

STATE LEADER SPOTLIGHT

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Ryan Wold leads the Workforce Digital Products team, overseeing major initiatives that improve access to workforce services, career exploration, training opportunities, and data-driven decision-making. He is responsible for Minnesota's labor exchange, eligible training providers list (ETPL) modernization, and contributes to data transformation efforts and emerging AI initiatives aimed at enhancing workforce system performance and customer experience.

Key Takeaways for States

- ✓ **Establish clear priorities early.** Successful modernization begins with leadership alignment around who the primary customer is and consistently reinforcing that vision throughout the project.
- ✓ **Design around users.** Prioritizing the job seeker experience can create broader value for employers and workforce partners while simplifying difficult product decisions.
- ✓ **AI requires both technical understanding and policy leadership.** Workforce leaders should actively experiment with AI while also defining the values and goals that should guide its use.
- ✓ **Technology decisions are policy decisions.** AI tools should reflect transparent workforce priorities rather than simply optimizing for technical capability.
- ✓ **Learn from other states.** Leveraging peer networks through programs like Workforce Information Technology Support Center (WITSC) helps states avoid reinventing solutions and accelerates modernization efforts.

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Read the full interview on the following pages.

FULL INTERVIEW

Strategy & Leadership

1. Minnesota has invested in workforce website modernization, ETPL improvements, data transformation, and emerging technologies. As you look across these initiatives, what factors have been most important in setting priorities and ensuring modernization efforts align with the needs of job seekers, employers, and workforce partners?

One major contributor to the success of our labor exchange replacement project was setting clear priorities at the beginning. We knew we didn't have enough resources to provide the best possible features and user experience for every group of stakeholders. At the beginning of the project, we had tough conversations and made the decision that, for this project, we were going to prioritize the needs of job seekers. We made the decision, documented it, and then I included a slide reminding everyone of that decision in every presentation I gave related to the project for the last three years. Everyone from the Commissioner's Office to the front-line staff and the technical team were aligned on that decision. By making the decision one time, we didn't have to renegotiate our priorities every single day. For example, at a design review meeting, we never had to debate whether the button for job seekers or for employers should have a more prominent placement. We bet that if we make a site that lots of job seekers use, then the employers and the workforce partners will want to use it too.

Future of AI & Data

2. As states explore artificial intelligence and advanced analytics, what opportunities do you believe have the greatest potential to improve workforce service delivery, and what considerations should leaders keep in mind when adopting these technologies?

I think effective AI implementation depends on leaders engaging with two things:

- The tactical details of how AI works and what it can do: We can't help prepare job seekers for an AI future if we aren't using it ourselves. So, I think everyone in the workforce space should be experimenting and pushing themselves to understand how AI can affect their own work.
- The big picture discussions about the priorities of their workforce development system: The opportunities presented by AI require states to get clear about the goals of their workforce development system. For example, people often request that the sites I manage have an AI feature that automatically recommends "the best job" for a job seeker. That sounds like something AI should be good at (analyzing a large data set of jobs and making an unintuitive match with a person's interests and skills), but the government building a tool that tells a job seeker what job is best for them is a values-based proposition. Should such a tool be optimized to get people a job as soon as

possible or to get them the highest-paying job possible? What if “the best job” for a job seeker is in another state? States need to be clear and transparent about the goals of their workforce development system, so they can be transparent about why they want to build AI tools and what those tools should accomplish.

State Collaboration

3. You recently connected with WITSC to explore how other states manage customer engagement tracking and computer access. What were you hoping to learn, and how does access to national peer insight support Minnesota's strategy?

When my team gets stuck with a problem, I always try to remind myself and my team that people in every other state and territory have encountered this problem before. I'm so grateful for WITSC and the way that other states are willing to share what they have learned. We have some technical and logistical challenges with trying to figure out a good solution to provide computer access at our American Job Centers (AJCs) and to track how many customers go to physical locations. Instead of trying to re-invent the wheel, we reached out to WITSC to see how other states had done it. Over the years, reaching out like that and attending WITSC events has saved our team countless hours and dollars!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

WITSC is committed to creating innovative, comprehensive, and tailored solutions that adapt with the evolving digital landscape. WITSC's team of experienced professionals offers an array of customizable strategic and project support designed to meet each state's unique needs. As a trusted partner, WITSC delivers best-in-class services focused on helping states address the distinct challenges that technology plays in addressing the public sector's needs and expectations.

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