

History of AHRIC to AWIB

Introduction

In 1992, the federal government began to encourage states to establish Human Resource Investment Councils for planning, monitoring, and evaluating employment education and training programs under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). In anticipation of major restructuring of these federal programs, the Alaska State Legislature passed legislation in 1995 that formed the Alaska Human Resource Investment Council (AHRIC). AHRIC opened its doors January 1, 1996. In 1998, Congress consolidated 60 programs under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) which took effect on July 1, 2000. Today, Alaska operates about 20 federal employment and job training programs through four state departments: Labor & Workforce Development, Community & Economic Development, Health & Social Services and Education & Early Development. In 2002 the legislature, through SB 252, renamed the AHRIC and it's now known as the Alaska Workforce Investment Board or AWIB.

The board represents:

- **Consolidation:** Replaced the Alaska Job Training Council, the Governor's Council on Vocational and Career Education and the Employment Security Advisory Council.
- **Public/Private Partnerships:** Members include representatives of business and industry, the private sector, government, education, organized labor, Native organizations, and community-based organizations.
- **Employment Training & Education Programs:** AWIB oversees the planning, monitoring and evaluation process of all state or federally funded employment training and education programs.
- **Workforce Development:** AWIB promotes an integrated system of employment training and education programs, and services so that Alaskans have greater opportunities to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and education for good jobs.

The board recommends policy to the Legislature and the Governor on preparing Alaska's workforce for emerging jobs, technologies and industries. AWIB's strategic plan for workforce development includes:

- **Goals and Benchmarks:** A strategic plan for job creation and job placement or work activity participation.
- **Program Evaluation:** Evaluate and direct resources into effective and cost efficient programs that prepare people for work.
- **Welfare to Work:** AWIB plays a central role in efforts to move Alaskans from

welfare to work.

- **Career Exploration:** AWIB participates with employers, education, labor, and community-based organizations to integrate academic and occupational learning leading to jobs and careers for Alaska's students.
- **Alaska Hire Initiatives:** Strategies to move Alaskans into jobs held by non-residents.
- **Economic Development:** Open dialogue between business, government and labor to promote economic development and jobs for Alaskans.

1996 and 1997 - The First Two Years

The Governor appointed 26 members to the AHRIC in October 1995. The council's first meeting was in Anchorage in January 1996. After an initial period of organization, which included writing council bylaws, setting up a committee structure, electing officers, and deciding on the council's vision, mission and goals, the AHRIC got down to business.

The council quickly recognized that the investigation of all Alaska's human resource development programs was a task that demanded research, meeting with and helping the agencies in their efforts to better coordinate the delivery of human resource development services in Alaska. At the council's direction, the staff prepared Report to the Governor on the Future of Alaska's Human Resource Programs, completed on September 1, 1996. The report included preliminary observations on overseeing the implementation of a coordinated human resource investment system. It also made preliminary observations on consolidation, including the need for private sector involvement, coordination of resources and efforts by both public and private entities in Alaska, and the need for streamlining services.

Other 1996-1997 accomplishments:

- Reviewed and approved The Governor's Coordinated Special Services Plan (GCSSP), The Wagner-Peyser Plan (Employment Services) and the JTPA Title III Plan (Dislocated Workers) and approved the three plans for the Alaska Private Industry Councils (PIC).
- One-Stop Career Centers - The state received a \$7.2 million U.S. Department of Labor grant in 1996 to implement a system of one-stop career centers across the state, called the **Alaska Job Center Network**.
- Welfare Reform - The AHRIC was involved in the state's transition into a reformed "work first" welfare system. The council helped implement a pilot program to hire welfare recipients into entry-level state employment.
- School-to-Work Initiative - The AHRIC helped implement a \$7.8 million grant for a statewide School-to-Work system.

