. That aspect is not part of the questions in any way. In our analysis we assumed that regions which answered only the questions should be judged on that criteria alone. While this is not a major issue it goes to the next issue regarding the depth of the process.

An Incomplete Process

We have been involved in multiple self-assessment processes and have learned quite a bit from those engagements. The following are some general observations about self-assessments that may be useful to the State as it looks to future exercises of this type.

We have seen self-assessments typically in two different ways. The first is to set an internal, in the present case, regional baseline from which self-improvements can be made. In this case, there really is no need for external follow-up or oversight since these are usually internally driven exercises. The other case, which mirrors the one at hand, is where an external or oversight body requires the self-assessment in order to gauge progress on something like the indicators. From our vantage point, what has been crucial to such efforts is that the initial self-assessment does not stand alone with some level of verification to ensure all parties are on the same page as to expectations.

We have seen validation processes that involve peer reviews, external site visits, or, at least, an internal review to determine the accuracy of the ratings set by the organization doing the self-assessments. We have seen this play across the country in a variety of high performing local board designation processes. In the best of those instances, the self-assessment criteria, parallel to the indicators, were jointly set by the oversight body and those being assessed. This step ensures, as much as possible, agreement on what was important and even when there was some level of disagreement, it was still clear what the oversight body was looking for.

With, at least, a level playing field of common understanding of what was expected, the self-assessments could be evaluated against commonly understood criteria.

And that leads to the next biggest step necessary to ensure the self-assessments were viewed as a valuable exercise. There was some follow-up to review what was in the self-assessments and agree on how it stood against the criteria set. Without this crucial step, those doing the SA's at the local level had no way of evaluating the level of importance given to this type of exercise.

Further, there is a need to know how the effort going into the SAs will be used for future reference and what will be the rewards for verified high achievement. Most commonly, we have seen SAs used in local board certification processes. The rewards have ranged from access to limited funding streams to simple public recognition. But the big point is the SAs did not go unnoticed or languish from faint recognition of their value as verified determinations of where entities were on critical criteria for success.

The descriptions above have relevance for future efforts in CA. It appears the SAs on the indicators met few if any of the crucial steps noted. Just from the analysis of how far off the mark regions were from the expectations of the higher than L/E levels is proof enough that these SAs got scant attention beyond the requirement to submit them.

Recommendation Going Forward for Self-Assessments

1. Be inclusive in developing the criteria that will be important in any assessment process. This does not mean there has to be full agreement, but inclusion ensures there is at least common understanding of what is intended, the measurements themselves, and how they will be used. There is also an early opportunity for discussion of expectations so that there is less chance for variance at the end.
2. Ensure there is a solid follow-up process to let those completing the assessments that their work is not in vain. That follow-up should also ensure there is consistency across the assessments. The information provided should allow the State to be able to make judgments across regions.
3. Ensure there is a validation process to verify the final information submitted is verified as an accurate picture of where the region stands. The most effective methods can be quite costly and time consuming but yield the best results. If possible, peer reviews with State participation is the top tier. But there are other ways this can be done with less intensive effort such as simple phone follow-up to discuss issues and highlight ways to improve the final assessment.
4. Build the self-assessments into an overall improvement process. Self-assessments can be quite time consuming, if done right. That time invest should be seen as having value. One good way to do that is to make them part of a larger effort such as improving regionalism overall. More on that in the final comments.
5. Have some reward system for those either achieving certain levels or making progress such as moving from one level to another. We purposely couch this as a reward process and not a

punitive one. Our experience is positive reinforcement is much more effective in garnering support and achieving alignment with overall goals than negative ones.

Overall Commentary

We started out this analysis asking the question – how closely the regions came to meeting the CWDB vision for regionalism. We stated we had to find proxies for that vision because it had not been clearly articulated anywhere. The fact that this is unclear is at the heart of all that we have observed in our evaluation of the regional grants.

We say this fully realizing how difficult it is in the WIOA system, which is essentially locally driven but clearly values regionalism in some respects. This often puts the State in a difficult position since there are competing forces at play. To complicate matter further, those supporting maximum local authority have powerful allies in the political structure. There is thus a tendency to try to walk a quite narrow path between what CWDB wants and what it thinks the regions will accept. It also appears to result in somewhat mixed messages about expectations. The self-assessments are a great example of this. As we have noted, how they would be used was never clear and thus their value was quite vague, leaving regions to define for themselves how much effort they would put into the assessments and how much they could mold them to their own priorities and not those of CWDB. And again, that was fairly easy for a region to do because the priorities of CWDB were not clearly articulated and this left the field wide open for local interpretation. Some regions chose to skip some indicators in the self-assessment, saying they were not emphasis areas in their general WIOA plans.

