



In 2022, the business community pointed to a workforce problem: there was no single workforce development owner. Workforce development and deployment is within over 30 agencies through programming or mission. Because of the number of agencies involved in workforce development somehow, Oklahoma has no strategic plan to develop the right type of workforce needed for industry. This prompted the creation of the Oklahoma Workforce Commission.

This new Commission was formed in 2023 by Senate Bill 621. Its purpose is to be the central location for a coordinated workforce development plan for Oklahoma. The Commission is comprised of nine private-sector business leaders. The stated mission of the Commission is “to coordinate the development of the workforce needed to grow Oklahoma’s economy and Oklahomans prosperity.” [40 O.S. 902](#).

The Workforce Commission has authority to receive a variety of revenue streams, including federal, state and private funds. This is unique in state government and affords the Commission the ability to encourage collaboration across a variety of stakeholders and agencies. With the help of statewide data that points to workforce development needs, programmatic solutions can be implemented if strong investments are made by the state.

Other states that have similarly situated workforce organizations use Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funding to implement programming. [The Kentucky Education and Workforce Collaborative](#) is a division of the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board, the entity that receives the state’s WIOA funding. The Collaborative accomplishes some of the functions that Oklahoma’s Workforce Commission could accomplish.

## State Longitudinal Data System

A state longitudinal data system (SLDS) is the first step in aligning and coordinating workforce development for the state. An SLDS “connects statewide information from early childhood through K-12 education, postsecondary education, and the workforce.” ([DQC-SLDA-Fact Sheet](#)) Connecting these data points will offer policymakers a fuller picture of what interventions and programs set students up for success in the workplace. An SLDS can also provide correlations between educational intervention implementation and the success of those interventions.

Oklahoma is [one of nine states](#) that have made no progress in creating an SLDS. Many states received federal funding to assist in the process. Utah’s SLDS is housed at the [Utah Data Research Center](#), where The Utah Department of Commerce, The Utah Department of Health, The Utah Department of Workforce Services, The Utah System of Higher Education, and The Utah State Board of Education integrate their data to create key insights for the state. These insights include the benefit of stacking credentials and degrees, high school course-taking patterns and their effects on college readiness, workforce retention of graduates, and more. These insights will help drive policy solutions for interventions that work.

## Industry Oriented Solutions

An SLDS system can also help indicate gaps in skills needed for the future based on the skills and credentials being pursued compared to what industry growth there is in the state. The Workforce Commission can then play a pivotal role in determining what education or credential-granting programs are needed in the state to fill the gap.

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that Oklahoma needed nurses. So, through the ARPA funding process, nurse programs were created or increased in capacity. With proper data and coordination, The Workforce Commission will be able to foresee workforce problems like these and formulate a plan to address with the proper stakeholder.

Moreover, The Workforce Commission will be able to nimbly be responsive to businesses' needs and create a plan to fulfill those needs. While this may be accomplished currently, it is on a smaller scale. The Commission could increase the effectiveness of the conversations and have a statewide impact.

