

Idaho Rebounds – Upskilling for the Future of Work

Objective

As of May 22, 2020, 102,975 Idahoans were unemployed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the majority are job attached and expect to go back to their employers, there is an opportunity to hone or learn new skills, aligned to Idaho's employers' needs, while they wait. For those who won't go back to their employer, starting a training program sooner, rather than when their unemployment benefits expire will assist in Idaho's recovery efforts.

The Workforce Development Council (WDC), and its partners in the workforce system and education, propose to stand up a workforce training component to Idaho Rebounds that provides targeted, short-term training to individuals impacted by COVID-19 at no cost. Training will be aligned to employers needs and curated primarily from Idaho institutions.

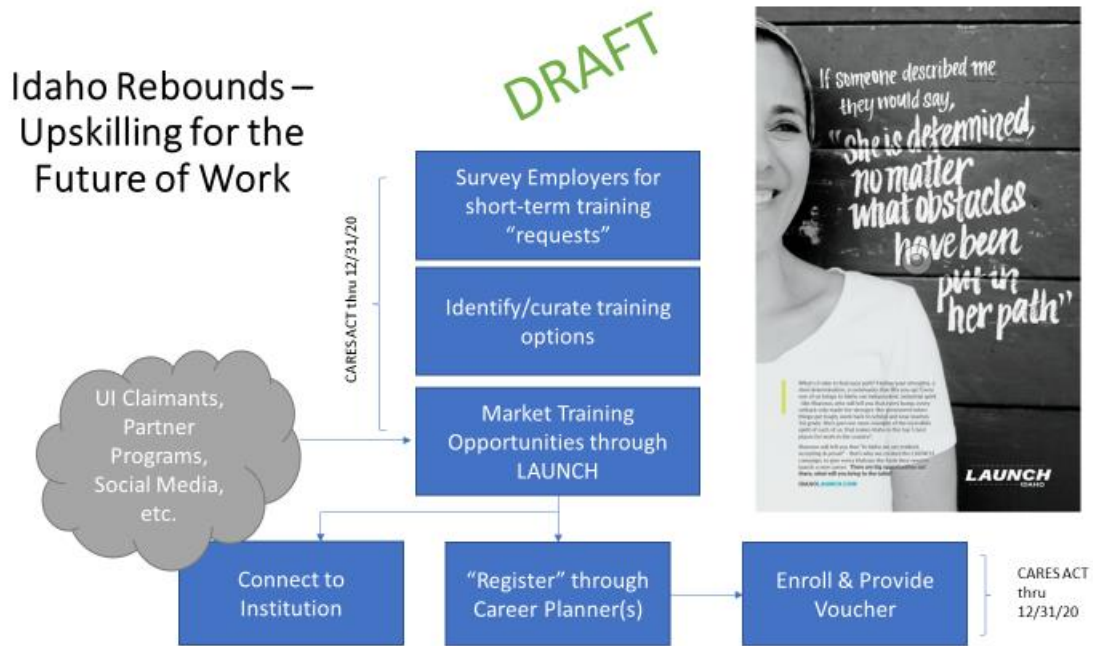
The WDC has been working on two initiatives that can be leveraged to stand up this skills training program relatively quickly. The first is *Idaho LAUNCH* – a marketing campaign that was designed to encourage Idahoans, with a focus on those under 40, to take advantage of existing training opportunities that lead to in-demand jobs in their region of the state. idaholaunch.com has been built and the WDC was just beginning to test the messaging before kicking off a social media campaign as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded. The messaging (*examples below*) would not need significant modifications to pivot to support this effort:

- *"She is determined, no matter what obstacles have been put in her path"*
- *"Being open to the flow of things allows me to adjust my job and try new things"*
- *"Created to give every Idahoan the tools they need to launch a new career."*

The second initiative is the creation of a new policy under the Workforce Development Training Fund. In January, the WDC discussed the need to fill a gap for individuals who want to pursue additional education and training; but either the training program does not qualify for federal financial aid, or the individual does not qualify for support under the traditional workforce system programs. The Policy Committee had already started working on a framework to provide financial assistance to these individuals and has now prioritized bringing the recommendation to the WDC for approval in July. In addition, WDC staff have been working across 10 agencies to identify a list of high-quality industry-recognized credentials that employers are seeking through their job postings to direct the assistance to developing the specific skills that Idaho's employers are requesting.

These two initiatives will be enhanced by employer data regarding the specific skills they need individuals to develop as the recovery progresses. A survey of Idaho employers will be conducted with an emphasis on regional needs and those skills will be mapped to training opportunities – first targeting existing programs at Idaho's institutions and then curating opportunities where there are gaps. The results will be integrated into a search tool on the Launch platform, and a marketing campaign will drive

Idahoans impacted by COVID-19 to the site. This will include direct marketing, in partnership with the Department of Labor, Health & Welfare, Vocational Rehabilitation and other workforce partners to individuals who are receiving unemployment benefits, food stamps, cash assistance and other supports. Individuals will be connected to the training provider and a Idaho Department of Labor Career Planner who will assess their eligibility for workforce programs (which could provide additional support beyond just the training), make referrals to other agencies if appropriate, and provide a voucher for the cost of the training program. The benefit to leveraging the existing infrastructure through IDOL are twofold. First, other federal program dollars that can support the training will be accessed before spending CARES Act and/or state Workforce Development Training Funds; and second, the institutions are already familiar with receiving vouchers from IDOL to pay for the training which means the funds will not be directly distributed to the individuals.