- Workforce Development Boards – Anticipating WIA, the AHRIC initiated the process to convert Alaska’s Private Industry Councils to Workforce Investment Boards.
- Alaska Industry Network Corporation Manufacturing Extension Partnership – the AHRIC worked with the Alaska Science and Technology Foundation and the Alaska Small Business Development Center to secure a \$3 million U.S. Department of Commerce grant to provide technical assistance to Alaska manufacturers of value added products.
- WorkStar – what started as an initiative to involve businesses in moving Alaskans from welfare to work became a private sector employer task force to provide ongoing assistance and advice to the state on welfare-to-work initiatives.
- Rural Partnership Conference – AHRIC sponsored a 1997 conference to examine welfare reform and economic development opportunities in rural Alaska, and how businesses, Native organizations, economic development organizations and local government could combine their efforts to create jobs for rural Alaskans.
- Business Education Compacts (BEC) – The BEC was created, following a national trend to involve business in School-to-Work and provide work-based learning opportunities for students.
- Employer Needs Assessment – in cooperation with the University of Alaska, the AHRIC embarked on assessing employers’ training needs in key Alaska industries.
- Business Learning Consortia (BLC) – a seafood processing business learning consortium was formed, bringing together seafood processing businesses to exchange ideas and resources for workforce development training. It served as a model for future BLCs.
- Consolidation of Alaska’s Human Resource Programs May 1997 – As part of AHRIC’s legislative mandate, this report details funding and administrative functions of state workforce development programs, discusses national trends and makes recommendations for improvements.
- Future of Private Industry Councils, September 1996 – another report required in AHRIC’s enabling legislation, this document examines the existing PIC structure, based on information gathered from interviews with Alaska’s three Service Delivery Area directors, and surveys of PIC members. The report makes recommendations on how best to utilize the existing PIC/SDA structure.
- 1997 STEP Report – in response to legislative requests for additional performance information on the State Training and Employment Program (STEP), the AHRIC met with program directors to reshape reporting requirements and improve accountability.

- Report on the Status of Vocational Education, April 1997 – the Alaska Department of Education teamed with the AHRIC to produce a long overdue assessment of Alaska’s vocational education system.

The AHRIC also consulted with business and industry to assess the system and explore options for change which would best serve business and improve Alaska’s economy. These activities included participating in a task force to improve the oil industry’s local hire record, and holding community forums, in conjunction with local Chambers of Commerce, across Alaska to determine business training needs.

1998 Highlights & Accomplishments

- Refined the AHRIC mission and state workforce development goals, establishing the framework for a long-term strategic plan for all programs.
- Facilitated a Workforce Development Conference attended by over 150 people, involving employers in developing policy for system improvements.
- Provided guidance to the Governor and Legislature on new AHRIC legislation increasing program accountability and performance, and to align the state with impending federal reforms.
- Connected the University of Alaska Statewide Vocational/Technical Education Advisory Council, health care industry representatives, and the Council for a workforce demand & job training capacity meeting that resulted in a commitment to develop an alliance focused on health care jobs.
- Provided guidance for the ongoing implementation of one-stop career centers through the Alaska Job Center Network.
- Produced the new biannual Governor’s Coordination and Special Services Plan (GCSSP) and Dislocated Worker Plan for the operation of Job Training Partnership Act Programs and coordination with all human resource investment programs.

1999 Highlights & Accomplishments

- Worked with the Alaska Department of Labor Research & Analysis Section to produce and deliver to the Governor and Legislature the **first annual program evaluation report of workforce development programs.**
- Assisted the Alaska State Legislature in **consolidating most workforce programs into one state department.**
- Initiated Workforce Investment Act implementation, with the help of 100 citizen "policy work group" volunteers.
- Designed two pilot programs for entry-level and incumbent worker training, using STEP Governor's discretionary funds.
- Adopted Job Center Certification Standards, and began certification process for all co-located Job Centers.