This lack of clarity further manifests itself in difficulty in measuring the progress of regions. This is a pretty obvious statement. It goes back to the old axiom - if you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there. But it also points to a glaring gap in being able to assess progress. In some ways, measures can help clarify expectations. They are best used following policy statements of those expectations. But they have a definite place in setting standards. We believe they have the most value if they are few in number, reflecting the absolutely crucial elements of success. We have found that an overabundance of measures just leads to more confusion. Further long-term consistency in measures helps keep eyes on what is important. A former colleague of ours used to preach – Just pick it and stick it – meaning figure out what is fundamental to success in any endeavor and hold fast to that belief.

We believe going forward on regionalism, CWDB must determine what is essential for regions to do, make the abundantly clear to the regions and reflect that in measures that can lead to rewards. We know this is easier said than done. In this case it may testing the water with the political leadership to see what can stick. There is already huge groundwork laid in the WIOA discretionary funding streams and other discretionary dollars that are released only on a regional basis. Building on that as explicit support for the fundamentals of regionalism could be a big step forward. Answering the question of why this important and what is expected is crucial to gaining internal and external consistency of what regionalism should accomplish.

Appendix 6: Regional Summaries

As previously noted, regions were assured of confidentiality regarding their regional interviews. The information contained in these brief summaries, therefore, comes from the review of documents such as 4-Year Plans, Regional Indicator self-assessments, quarterly reports and close-out reports, as well as CWDB's own regional summary documents. Document review occurred in two phases. In preparation for the regional interviews, the evaluation team surveyed a range of materials, from the State Plan to the most recent regional quarterly reports, in order to tailor the interview questions to each region by identifying sector priorities and avoid asking questions CWDB already had answers to. Of particular help in this were the RPI proposals submitted by each region, and the Regional Summaries that were prepared in August 2019 by CWDB. Following the regional interviews, the evaluation took a deeper dive into the same documents, this time focusing on quarterly and close-out reports and the Regional Indicators self-assessments submitted by each region as part of their 2-year Plan Update. The appendices contain spreadsheets created as a result of these reviews; what follows is an overview. It should be noted that aspects of these summaries may be out-of-date, insofar as they rely in part on self-assessments conducted in early 2019, and on other documents that likewise represent a specific point in time.

Bay Peninsula Region

The four local boards that make up the Bay Peninsula Region have indicated, in their self-assessment and other documents, that they have significant issues with regionalism. They selected NOVA as fiscal lead for regional funding, but decided not to establish any regional structure or body. They have convened a regional business team, and report that they are exploring potential collaboration via a healthcare taskforce, but have formed no new region-wide sector teams. Instead, select boards work together in areas of overlap when they deem it appropriate, and report in their self-assessment that "there is some joint convening of industry, although not across the entire region." They note that the local areas within the region are very different from each other, with distinct labor markets and economies.

Capital Region

The four local boards in the nine-county Capital Region chose to pool their resources to engage an intermediary organization, Valley Vision, to assist them in developing and implementing regional strategies and engaging regional employers. Valley Vision has convened sector teams in multiple industry clusters, including manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, food & agriculture, construction, and clean energy. Frequency of team meetings and convenings vary; some are monthly, others quarterly.

Supply-side partners participate actively in the sector teams, resulting in better alignment of services with employer needs, including new curricula at community colleges and the creation of apprenticeship programs. Sectors were selected using data from EDD's LMI division, as well as local Centers of Excellence, economic development agencies, and business partners. AJCCs in the region attempt to coordinate with regional partners to ensure that they are developing the kinds of work readiness skills that can lead to training and employment.

The region has not adopted a formal job quality policy, focusing instead on making the best match for each job seeker, in as high-quality a job as is possible. The region has shared target populations,

including low-income residents and all of the usual DOL target populations; food stamp recipients are estimated to total 30% of customers. They have not established specific goals for target populations, but “strive to increase access and services for all target populations.”

