



FUTURE-FOCUSED WORKFORCE BOARD BEHAVIORS

Opportunity-Oriented

Imagining What Could Be, Not Accepting What Is

AT A GLANCE

Workforce boards that actively seek out new opportunities can increase their influence and expand the range of services available to their communities.

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Future-focused workforce boards have expansive visions of what they can achieve, and they pursue the resources and talent necessary to meet ambitious goals. They are aware of strategic opportunities to expand their influence at all levels across a diverse set of stakeholders.

Too often, workforce development boards place constraints on themselves based on the status quo, resource limitations, lack of capacity, and other hurdles. By burdening themselves with such barriers, which they may perceive to be insurmountable, workforce organizations may become incapable of reaching their potential as community leaders and drivers of innovation that power regional growth and development. Without the ability to open themselves up to new opportunities by envisioning what could be rather than accepting what is, workforce boards may not make the most of their capacity to be economic engines within their communities.

An opportunity-oriented approach to providing services is one of four future-focused behaviors identified by AWAKE. 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

Opportunity-oriented organizations and leaders find ways to increase their visibility, influence, and reach with an eye toward broadening the opportunities and services they help make available to people in their communities.

By expanding the lens through which they view what is needed and what they are capable of, workforce boards and American Job Centers (AJCs) open themselves up to exciting new opportunities to grow by taking steps such as these:

- Amplifying organizational goals through community-driven initiatives and collaborative partnerships
- Diversifying revenue sources and expanding offerings to include new programs and services, new learning opportunities, and new financing mechanisms
- Providing equitable access to information, tools, and services so that everyone entering the system can benefit
- Creating an entrepreneurial culture within the organization so that employees focus on what could be rather than what is

Opportunity-oriented organizations also typically do the following:

- Take a team-based approach to solving problems and achieving goals
- Understand that the path to success looks different for every organization
- Focus on diversification of tools, funding, and talent to improve internal operations as well as customer experiences

A drive to seek out and pursue new opportunities is a foundational attribute that encourages exploration and discovery and permits failure, thereby making other behaviors and actions possible. With an expansive vision that takes in all possibilities, an organization and its employees can develop a growth mindset that guides and drives community impact. And internally, they can build a culture that prioritizes teamwork and welcomes diverse viewpoints.



“The workforce board has always been an organization that strives for more than just WIOA funds, and there is a long-held expectation that the board is a community-based asset and is expected to behave as such.”

— Andrew McGough

Worksystems Inc., Portland, Oregon



The Obstacles

Many leaders of workforce organizations across the country candidly acknowledged that it's difficult to promote opportunity-oriented behavior throughout an organization. They cited challenges and barriers such as these:

- The status quo is extremely hard to overcome
- People are comfortable with what they understand and trust
- Turf wars still drive a lot of activities, particularly when organizations with minimal resources compete for money, visibility, and influence
- Inadequate infrastructures make it difficult to implement meaningful change
- Resources are not equally distributed across the country making it more challenging for some to access financial capital or recruit talent
- The prospect of experimenting and taking risks is daunting for publicly funded organizations, given the expectations they must fulfill and the degree to which they are scrutinized for the outcomes of their initiatives

Despite the challenges facing workforce boards everywhere, AWAKE found several examples of organizations whose willingness to take an opportunity-oriented approach to their work is helping them push for progress and reach new heights as they prepare for the future of work.