- Designated the Alaska Native Coalition on Employment and Training (ANCET) as an ad-hoc committee for developing one-stop partner agreements, and to improve access to services in rural Alaska.
- Assisted with regional workforce development planning in Western Alaska, which has been severely impacted by poor fishing seasons.
- Assisted the new Denali Commission, a federal-state partnership established by Congress, in coordinating infrastructure and economic support throughout rural Alaska.
- Continued to assist in the state's efforts to move needy Alaskans from welfare to work.
- Continued to hold "**Industry Needs Assessment**" forums, most recently with the Transportation Industry, to learn from transportation employers about their workforce needs, and to identify training gaps.
- Worked with the **Health Care Business Learning Consortium** to increase education and training programs to meet the demand for health care workers.
- Helped to establish a plan for workforce renewal and a new **Alaska Process Industry Careers Consortium (APICC)**, which includes the oil, gas, mining, and power generation industries.
- Assisted the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development in starting a **Career Pathways** Initiative to strengthen the connection between educators, students and employers in key industries with high worker demand.
- Utilized a USDOL planning grant to formulate **an incumbent worker training plan** within WIA planning process.
- Worked with the Alaska Science and Technology Foundation to develop two Technology Worker Initiatives. These initiatives will provide resources to build connections between employers and schools to attract K-12 students into the technology industry, and to improve training for technology workers.
- Hosted a joint meeting between the National Workforce Board Chairs, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, and the National Workforce Board's executive committee.
- Adopted the **Baldrige Principles for Continuous Improvement** in the new WIA strategic plan for workforce investment.
- Created an annual operational plan for the AHRIC to measure success and map future progress.

2000 Highlights & Accomplishments

- Workforce Investment Act Implementation. The AHRIC convened over 100 volunteer stakeholders and dozens of state agency representatives to complete its 5-year implementation plan for the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which was required by the US Dept. of Labor by July 1, 2000. The 352-

page *Alaska Unified Plan* is posted on the AHRIC web site, and replaces the previously required *Governor's Consolidated Special Services Plan* (GCSSP) for training programs under the old JTPA system. The Unified Plan was a huge undertaking. It was completed in a timely manner, it passed federal muster, and it represents consolidation of services and cooperation among agencies for a more streamlined delivery system. The Plan will be annually evaluated and updated as appropriate by the AHRIC.

- **Evaluation Report.** The AHRIC Evaluation & Assessment Committee and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development worked to improve this annual evaluation report and meet the requirements for program reporting established by the legislature. The law requires state and federally funded training programs to create performance measures and report on program outcomes. AHRIC and DOL-R&A have produced three evaluation reports on *Employment and Earnings of Participants in Selected Alaska Training Programs*, the first for program year 1997, the second for program year 1998 with a comparison to performance in 1997, and the third for program year 1999 with comparisons to 1997 and 1998. All reports are available through the AHRIC and DOL offices.
- **One Stop Career Centers.** Alaska's one-stop career center system is successfully providing services at the local level across the state at nine full service job centers and thirteen satellite centers. The federal grant for implementing one-stop career centers ended June 30, 2000, and administration of the system has been transferred to the DOL Division of
- Employment Security and the two Local Workforce Investment Boards. The AHRIC has remained involved to continuously improve program outcomes and customer service for employers and job seekers through the one-stop system.
- **Denali Commission.** The Denali Commission, a federal/state commission whose mission is to improve infrastructure, education, training and employment in rural Alaska, has been a helpful partner to AHRIC in improving statewide services. The Department of Labor received a \$2 million Denali Commission grant, which has helped provide training opportunities for rural Alaska residents on infrastructure projects in their region.
- **Skill Standards.** AHRIC's Employment and Placement Committee and the Workforce Readiness Committee have identified common areas in their committee goals, and have met jointly for some time to work toward common goals. The committees have spent a considerable amount of time working toward implementation of nationally recognized, industry based skill standards and occupational certifications.
- **Business Learning Consortia.** The AHRIC Workforce Readiness Committee provides oversight for training, education, and employment programs to

ensure the programs are delivering education and training that is relevant to local market needs and the career goals of state residents. The committee has worked to build partnerships between employers and quality workforce training programs, and connect state public and private education systems with business, government and labor to ensure that state residents are learning skills pertinent to employer needs. The six Business Learning Consortia in Alaska provide the best example of the AHRIC's efforts to create partnerships between employers and training programs. The AHRIC has helped to convene industry workforce development groups in the health industry, an industry group composed of oil, gas, mining and utility processing, the Transportation industry, Information Technology, Construction and Hospitality. The six industry groups have worked successfully with the University of Alaska and other training providers to customize training for their particular industry.