The boards have entered into a regional MOU, and pool multiple funding sources, both required and non-required. As noted in the Self -Assessment, “the Boards follow a co-investment strategy that aligns funding and resources with regional partners and attempts to reduce duplication across funding silos... work[ing] together to share regional resources, streamline administrative processes and improve outcomes.” Th boards have opted not to create a formal regional leadership council, relying on Valley Vision instead to bring those parties together and coordinate regional efforts. The region has established regional goals, but to date these are not numerical goals, beyond a commitment to “increase industry-recognized credentials and apprenticeships thought the region.” They local boards employ shared case management and an integrated resource team approach; a majority of AJCC customers experience shared case management by multiple partners.

Coastal Region

The four local boards of the Coastal Region, covering four counties that stretch from Santa Barbara to Santa Cruz, came together under the original SlingShot initiative to establish, with the help of consultants, a healthcare sector partnership. The sector partnership provided input on curriculum for a successful Community Health Worker Certification training program, and continues to meet on a quarterly basis to advise the region on hiring needs and trends. As of March 2019, Coastal Region was investigating the hospitality sector and exploring the development of apprenticeship programs for Medical Assistants and Certified Nursing Assistants. Labor market information, as validated by industry leaders, and commissioned studies were utilized to select the healthcare sector and identify in-demand occupations.

While community colleges participate in the healthcare sector partnership, the region reports that work remains to be done to ensure that supply-side partners more broadly are receiving and acting on timely information regarding employer needs. The region commissioned a study in 2019 to identify additional growth sectors and occupations, with an eye towards establishing a jobs quality policy as well as other regional policies and procedures. The primary target population focus for the region has been the justice-involved population served under the P2E initiative.

The boards of the Coastal Region have entered into an MOU and contract, and have established a 501c3 to manage regional funds and streamline fiscal processes. The directors meet in person quarterly and hold bi-weekly conference calls. They indicate that they have agreed to some common performance goals and regional measures, although it is not clear from the self-assessment what those are. Shared strategies in the region have primarily centered on the staff development opportunities organized by the Regional Training Coordinator. In 2019, the region issued an to identify a consultant to help develop a range of regional policies, as well as a pool of pre-approved consultants for future projects.

East Bay Region

The East Bay region comprises four local boards (two county-based, two municipal). The boards came together under SlingShot to establish an advanced manufacturing sector partnership, subsequently adding partnerships in the healthcare and information technology sectors. They participate in the transportation & logistics working group of a regional economic development partner as well. The manufacturing and healthcare partnerships have established their own independent organizational

structures. A series of quarterly sector convenings, regular sub-committee meetings, periodic leadership meetings, and annual sector summits support and inform the work. Additionally, the manufacturing partnership convenes a quarterly CEO roundtable and, as a stand-alone organization, has its own board of directors. Each of the partnerships has its own unique structure and approach. The region is exploring partnerships in construction and tourism/hospitality.

The manufacturing partnership employed a contracted labor market economist to conduct an extensive labor market analysis using both public and proprietary data, subsequently validated by employers, that labor market analysis is regularly updated. The healthcare sector partners generate in-depth, real-time labor demand data, while the information technology partnership makes extensive use of the community college systems Center of Excellence and regional economic development partners; both partnerships rely on employer validation.

Supply-side partners, including AJCC management and staff, WIOA providers, community colleges and K-12 systems are involved in the sector partnerships and receive regular communication and presentations. AJCC management is convened quarterly by East Bay Works to review sector trends and opportunities. As the region's self-assessment states: "Occupation demand data in regional priority sectors informs local and regional service delivery strategies and is used to target training and placement resources and goals at the local level."

While the region has not adopted a job quality policy, local boards have policies which prioritize higher quality goals. The directors believe that focusing on sectors in which a significant percentage of jobs are of high quality creates the possibility that even the lower-wage entry-level jobs in those sectors can lead to jobs with good pay and benefits. Target populations identified by the region are individuals with barriers to employment, including veterans, disconnected youth, and the re-entry population; they note that each local area takes its own nuanced approach to prioritization based on demographics. Specific numerical goals have not been set at the regional level.

A regional strategic advisory body, including the WDB directors, the regional organizer and multiple stakeholders such as industry sector leads and economic development partners, meets quarterly to guide the regional work. The region has not entered into an MOU, although the two county-based local boards were (as of March 2019) developing an MOU between themselves in an effort to streamline board-to-board contracting processes that have tended to hinder the regional work. Pooled resources have been limited to SlingShot, RPI and P2E as mandated. To date, Easy Bay has not explored common case management, co-enrollment or other such shared strategies at the regional level. A feasibility study is underway to explore the development of a third-party administrative entity.

