FUTURE-FOCUSED WORKFORCE BOARD BEHAVIORS

Data-Obsessed

Analyzing, Understanding, and Preparing for Change

AT A GLANCE

Workforce boards that collect and analyze a wealth of data are able to keep pace with and, in some cases, anticipate constantly changing regional dynamics.

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Future-focused workforce boards collect and analyze vast amounts of data to stay in front of emerging developments throughout their organizations, among their partners and training providers, and within their communities.

It's becoming increasingly difficult to anticipate and predict changes in the labor market. The rapid pace at which job functions are evolving and shifts in the way people are looking for and finding employment make it difficult to develop responsive on-demand services that meet the unique needs of today's learners and workers. Creating systems and infrastructure to collect accurate, reliable data across a wide range of services and operations helps future-focused workforce boards stay ahead of emerging trends, identify inefficiencies and areas for improvement, maximize organizational outcomes, and become economic leaders in their communities.

A data-obsessed approach to providing services is one of four future-focused behaviors identified by AWAKE, an initiative at JFFLabs that scans the workforce market and system to call attention to how workforce boards and professionals are evolving and adapting with advances in technology and data. These behaviors were vetted by a diverse group of workforce professionals from across the country to ensure they are reflective of the core characteristics, priorities, and commitments needed to prepare and transform America's workforce system to ensure that all workers and learners succeed.

The Opportunity

Data-obsessed organizations and leaders understand that stronger data not only leads to more informed, proactive decision making, but also increases relevance and visibility. They commit the time, resources, and expertise necessary to dive deeper into common measures outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and they find collaborative, innovative ways to collect or tap into supplemental regional data sources that lend insight to program and process improvement. These include, for example measurements of recidivism, crime, dropout rates, living wage levels, job quality, and homelessness. These organizations design and develop robust data infrastructures and also utilize data generated from digital tools used for service delivery and communication.

The opportunities that arise from becoming a trusted leader in data-driven insights include the ability to do the following:

- Serve as a premier data source for training providers and community-based organizations throughout the region and nationally

- Shape and improve new technologies, tools, and solutions based on lessons learned from previous trials

- Exert influence to inform regional investments and economic growth opportunities

- Facilitate systemwide alignment of success metrics through a common set of data elements and definitions that promote a shared mission and unified community-wide improvement goals

- Measure the impact of the workforce system on the region and tell a story that helps attract additional resources and growth opportunities

Data-obsessed organizations also typically share these characteristics:

- An interest in using data to increase accountability and improve performance across service sites

- An ongoing hunger for new insights and a preoccupation with the power and potential of data

- A data-driven mindset throughout the organization

Data obsession goes far beyond using software and systems to collect and analyze performance data. It includes focused analysis of demographic data, access and use patterns, and behavioral trends across all types of digital platforms to inform more customized and responsive service delivery and learning options.

"In order for workforce boards to demonstrate their value add within the workforce and economic development system, it is imperative that the same data sets are collected, with agreed upon definitions, to provide uniform information and exhibit that the impact of the workforce system is so much greater than what WIOA performance data shows."

— Kelly Folks

Arapahoe/Douglas Works!, Centennial, Colorado
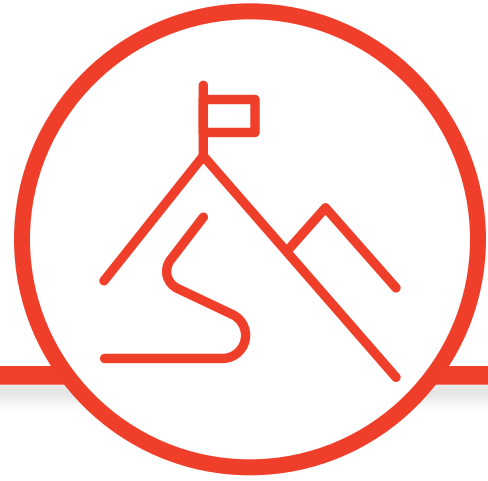
The Obstacles

Safe and accurate data collection and analysis comes with an inherent responsibility to ensure that proper security procedures are followed so that personal information is safeguarded in accordance with federal data privacy laws. In addition, the ability to design, develop, and implement a broadscale data infrastructure and integration process is an expensive and resource-heavy goal that many workforce boards find unattainable. The barriers and challenges to adopting the data-obsessed future-focused behavior vary across organizations and systems. Some hurdles are geographical, while others are technical or philosophical. *In speaking with workforce leaders across the country, AWAKE identified the following common challenges:*