- **Blueprint for Vocational and Technical Education.** The Workforce Readiness Committee has joined with an ad hoc AHRIC committee on Education and a group of stakeholders in Vocational Education to draft a statewide plan for vocational and technical education. The plan, *Alaska's Future Workforce Strategic Policies and Investment Blueprint*, is required by SB 289 (Chapter 132 SLA 00). The law states that the AHRIC must "facilitate the development of a statewide policy for a coordinated and effective technical and vocational education training system in this state and, to the extent authorized by state and federal law, plan and coordinate federal, state, and local efforts in technical and vocational education programs." The Blueprint was forwarded to the 22nd Legislature in January 2001.
- **AHRIC Regulations.** AHRIC's Policy & Planning Committee worked with the Alaska Workforce Investment Office in DOL and an assistant attorney general to draft regulations for the state's training and employment programs, as required by SB 334 (Chapter 85 SLA 98) and SB 289 (Chapter 132 SLA 00). The draft regulations clarify legislation affecting the State Training and Employment Program, elucidate the technical and vocational education grants program in AHRIC, and define the program's administrative costs, application deadline and priorities for grant awards. The regulations also describe the responsibilities of the AHRIC's four standing committees and detail the administrative, program, performance and reporting responsibilities of the state's workforce investment system. A public hearing to elicit comments was held on December 4, 2000. The 30-day public comment period ended on December 11, 2000. The committee forwarded the regulations to the Council at their December 12 business meeting.
- **STEP Plan.** The Policy & Planning Committee also adopted a 5-year plan for the State Training and Employment Program (STEP), which outlines administrative and programmatic improvements to assist in meeting STEP goals. Among other improvements, the plan requires DOL to distribute funds

to the Local Workforce Investment Area administrators (sub-grantees) in a more efficient and timely manner, improved services to individuals through grants that place participants in training for high-demand occupations, and requires local administrators to improve data collection and information distribution.

- **Report on Council Reorganization.** In accordance with the legislative intent of SB 289 (Chapter 132 SLA 00), the Policy and Planning Committee has worked with Michael Brustein, a noted expert on the Workforce Investment Act and the Carl Perkins Act, to make a recommendation on reorganization of the AHRIC. Several considerations must be made for the Council to remain in compliance with these federal Acts. A report with recommendations was forwarded to the 22nd Legislature in January of 2001.
- **Career Pathways.** A state plan for Alaska's Career Pathway system was developed in February, 1999. The Alaska Human Resource Investment Council (AHRIC) Employment Training/Workplace Readiness Committee reviewed and endorsed the plan. The Career Pathways plan called for 1) establishing a framework of career pathways in Alaska, 2) ensuring students meet high academic standards, engage in career development and develop employability skills, 3) implementing pilot career pathways that demonstrate how career pathways can help sustain School-to-Work principles by connecting students with high skill, high wage careers. Career pathways provide a roadmap for academic learning and career preparation. A career
- Pathways framework begins with career awareness in the earliest grades, and develops to include career-based learning in the later grades. Participation in a career pathway prepares the learner to transition into post-secondary education as well as to achieve employability, academic and technical (industry) skill standards.

2001 Highlights & Accomplishments

- **Carl Perkins.** The council adopted a resolution agreeing to a Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of Education & Early Development to transfer responsibility of post-secondary Perkins programs to the council. The council also adopted a resolution regarding solicitation proposals for regional training centers.
- **Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL).** In order for post-secondary schools to receive WIA training grants, they must apply for and be authorized or exempted as an "eligible provider." Board members approved performance measures these schools must meet to continue their eligibility.
- **Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE).** The board signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the ACPE, to share responsibilities for authorizing post-secondary training schools, and a position was created in

the AWIB office. The project assistant not only monitors and ensures the post-secondary vocational training schools meet eligibility requirements, but she also serves as liaison to the schools and an information source to the board.