Inland Empire Region

The Inland Empire Region comprises two county-based local workforce areas which entered into an MOU, approved by each county's board of supervisors, which establishes streamlined process for sharing regional funding. Inland Empire has developed sector teams in manufacturing, healthcare, and transportation/logistics. In each case, a consulting firm was engaged to research and convene those partnerships. Full sector convenings are held 2-4 times a year, with frequent smaller meetings on an ongoing basis, attended by training providers and sector navigators. Community college and adult education consortia, as well as all AJCC mandated partners, participate in regular meetings and quarterly steering committee meetings. The sector partnerships have led to the establishment of a pilot Community Health Worker program and an increase in sector-related apprenticeship opportunities through the region's Apprenticeship Network. The region received a grant from the James Irvine Foundation to hire its first regional apprenticeship coordinator.

Labor market information from EDD's LMI division and the Strong Workforce Center of Excellence was utilized to identify sector opportunities, which led to data-driven reports produced by the contracted consulting firms. The region is pooling RPI funding with WIOA funding and employer contributions in support of specific regional initiatives. AJCC operators in the region meet quarterly to explore efficiencies and alignment. Business services staff from the two workforce areas meet periodically as a team, work with the Strong Workforce community college job developers, as well as the Department of Rehabilitation business engagement team, and share information with AJCC staff.

Inland Empire does not have a regional job quality policy, opting instead to focus on sectors offering sustainable wage jobs, career pathways, and upward mobility. Target populations for the region include justice-involved individuals, veterans and disconnected youth; no service-level goals have been set for these groups. Broad regional goals have been discussed, as have targets for increased numbers of industry-recognized credentials and apprenticeships. Shared case management, co-enrollment and related strategies have been implemented by the region.

LA Basin Region

The LA Basin Region comprises seven local workforce areas covering the 88 cities (and 120+ unincorporated areas) in the nation's most populous county. A history of working together in the past allowed the local areas to come together relatively quickly and establish a successful healthcare sector partnership under the SlingShot initiative. The region identifies a total of six potential target sectors, and has subsequently established sector teams in manufacturing as well as transportation & logistics, with work underway in construction and bio-tech as well. The sector partnerships meet several times per year; various local directors take the lead on different regional projects, and meet quarterly to coordinate activities. They pool resources in support of regional efforts, including WIOA, TANF, LA County general funds and other local sources.

Partners co-located with AJCCs are well-represented in the sector teams and regularly receive information on employer needs. The region reports that work needs to be done to bring workforce partners who are not connected to the AJCCs into this information loop: "The greatest unmet need is improving communications to the many workforce partners who are not physically located in AJCCs." A website is planned to help improve this situation.

The region has not established a job quality policy, focusing instead on reaching target populations such as ex-offenders, the homeless and persons with disabilities, with a particular priority on services to disconnected youth, and connecting those populations with career ladder opportunities. AJCCs in the region coordinate case management for participants.

Middle Sierra Region (aka Motherload)

The Middle Sierra Region has only one local workforce board, but covers four largely rural counties. As a region, Middle Sierra began by identifying several priority sectors (healthcare, hospitality, advanced manufacturing, construction, natural resources), and utilized its initial SlingShot funding to hire a consultant to help them establish a business-led healthcare sector partnership. That partnership is not fully functional, and Middle Sierra is now working to establish a sector partnership in manufacturing [Verify.] Labor market data from EDD and local sources was utilized to identify priority sectors.

Providing information to supply-side partners is a work in progress, with stakeholders provided with information at quarterly WDB meetings and AJCC partner meetings. The self-assessment indicates that the region plans to publish quarterly regional industry updates.

As a one-board region, Middle Sierra does not have the challenge of finding common ground among multiple workforce boards. They have instead focused on building a comprehensive board with equal representation from each of the four counties they cover, as well as strong employer-led sector partnerships. The establishment of quantitative goals for the region is cited in their self-assessment as an area where more work is required.

North Bay Region

The North Bay Region comprises four local workforce areas serving six counties. Their self-assessment notes that while “there is some sharing of sector focus... no [industry sector partnerships] span the entire region.” Instead, two healthcare partnerships, covering two local areas each, have been established. One local board also created a hospitality sector team.