The Behavior in Action



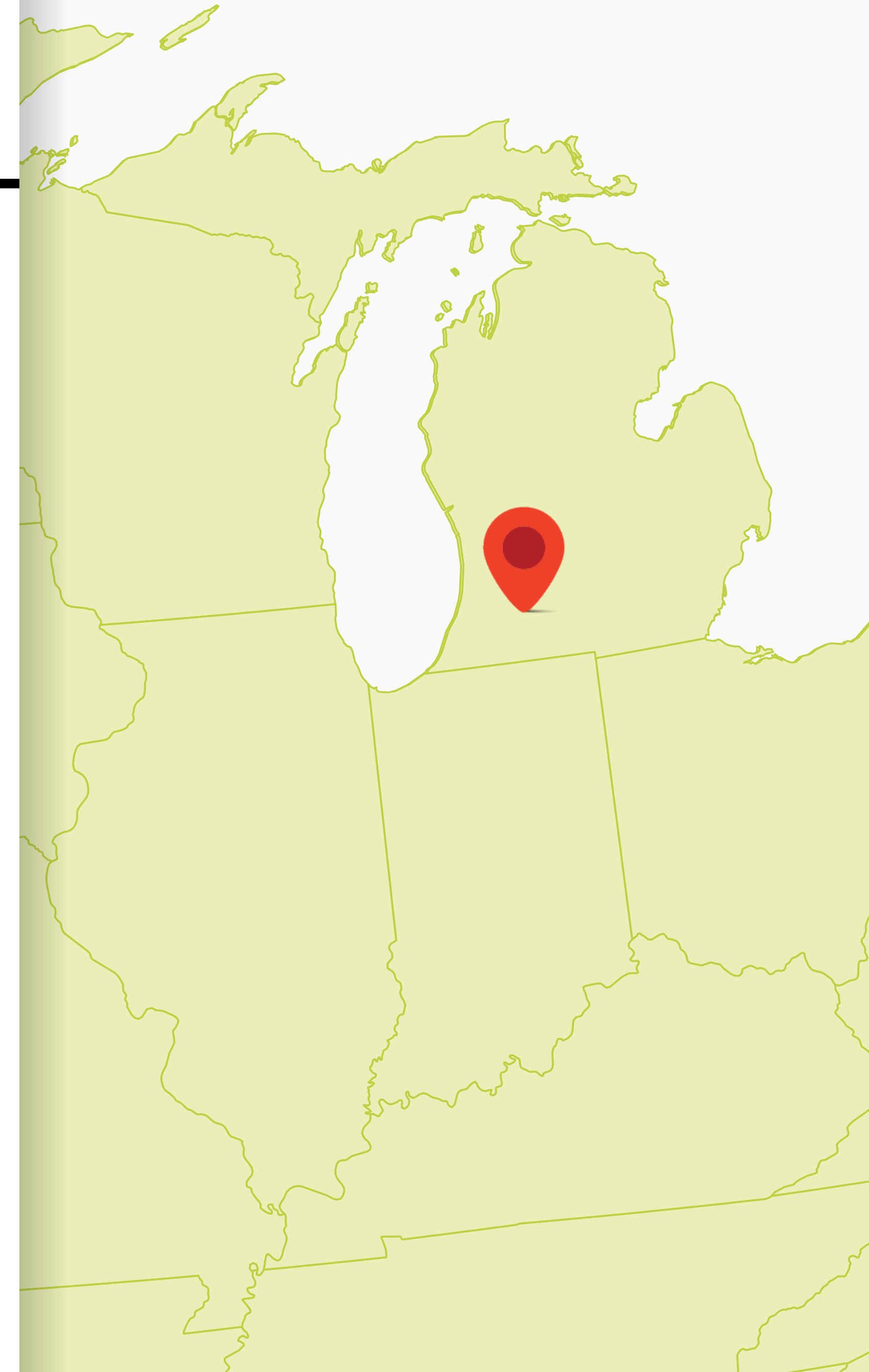
The San Diego Workforce Partnership is combining flexible funding streams and technologies to provide comprehensive supports to the reentry and homeless populations, offer online learning to all career center clients, adopt innovative funding models (such as income-share agreements) for quality credentials, and provide career coaching services to high school students. In addition, the organization has a lineup of fee-for-service offerings that includes labor market research, career coaching for K-12 teachers, and informational sessions to promote inclusive hiring practices and help businesses prepare for the future of work.

The Behavior in Action

W.E. UPJOHN
INSTITUTE
FOR EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH

The W.E. Upjohn Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan, offers a broad range of effective programs and services, and it attributes its success in part to its history of being a lab for innovation with a board that's supportive of trying cutting-edge ideas.

Among other things, the institute collects and analyzes many more types of data than the common measures outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and it is part of an extensive peer-to-peer learning network that includes other Michigan workforce and economic development agencies.



The Behavior in Action



Worksystems, the Portland Metro Workforce Development Board, views its WorkSource onestop centers not as the be-all and end-all, but rather as hubs to support the work of regional community-based organizations. A universal enrollment model allows Worksystems to outsource career coaching and case management to a network of partners. The workforce board and the one-stop centers have defined relationships with 30+ community-based organizations (CBOs) that offer culturally responsive and population specific services and tackle issues such as housing, criminal justice, child care, homelessness, and community health. Worksystems train personnel at the CBOs to deliver career-focused case management and set-aside resources within the WorkSource system to support CBO customers when they are ready to pursue occupational training. This shared customer approach expands the services available to regional job seekers and improves the accessibility and effectiveness of the regional one-stop system. This model has attracted additional funders, including the City of Portland, Multnomah and Washington counties and offers the framework to build a more equitable, coordinated and adaptive workforce development system.

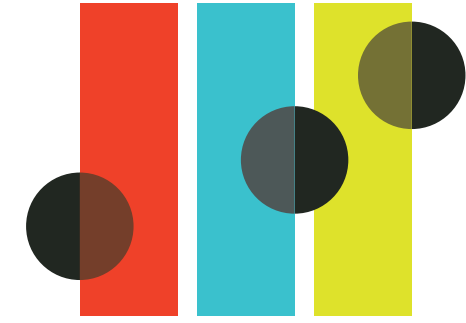


Taking the Next Step

Opportunity-oriented leaders and organizations are helping to usher in a new era of service delivery and operations at workforce boards and AJCs across the country. They may not have all of the answers as to how the U.S. workforce system must evolve and transform in order to effectively support all types of workers and learners in the new economy, but they are finding creative ways to experiment, fail forward, and engage in disruptive conversations about how the workforce system can keep up with the pace of change.

JFF encourages you to share this brief with your colleagues, board members, stakeholders, and others as a way to take the next step toward building an opportunity-oriented culture that's driven by expansive vision. Only through expanded awareness of the behaviors profiled here, and with a commitment to pursuing the resources and talent necessary to stimulate change, will our nation's workforce system be able to keep pace with the evolution of work and learning.

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



JFFLABS

AWAKE

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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 JFF Labs 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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