



- I. Title: Workforce Development: An Appeal to Youth Entering the Workforce

- II. Introduction:

The US Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014. The purpose was to strengthen the United States workforce development system through innovation in employment training and education programs, with the hope that this would promote economic growth. Virginia's Governor has created a board for Workforce Development in agreement with the Act. The Virginia Board of Workforce Development is a business-led board that acts as the principal advisor to the Governor and provides strategic leadership to the state regarding the workforce development system and its efforts to create a strong workforce aligned with employer needs. However, there is no standard for Workforce Development practice programs in Virginia, which means that there are many distinct programs and entities attempting to solve issues surrounding workforce development in the Richmond region.

- III. Journey: Scope of Work

Our immersion team began working as soon as our topic was assigned, gathering information to quickly figure out when we and how we should meet as a group and how we would tackle interviewing experts in workforce development. We agreed to meet every other week, virtually, alternating meetings from noon to 6 pm to accommodate different schedules, and to use as much time in class meetings as possible. In our first few meetings, we discussed what workforce development meant to us. We each had a different reason for joining this team and a different lens through which to view workforce development issues. We brainstormed more than 20 interview questions and decided to divvy up the interviews we wanted to conduct. We had more than 10 people from different backgrounds and businesses across the region to interview. Most were done one on one, tracking notes, key takeaways, and group meetings on a Google Doc. We heard during several interviews that employers were having difficulty reaching young people with their programs. This made us hold a listening session with thirty 15-25-year-olds to gauge their experience with and knowledge of workforce development programs and challenges. We used the information we gathered to narrow down the project topic, deciding to focus on youth entering the workforce. Our group was unanimous when deciding on this direction for the project. As we neared the presentation date, we divided our group in two to ensure we were able to finish our project on time. We continued to track both groups' meeting notes in Google Docs and met as a full group when possible. This enabled us to keep on track and ensure we were all on the same page for the final project.

IV. Findings:

A. Needs/Problems/Issues:

From the interviews and research, we learned that there are many programs for workforce development, but there is also a lack of connection between the programs and a lack of general awareness about these programs from job seekers. We learned about programs that companies had built to help recruit new employees and help attract talent. We learned what groups like United Way, the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services, and the Community College Workforce Alliance are doing to help people get prepared for work and work with employers. This is a complicated subject with many different moving parts. Although it is complicated, we learned there are two audiences when talking about workforce development -- the employer and the job seeker. Narrowing the topic down was difficult, but the youth spoke to issues we felt needed attention. Not only did we find that each school system has a different workforce development program, but even individual schools within the same locality. Students we spoke to who attended the same schools all had different experiences in workforce development. In general, the youth seemed to have been left fending for themselves when it came to learning soft skills needed for employment.

B. Key Learning Points

1. At the December 7th session on *DesignThinking*, the presenter Zane Gibbs talked about knowing your end user and what they want. Our group left that session thinking about who the end user of these workforce development programs is and who they target. This led us to focus on the end user - the job seeker. We had not yet talked to anyone entering the workforce, only those running the workforce development programs. This is where the idea surfaced to meet and interview youth directly.
2. On January 17th, we held a Youth Speak session at Hickory Hill Community Center. Jerrod set this event up with the Mayor's Academy students and those who had gone through his workforce development program in Richmond Parks and Recreation. We took the questions that we developed for the businesses and adjusted them for this audience. There were around 30 young people that attended this session from the ages 15-25. We split our group into groups of 2 and divided the students amongst us to have smaller, meaningful groups.
3. These facilitated small group discussions were extremely meaningful and vital to our discovery and project. We realized the youth did not know the term "workforce development," and that they each had different experiences in their life around work, job exploration, and what they were

or were not exposed to in school. Our group met a week after the session after we had time to type notes on our experiences in these small meetings and to digest what we learned. We learned from the youth that they believed that they lacked basic work readiness skills and that their schools did not properly prepare them for how to get a job. They did not know how to navigate looking for a job, how to prepare for an interview, what tax forms to fill out, or how to be successful in their first job. They also did not use Google, Facebook, and Indeed as much as individuals from different age groups. They use TikTok to get information -- even to conduct internet searches. From this debrief as a group, we quickly decided to focus our project on people entering the workforce, specifically ages 15-25. We decided we wanted to create a resource site to host information on these soft skills that the youth felt they were lacking in school. We also decided we wanted to capture engaging and compelling resources on these workforce development programs targeting youth in our defined age range.

V. Recommendation and Call to Action:

We created [WorkReadyRVA.com](https://www.workreadyrva.com). This site was created to be a resource for youth on how to become work ready. The purpose of the website is *“Get you ready for work in RVA. Everything you need to prepare for your first/next job in RVA.”* The website has four main sections: get hired; get ready; get paid; and get informed. We specifically used TikTok, videos, and images that this age group could relate to and were able to have some of the youth we met help with the TikTok videos. These videos span topics like how to apply for a job, write a resume, prepare for an interview, and fill out tax forms to get paid. We wanted this to be a site the youth could use as a reference and to help them prepare for work and to start them off successfully in a new job. We included a section on the website for all the workforce development programs that we had researched or became known to us. This site is meant to help young people entering the workforce quickly access and learn soft skills needed for successful employment. We realize that this is a site that will need to be maintained and updated from time to time. Ultimately we would love to partner with an organization to take this site over well after LMR and continue to update and add content to further the resources offered to youth. We will disseminate the site to the youth that we met at our listening session, all the organizations that we interviewed, and our LMR community and personal networks.

VI. Sources:

A. Interviews:

1. Trish Morrison, Director of Apprenticeship - Virginia Department of Labor & Industry
2. Beth Weisbrod, Vice President Talent & Workforce - Chamber RVA
3. Heather McKay, Executive Director Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE) - Virginia Economic Development Partnership
4. Bill Fiege, Vice President of Learning and Student Success - Brightpoint Community College
5. John Dougherty - Network2Work
6. Chris Martin/Kristen Ballard-SOAR365 Workforce Development
7. Jim Wilson, VP of Education and Workforce Development, Virginia Restaurant Lodging & Travel Association
8. Elizabeth Creamer, VP of Workforce Development at Virginia Community College System
9. Tasha El-Amin Community Outreach Coordinator Boys & Girls Club of Metro Richmond
10. Anna Danese, Director of Workforce Partnerships, United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg
11. University of Richmond's UR Well
12. Legal Aid Justice Center
13. Youth Session

B. References:

1. <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/58347>
2. <https://vcwcapital.com/resources/>
3. <https://vachamber.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/20211110-VACOC-BP-VA2030-FINAL.pdf>
4. <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:47045c5e-2e5e-3d32-ba05-fb8563ef3bef>
5. [13 charts that show jobs, unemployment and workforce data for Richmond and Virginia](#)
6. [Workforce Development Initiative: Request for Proposal | ConnectVA](#)
7. https://www.richmondfed.org/research/regional_economy/regional_matters/2022/rm_12_01_2022_hiring_wages?utm_source=Federal+Reserve+Bank+of+Richmond&utm_campaign=a718c65370-AOD_12_06_2022&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f56b5f06b6-a718c65370-114401860
8. [Virginia Workforce Connection](#)

C. Group Members:

Bridget Aman, Jerrod Booker, Meghan Harris, Toni Jackson, Emily Lehmann,
Cameron McPherson, Erika Payne, Tyler Sinsabaugh, Tracey van Marcke,
Sheba Williams