

Policy and Implementation Opportunities

From scholarships to competitive grant programs, the five states examined in this paper took different approaches to Governors’ signature workforce investments. However, certain practices consistently emerged as enablers of program success across design and delivery. The tables below (Table 14 and 15) synthesize those policy opportunities and promising implementation practices across key themes. They reflect patterns observed across multiple states and were drawn from interviewee responses to the question: what advice would you give to other states considering investing in their own signature workforce initiative?

The following practices are offered not as a prescriptive checklist, but as a menu of opportunities for Governors to consider. The tables are intended to serve as a starting point for teams who are designing or refining state workforce investments and want to draw on learnings from peer states. Interviewees also emphasized the importance of building on existing state strengths and the uniqueness of each state’s context. The justifications and examples are included to support that contextual judgment.

Table 14: **Policy Opportunities to Shape Investments in Workforce Development**

Policy Opportunity	Justification	Example(s)
Program Design		
Use data to inform key targets e.g., sectors, populations, regions	Targets funding toward areas of highest need.	MN used labor market information to identify priority occupation clusters. ID developed a data-driven methodology to create its LAUNCH in-demand occupations list.
Engage employers as co-designers from the outset	Supports labor market alignment.	ID engaged employers through its Workforce Development Council to shape credential priorities.
Define minimum quality and content standards for funded training programs e.g., provider criteria, industry-recognized credentials, stackable credits, integration of foundational or durable skills components	Without guardrails, funds risk subsidizing training that does not improve participants’ long-term prospects.	WY and MA restricted eligibility to accredited public higher education institutions. MN required industry-recognized certifications or credits towards an associate’s degree.
Build collaboration requirements into grant design from the start e.g., across institutions, regions, employers	Designing in partnership requirements from the start builds ecosystems that persist beyond the grant period.	ND required regional coordination across grantees and formal employer partnerships. MN required employer collaboration and WY required collaboration across colleges.

Policy Opportunity	Justification	Example(s)
Consider recruitment and wraparound support costs	Deliberately investing in recruitment and retention ensures the program covers end-to-end elements of success.	MA and WY invested in state-led marketing initiatives. MA provided \$100,000 in start-up support to colleges, which many used for recruitment efforts, and has identified a need for further wraparound services. MN's community partners expanded access to broader talent pools and provided a range of wraparound supports.
Consider piloting before scaling	Piloting surfaces design problems and builds operational capacity at manageable scale.	MA's MassReconnect eligibility was 25+ before broadening. ID implemented Adult LAUNCH before expanding to graduating high school seniors.
Invest in pre-launch planning and provide adequate runway to grantees before applications open	Rushed timelines can produce under-resourced proposals and costly mid-implementation corrections.	Program teams and grantees across states described rollout timelines as ambitious. Advice converged on ideally 6-12 months of pre-launch planning for the program team and 6-12 months advance notice for grantees.
Governance		
Assess agency strengths and align implementation responsibilities to goals	The right institutional home shapes orientation and effectiveness.	States made deliberate choices. ID and WY placed the implementation team in proximity to the Governor's Office. MN housed Drive for 5 in DEED, ND established RWIP under DOC, and MA placed MassReconnect under EOE.
Leverage workforce system infrastructure and expertise	Building on established systems brings existing relationships, legitimacy, and administrative capacity. Alignment across agencies also helps avoid program duplication and ensure programs are additive.	ID leveraged its Workforce Development Council and MA its Workforce Skills Cabinet. WY designed its steering committee with cross-agency representation.
Funding		
Provide planning grants	Dedicated planning time can produce better-designed programs—stronger partnerships, more defined outcomes, and more realistic implementation plans—before funds are committed at scale.	Grantees across programs expressed interest in having had a planning grant. ND moved to a sector strategies approach in Phase 3, which functioned as a planning grant before implementation funding.
Leverage and integrate federal funding sources	Maximize resources and reduce program costs.	WY and ND used ARPA as seed funding. MA leveraged Pell eligibility to reduce per-student state cost. ID also encouraged participants to apply for federal aid.
Ensure grantees have "skin in the game" e.g., match funding, cost sharing	Skin-in-the-game requirements strengthen commitment and accountability. However, these requirements should also be calibrated to avoid deterring participation.	ND's 25% match helped ensure local buy-in and was seen as a balanced threshold, though some grantees in rural regions encountered challenges. ID required 20% personal contribution with LAUNCH covering up to 80% of tuition and fees.