- Employees of workforce boards often lack data literacy and do not have a strong understanding of what data their organizations need and how to access it

- Data definitions and metrics are inconsistent across partners, systems, and states

- Accountability to specific funding streams and dedicated reporting mechanisms delays organizations from making necessary data breakthroughs

- Publicly accessible data is outdated and is difficult to disaggregate to the local level

- WIOA metrics are not reflective of the full range of learning and work opportunities that are being created in today's economy

- Data-sharing capability depends heavily on local policy, personalities, and the status quo

Despite the challenges facing workforce boards everywhere, AWAKE found several examples of workforce boards and organizations whose obsession with data is helping them define progress and success as they strive to prepare for the changing dynamics of working and learning environments in their regions.

The Behavior in Action

Arapahoe/Douglas
WORKS!
Workforce Center

The Arapahoe/Douglas Works! Workforce Center in Centennial, Colorado, is committed not only to brokering necessary sharing agreements to gain access to critical data sets across its service region, but also to ensuring that all employees throughout the system are trained to interpret and consistently apply data outcomes to the work they do, both within and outside of Colorado. The workforce board prepares data reports at no cost to stakeholders, and it has also implemented a fee-for-service model to provide labor market analysis to partners and organizations that need more comprehensive reports, helping to make certain that the entire system is informed and has relevant information.

The Behavior in Action

The collaboration between Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas and the Dallas Regional Chamber has helped Dallas, Texas, become a national leader in workforce data analytics. Through the efforts of a dedicated research staff, the two organizations have established a collaborative approach to sharing, reporting, and presenting information. They are focused on providing stakeholders in the region with a consistent, reliable, and unified source of labor market and industry data.
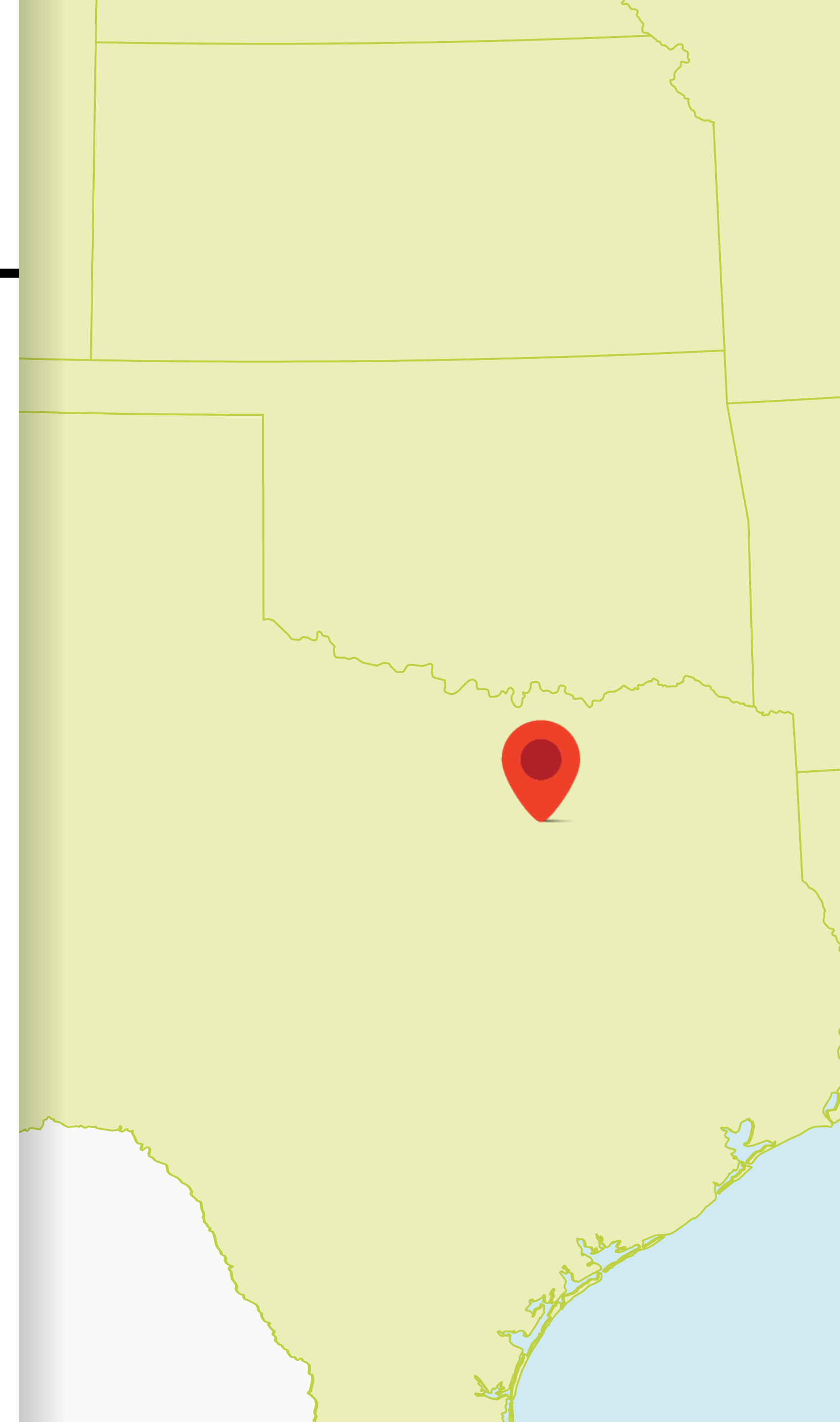
The Behavior in Action