Comparable state programs have been launched in Maine and Connecticut. A nearly identical program is being launched in Utah on June 1. A quick comparison of the programs to our proposed model is included below:

State	Type of Training Provided	Are Training Costs Paid?	Other Considerations
Idaho	We would be deploying a version of the survey modeled after Utah's program version and map specific training opportunities against the results.	Yes. We would leverage existing federal program funds to pay for most of the training costs. For those individuals who are not eligible, training costs would be covered by CARES Act fund until 12/31/2020 and by the Workforce Development Training Fund afterwards.	Our program leverages existing initiatives and programs into a model that can continue beyond the current crisis.
Utah	Specific courses that have been curated in alignment to the "short-term skill development priorities" that were identified in a survey of Utah employers.	No. The training that is being curated is requiring the institution to provide some sort of "incentive" in order to be on the site. It can be as simple as a waived application fee, a percentage off, or free first course.	Target individuals are not in a position to pay the cost of training. In addition, putting pressure on our institutions to offer discounts at this time is problematic given their budget issues.
Maine	Online training courses offered through the Maine Quality Centers (similar to Idaho's Workforce Training Centers at NIC, LCSC, CWI, CSI, ISU and CEI)	Yes.	Leverages an existing program that provided workforce training grants to employers by waiving requirements to allow maximum flexibility in responding to COVID-19. It appears that the training offered will be highly aligned to employer needs.
Connecticut	Online training through the SkillsSoft platform. Approximately 5,000 courses – some of which are arranged into skills tracks and career pathways.	Yes. Each individual is provided with a 180-day unlimited access license to the platform.	While the breadth of options is significant, there is not alignment to what CT employers are "asking" for. They intend to enhance the offering to show that type of alignment, but it is very much a free-choice model.

Implementation

Approximately 8-9 weeks after project approval, the program will be ready to market to Idahoans. The WDC will engage Strategies 360 (under our existing contract, which was procured with the support of the Division of Purchasing) to conduct the survey, map the training opportunities, enhance the *Idaho LAUNCH* platform to support the initiative and implement the communications/marketing plan.

Note: Strategies 360 will subcontract the survey and mapping of training programs to the firm that is building Utah's platform to speed up delivery so that they can simultaneously enhance the platform and prepare the marketing collateral.

The WDC's partners will be engaged as follows:

- Employers/Industry Associations, Commerce, College Technical Advisory Committees, IDOL, etc. – assist with disseminating the survey to employers.
- State Board of Education, Idaho Career & Technical Education – assist with mapping training opportunities and vetting them to ensure quality.
- Idaho Department of Labor, Department of Health & Welfare, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Idaho Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired, Department of Corrections (reentry program), Commission on Aging, and Commission for Libraries – assist with developing communications/marketing plans to target their participants.

Anticipated Reach

As this is a new initiative, there are no existing metrics to use in estimating the number of Idahoans that may take advantage of the training opportunities. Connecticut launched their program on May 4 (following a pilot in one region of the state which started April 1) and shared the following statistics:

Emails delivered to UI claimants between May 4 and May 17	130,886
Self-service registrations	6,069
Registrations/delivered emails	4.6%
# of site logins	12,061
# of courses completed	2,448

Connecticut's program offers access to a library of over 5,000 courses – thus the 4.6% “participation rate” is on the extreme high end of what Idaho could expect. Our program will be targeted towards a smaller set of offerings that are highly aligned to employer needs, meaning that their appeal may not be as apparent to everyone. If we apply a rate of 2.5% to our 102,975 UI claimants, we might anticipate over 2,500 participants.

Cost Estimates (note – all line items are fluid and may be adjusted within the approved budget)

Start Date – December 31, 2020

Item	Amount	Description
Survey & Skills/Workforce Training Taxonomy	\$212,500	Conduct statewide survey of employers to identify desired skills and map training opportunities that will be provided under the program. Managed by Strategies 360 and subcontracted to Cicero Group.
Updates to <i>Idaho LAUNCH</i> to connect Idahoans to Short-Term Training	\$75,000	Develop new data-driven functionality within existing site. Provided by Strategies 360, under an existing contract with WDC.
Marketing of <i>Idaho LAUNCH</i>	\$200,000	Develop and implement a marketing campaign to inform Idahoans of the opportunities and connect them to the training. Provided by Strategies 360, under an existing contract with WDC.
Assessment, Approval & Providing Training Vouchers	\$31,250	\$50 per person to assess the eligibility of individuals who end up not qualifying for WIOA programs (estimated at 25% of anticipated participants). Provided by IDOL.
SharePoint Site Development to track participants	\$5,000	Development of an internal database to track participants so that employment outcomes can be tracked. Provided by IDOL.
Training for Workforce System Partners	\$20,000	Development and implementation of training for workforce system partners.
*Training cost for those falling into a gap	\$456,250	Pool of funds that can be supplemented with state workforce development training fund resources once depleted.
Total	\$1,000,000	

*As noted previously, most individuals interested in the training are going to qualify for services through the existing workforce programs so the actual cost of training to the CARES Act will be low.

Beyond January 1, 2021

- Ongoing marketing costs will be integrated into the allocation approved by the WDC in July. Anticipate \$250,000 for FY21.
- Training vouchers for individuals not qualifying for other federal program support will be covered by the WDTF Short-term Financial Assistance funding.

Questions

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