Policy Opportunity	Justification	Example(s)
Design funding structures to promote equitable access e.g., regional allocations, reserved set-asides	Without explicit provisions, competitive funding may concentrate among better-resourced applicants.	ND used regional funding allocations based on population to ensure all parts of the state—regardless of size—had access to funding.
Front-load high-cost startup expenses	Grant funding should be directed towards capital-intensive launch costs. Programs should be designed so that ongoing costs can be sustained through local or earned revenue once grant funds expire.	ND’s funding covered major up-front costs—such as purchasing a mobile unit and establishing child care facilities including initial staffing—reducing barriers to launch and positioning grantees to generate ongoing revenue or secure local funding.
Aim for flexibility in fund disbursement to accommodate implementation variability e.g., carryover authority, reallocation across grantees, expenditure flexibility	Rigid appropriations cycles create artificial pressure to spend or close projects. Legislative flexibility allows programs to adapt.	ND and WY requested carryover of state funds across bienniums, which helped projects adjust to delays, changing costs, and evolving implementation realities.
Metrics and Accountability		
Define success from the outset and select metrics aligned to those definitions	Defining outcomes upfront creates a shared basis for accountability and makes continuous improvement measurable.	WY began requiring applicants to commit to a metrics framework before funds were awarded. MN’s \$25/hour wage benchmark anchored program design and employer behavior from the outset.
Build in data collection from launch	Programs that collect data from launch produce more credible evidence and are better positioned to course-correct and make the case for continued funding.	Stakeholders across states emphasized building in data collection requirements early and continuously improving systems over time.
Tie funding disbursement to milestone completion or data submission	Phased disbursement can incentivize milestone completion or data collection more reliably than reporting requirements alone.	ND allowed grantees to set their own milestones, disbursing funds in phases tied to progress. MN withheld a job quality incentive until the \$25/hour wage outcome was met. MA stakeholders noted that tying payment tranches to data submission drives reporting compliance.

Source: Authors’ synthesis based on interviews and program documents.

Table 15: **Promising Practices for Successful Implementation**

Promising Practice	Justification	Example(s)
Program Delivery		
Build a strong implementation team	Understaffed implementations create accountability gaps, slow grantee support, and make mid-course corrections difficult.	Interviewees noted capacity challenges, reflecting on experiences transitioning part-time or temporary staff to full-time.
Use standardized application systems to streamline review, involving end users in design	Inconsistent or complex systems create review inefficiencies.	ND’s transition from email submissions to a portal improved application consistency. ID involved financial aid directors from partner institutions in platform design to ensure it met institutional needs.
Provide clear, accessible guidance to applicants and update proactively when requirements change	Grantees cannot meet requirements they do not fully understand. Clear and current guidance is foundational to successful implementation.	ND provided centralized resources (e.g., FAQ, webinars) and saw a need for more communication as program requirements changed. MN required updated FAQs throughout the open RFP period.
Provide targeted support to new grantees e.g., options for onboarding and technical assistance	First-time grantees may submit under-resourced proposals and struggle with compliance. Issues can compound across the grant lifecycle.	First-time grantees across states described wanting more structured onboarding and additional resources to support compliance.
Establish regular grantee convenings This serves a variety of purposes: e.g., facilitate relationship-building, share best practices, collect feedback, and communicate changes	Implementation problems surface faster and solutions spread more quickly when grantees have structured peer-learning channels alongside direct access to program staff.	WY held monthly industry-based working group meetings.
Sustainability		
Invest in impact communication and stakeholder awareness e.g., published reports, campaigns, press, direct policymaker engagement	Proactive communication builds political will, sustains stakeholder support, and strengthens the case for continued investment.	WY phase reports were cited as important for sustaining Governor and legislative support. ND legislators heard about RWIP directly from constituents, strengthening appropriations advocacy.
Maintain visible Governor commitment throughout the initiative	Consistent leadership signals durability to grantees, employers, and partners.	WY stakeholders noted that the Governor’s visible ownership and the Governor’s Office institutional home were essential signals to all partners.

Source: Authors’ synthesis based on interviews and program documents.