Every year, the Center of Workforce Innovations, Inc. (CWI) in Valparaiso, Indiana, calculates its return on investment in terms of its financial impact on the region and the savings it helps stakeholders achieve. The organization also collaborates with education, economic development, and community partners to measure progress on raising the educational attainment rate in the region. Together, the partners collect and publish data annually on educational progress measurements such as K-12 graduation rates, college enrollment and completion rates, and credential attainment for adults over 25, focusing their efforts on the goal of building a workforce that achieves a 60 percent credential rate by 2025. In addition, in partnership with the private-sector regional economic development entity, CWI has recently established metrics to measure wage increases in Northwest Indiana. These are just a few examples of the ways CWI is using data to drive programs and initiatives leading to positive outcomes.
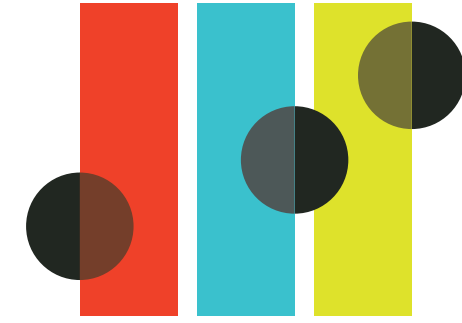
Taking the Next Step

Organizations that take a data-obsessed approach to their work are establishing themselves as invaluable sources of insight and information across the communities and states they serve. Some have more sophisticated and robust data infrastructures than others, but all of them emphasize the importance of regional collaboration to determine common goals and work toward achieving those goals. The AWAKE initiative aims to harness the power of networks and partnerships to move workforce boards toward a shared understanding of success and a viable way of measuring it across systems and states.

JFF encourages you to share this brief with your colleagues, board members, stakeholders, and others in order to take the next step toward building the data capacity necessary to become a compelling influencer within your region. Through a commitment to designing efficient data infrastructures and forging the partnerships necessary to tap into unconventional data sources, workforce boards can become sources of key insights that underpin regional economic growth.

Be sure to check out AWAKE's briefs about the three other future-focused behaviors—opportunity-oriented, human-centered, and tech-enabled— to learn more about the nature of these behaviors and how workforce organizations are practicing them nationwide.

AWAKE (the Advanced Workforce Analytics and Knowledge Exchange) partners with workforce boards, AJCs, and innovative entrepreneurs and investors to offer a responsive, comprehensive, and effective source of support for workers as they navigate complex career challenges. Through research sponsored by Google.org, this effort has identified key behaviors and characteristics of workforce organizations that are future-focused, innovative, and dedicated to transforming the way they can meet the changing needs of the workers and learners they serve.

The AWAKE initiative at JFFLabs aims to call attention to how workforce boards are evolving and examine how technology and data have shaped those adaptations. Through research conducted over the last 12 months, we have identified four behaviors and accompanying characteristics shared by workforce organizations that we believe are future-focused, innovative, and dedicated to transforming the way they work in order to better meet the needs of workers and learners in their regions.

AWAKE conducted structured interviews with workforce professionals from all across the country representing a diverse set of workforce boards and American Job Centers in rural, suburban, and urban locations. Interviews were held with 35 leaders from 26 unique workforce organizations in 16 states. These interviews yielded a clear set of characteristics shared by organizations committed to finding new and innovative ways of doing the following:

- Expanding their reach and influence through diversified funding and partnerships

- Building data literacy, capability, and capacity to make information more accessible

- Transforming cultures and operations to be more people-focused and locally-driven

- Integrating new technologies into both internal and external operations to increase effectiveness and efficiency

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