The region shares the target populations established by WIOA and state initiatives such as P2E. The local boards do not employ common case management strategies, but are examining local policies “to identify areas where policies can be aligned or efficiencies achieved.” North Bay has a non-financial MOU outlining how the boards work together as a region; the region has not established a formal regional governance structure, opting instead to make decisions by agreement at regular meetings.

North Coast Region (aka Humboldt)

North Coast is a rural one-board, one-county region. The board and its educational partners have established industry-led sector teams in healthcare and the building trades. Healthcare was selected on the basis of Humboldt County’s designation by HRSA as a Health Care Provider Shortage Area. That sector team meets quarterly, and is working to re-establish a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program for RNs, and has spawned a dental and oral health initiative as well. The team includes the CA Center for Rural Policy, the College of the Redwoods, Humboldt State University and the county education office. The building trades sector team, led by the trades, worked to bring a small local youth program to the entire county through the use of a mobile van.

North Coast conducts an annual survey of employers to identify hiring needs, reinforced by deep-dive interviews to corroborate labor market intelligence. Results of the survey are shared with supply-side providers and AJCC partners. The board has a commitment to providing high-quality employment, and expects business services staff to consider job quality in assessing employers, but has not established a job quality policy. Target populations are those identified in WIOA. The boards focus is on expanding partnerships in order to impact upward mobility.

As a one-board region, it is fairly simple for North Coast to pool resources, and to adopt policies such as shared case-management. They report that goal-setting occurs “organically,” but that they have identified a need for “more formalized policies, procedures and processes,” including a policy on co-enrollment.

North State Region (aka NoRTEC)

North State / NoRTEC is a largely rural one-board region comprising 11 counties; the board meets quarterly and has representation from each county. The region has adopted the Next Generation Industry Sector Partnership model, and has established industry-led partnerships in agriculture, healthcare, information technology and advanced manufacturing. In this model, supply-side partners and the public workforce system agree to take a back seat to employers; some meetings are employer-only, while others bring in supply side partners to present information and receive guidance. Each partnership holds a quarterly steering committee meeting, with subcommittees working between full meetings. In addition to an annual goal-setting meeting, regular networking sessions are used to recruit new partners and disseminate information.

NoRTEC used the WIOA regional/local planning process to survey nearly 300 businesses and engage many in input sessions alongside education and workforce partners (including five community colleges and multiple economic development agencies). This led to a Regional Labor Market Profile and Industry Sector Analysis, used to identify priority sectors. Supply-side partners used information provided by employers to map career pathways and develop industry-specific soft skill components for their career programs. As noted, providers attend employer-led sector convenings, and also receive information via monthly newsletters.

As a one-board region, North State does not have the challenge of getting multiple local workforce boards on the same page. Eleven counties have seats on the WDB's governing board, and NoRTEC works hard to build support for system alignment, administrative efficiencies, and common policies on case management and referral. Much of this plays out at the local AJCC/partner level. NoRTEC does not have a job quality policy, noting that the sectors they have targeted offer both lower and higher quality opportunities, allowing for a career pathways approach of moving lower-skilled workers from the former to the latter. NoRTEC sees "the low-skilled, low-wage positions as opportunities for young, early career or inexperienced workers to gain experience and workplace exposure." Youth are the primary regional target population; specific numerical goals had not yet been established at the time of the self-assessment.

Orange Region

The Orange region comprises three local workforce boards in one county. The Orange County Leadership Council serves as the governing body for the region. Orange initially established industry-driven sector partnerships in manufacturing and healthcare, and, their self-assessment, project additional teams in information technology and hospitality as well. As in some other regions, they are utilizing a version of the Next Generation Industry Sector Partnership model, whereby public and supply-side partners take a back seat to employers. Sector partnerships meet quarterly, with action teams completing work between those meetings.

Public and supply-side partners include both economic development and workforce development; work is ongoing to broaden the engagement of educational systems and other supply-side partners. The region uses the Orange County Career Pathways project as a vehicle for communicating business needs to providers, to "equip educators with the information and competencies needed to offer students relevant preparation [for] ... high-demand, high-skill and high-wage careers." Specific numerical goals have not been established.