- **Clearinghouse.** The board decided to focus their efforts on creating an informational clearinghouse, a comprehensive, integrated database of funding sources and training providers, as well as a portal to workforce-related issues, organizations and resources.
- *Alaska's Skilled Worker Shortage: Crisis or Opportunity?* White paper. The AWIB had become increasingly concerned about the lack of a skilled workforce in Alaska. Members of the AWIB believed the state was on the verge of a workforce crisis, describing the situation as "urgent," "serious," and "critical." But members of the AWIB also believed the labor shortage presented tremendous opportunities for Alaskans whom are unemployed or who lack education and training. Planning efforts today will have a direct impact on Alaska's ability to attract new businesses tomorrow, and to maintain an educated workforce, and build and sustain projects such as the much-desired natural gas pipeline. As the "...private/public leadership board that sets the policy framework for developing Alaska's workforce," Members of the AWIB called attention to Alaska's workforce issues through the white paper.
- The AWIB co-sponsored an Employer/One Stop Forum –a full exploration of the services the One Stops have to offer local employers. Participating agencies presented their programs in conjunction with presentations from businesses familiar with these services.
- The AWIB co-sponsored “the Alaskan Workforce rEvolution” Conference. It was an overwhelming success, with over 600 participants from around the State and the West Coast.
- The AWIB reviewed solicitations for regional training centers and forwarded the recommendations to Senator Stevens’ office.
- The first **WIA Annual Report** was submitted to US DOL in December 2001. Alaska’s report was deemed one of the best in the nation.

2002 Highlights & Accomplishments

- The board began a serious inquiry into the development of a workforce development information accumulation and sharing system (clearinghouse), to plan and detail the desired elements, to identify costs, and to negotiate agreements and understandings among the parties of interest to initiate the desired system.
- The board voted to adopt and enforce a **nationally recognized skill standard and industry certification program** within the following three-year time line:

- Current levels of service and gaps will be identified in the first year, while capacity among training providers is built and benchmark criteria are set.
- In the second year, the training providers must show their progress towards alignment to the skill standards and show improvement on benchmark data along with continued capacity building.
- In the third year, training providers must show progress towards alignment to skill standards and improvement in benchmark data and accountability measures.
- At the beginning of the fourth year, training providers must be aligned with individual skill standards and competencies and be at the acceptable benchmarking level in all accountability measures.
- The board adopted regulatory amendments to 8 AAC 84 and 8 AAC 86, to make specific AS 23.15.550, AS 23.15.580, AS 23.15.820 and AS 23.15.840.
- The board co-sponsored the second annual WIA conference. Again, it was an overwhelming success, with over 700 participants from around the State and the nation.
- The second WIA Annual Report was submitted to US DOL in December 2002.

2003 Highlights & Accomplishments

- **STEP Report** - in response to Senate Bill 252, which directed the Department of Labor & Workforce Development to submit a report on five elements of the State Training and Employment Program, the Board wrote *Report to the Legislature ~ The State Training and Employment Program*.
- The Board determined the **annual priority list for high-wage, high-demand occupations**;
- The board is modifying the State's Workforce Investment Act Unified Plan, which is up for reauthorization;
- The board continues its work on **Regional Training Centers**, and has identified specific recommendations to define and shape the envisioned centers;
- The board is working towards a solid alignment of economic development and workforce development;
- **Workforce Investment System** restructuring: the Governor signed Administrative Order #210, making Alaska a single workforce investment area with one board. The Legislature passed companion legislation, and on July 1, 2003 the AWIB became both the state and the local Workforce Investment Board, assuming the responsibilities of the Anchorage/Mat-Su Local Workforce Investment Board and the Balance of State Local Workforce Investment Board.
- **Regional Councils.** The board began work on setting up regional councils throughout the state, to ensure the "local" voice was not lost. Regional councils will assist the AWIB in determining workforce and economic

development needs in their areas, and will make recommendations to the board on investment decisions.