Orange Region notes that it is working towards aligning policies on items such as intake and supportive services. It is anticipated that various resources will increasingly be pooled as the sector partnerships become more established; agreements exist between the boards which facilitate the sharing of

resources. The county has agreements with The Orange Region's self-assessment indicates that they are not focusing on certain indicators, including those related to equity, job quality and upward mobility.

San Joaquin Valley & Associated Counties Region

The SJVAC Region comprises eight local boards covering ten counties, and stretches from just north of Los Angeles to just south of Sacramento. It is largely rural but includes a number of small and medium sized cities as well. Boards in this vast region have a long history of working together in various combinations, and currently meet monthly as the Central California Workforce Collaborative.

While a number of regional initiatives exist, including a SlingShot-funded manufacturing partnership, SJVAC notes that much of the industry convening actually takes place at the local level. The San Joaquin County WDB has a healthcare sector initiative; Tulare County WDB convenes healthcare, manufacturing and logistics sector teams; the Tulare and Kings County WDBs participate in a sub-regional advanced manufacturing sector partnership; the Fresno WDB is working with trades unions in a building trades partnership. While most of these do not cover the entire region, there is some spill-over effect on adjacent local areas. SJVAC notes that "Significant work on the quantitative aspects of service delivery at the regional level has not been achieved." The region's self-assessment did not respond to the indicators regarding equity, job quality, upward mobility or shared case management approaches.

Labor market data from various sources, analyzed by Applied Development Economics, was utilized to identify potential target sectors. Under SlingsShot, manufacturing and construction were the primary focus. While economic development and labor market data is shared among all local boards and partners, engagement of supply-side partners, like employer engagement, tends to happen primarily at the local level. Pooling of resources across the entire region is limited as well, although the region has a history of sharing resources on specific grants and projects. As SJVAC notes, "The local boards have been collaborating on administrative and programmatic mater for many years." Fiscal staff from all boards have formed a work group, as have business services staff, who coordinate to ensure employers have single points of contact.

Southern Border Region

The Southern Border Region's two local workforce boards cover the City and County of San Diego and the very rural Imperial County. To date, the region has established sector partnerships in information technology, healthcare, and the service sector (defined as retail, hospitality and tourism). Teams are chaired by industry leaders, and meet quarterly; the two workforce boards meet monthly. The region has a Director of Research, who compiles and regularly updates an In-Demand Jobs and Priority Sectors report, which is validated by employer review. An annual Workforce Conference convenes employers from all sectors, with workforce leaders, providers and community partners. Supply-side partners also receive ongoing information about employer needs via regular reports and online materials.

Southern Border has attempted to tackle job quality, establishing it as a core pillar of the region, developing a position paper on the topic, and working to embed job quality into the Salesforce tool used by most programs. A symposium was convened with employers and community partners to examine job quality and related issues. The healthcare sector team developed a job quality pilot.

Target populations for the region include English language learners, justice-involved individuals, disconnected youth, TANF recipients and people with disabilities. CalJOBS indicators are used to track service to these and other groups, and individual providers have service goals, but numeric regional

goals have not been established. Pooled funds include RPI, P2E, WAF, and training funds. WIOA core partners and other State Plan stakeholders are implementing common case management and co-enrollment.

Ventura Region

Ventura is a one-board, one-county region adjacent to LA County. Ventura participated in the LA Basin SlingShot healthcare initiative, and subsequently received RPI funding. Ventura has strong employer-led board committees in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, business services and clean/green industries. Colleges and training providers participate in those committees, but Ventura indicates more work is needed to ensure that all supply-side providers are receiving and acting upon current information about employer needs. Ventura's AJCC and its many partners offer work-readiness services appropriate to the target sectors.

Ventura has a focus on job quality, but has not yet adopted a job quality policy. As their self-assessment indicates, "While equity and job quality are long-standing goals, they have not been fully articulated into comprehensive policy." The board has identified a self-sustaining wage rate of \$27.85 per hour, and business engagement staff do review job quality in assessing employers.

Ventura focuses on the standard WIOA target populations, and (aside from P2E) has not identified more specific target population for its regional initiatives. Last year's 2-Year Plan Update process initiated an effort to significantly increase services to low-income food assistance recipients, as well as a pilot SNAP E&T federal reimbursement program. While there is a good deal of pooling of resources at the AJCC level, it does not yet extend more widely throughout the workforce system. Partners do share case management and co-enrollment strategies. Regional partners meet regularly and are using the Regional Indicators to evaluate their work but have not set numerical goals.