

THE ALIGNED PARTNER NETWORK

An innovative model
that connects the public
workforce system and
local agencies to help
move people toward
self-sufficiency.

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Introduction

A prolonged period of economic volatility, skyrocketing need, and budget reductions left public agencies and non-profits unable to meet the demand for services that help people move toward self-sufficiency. Recognizing the growing expectation that more be done with less, Worksystems, Inc., the Local Workforce Investment Board for the City of Portland and Multnomah and Washington Counties, has invested funds, committed staff, and convened partners to align systems and resources for increased efficiency and better outcomes.

The resulting Aligned Partner Network connects the public workforce system and local agencies to provide a coordinated progression of services that help individuals move into career-track employment. The Aligned Partner Network is comprised of more than 20 agencies that share a vision for strategic alignment and responsiveness to the community.

This white paper will describe:

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- The evolution of the Aligned Partner Network model p. 4
- The model's partnership structure p. 5
- Critical elements of the Aligned Partner Network model p. 6
- The model's success p. 8

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A solution for social service and public agency partners that addresses the increasing need for services in an era of declining resources.

The Aligned Partner Network (APN) is a community of agencies dedicated to helping participants find quality, living-wage employment and economic prosperity. The Network provides a strategic connection to the public workforce system that leverages each agency's expertise in a coherent progression of services and resources that move people into career-track employment. While economic factors provided the impetus to create the Aligned Partner Network, subsequent policy decisions and funding trends reinforced the need to expand this model.

Increased Need, Reduced Funding¹ Drive Alignment

According to recent census data, more than 96,000 people in the Portland Metro area are unemployed and there are thousands more who work full-time but can't make ends meet due to low wages, insufficient benefits, and few prospects for career advancement. In the Metro Area, 17% of the population works full-time and earns less than \$25,000 per year. Others face steep barriers to employment because of low literacy skills, criminal histories or lack of educational credentials.

During the last decade, the region saw a steep decline in resources available to combat poverty and move people to work, due in large part to shrinking federal resources. Between 2002 and 2012, TANF/public assistance funding was reduced by \$6.6 million, and community college funding went down \$90 million. Federal Workforce Program funding, which includes adult basic education, Wagner-Peyser, vocational rehabilitation, and Workforce Investment Act funding for adults, dislocated workers, and youth, decreased \$17.5 million.

The Aligned Partner Network provides a solution for social service and public agency partners that reduces duplication, increases effectiveness, and enables all parties to address collaboratively the increasing need for services in an era of declining resources.

¹ Data points in this section are presented in broader context in Worksystems' 2013 State of the Workforce Report: <http://www.worksystems.org/sites/default/files/Worksystems%20State%20of%20the%20Workforce%20Report.pdf>

Policy and Environmental Factors Call for Alignment

Oregon's Need for Skilled Workers Creates Opportunity for Job Seekers with Barriers

To address an increasing demand for middle-skilled workers who have an Associate's Degree or meaningful postsecondary certificate, Oregon's Governor John Kitzhaber championed the 40-40-20 Initiative. This ambitious goal calls for 40% of adult Oregonians to hold a bachelor's degree or above, 40% to hold an associate's degree or meaningful post-secondary credential, and all adult Oregonians to have a high-school diploma by 2025.

Meeting the demand for talent at the local level means finding creative ways to engage and incent adult workers to earn educational credentials. Efforts that assist job seekers who have barriers or who are low-income to earn industry-recognized credentials will both provide those individuals with career-track employment and benefit the local labor market. Creating a true path to employment opportunity and stability for these job seekers recognizes that this population may require intensive coaching and support.

Executive Order 13-08 Focus on Alignment and Integration

Oregon's economic reality and workforce demands pointed state leadership toward the goal of resource alignment.² In July 2013, Governor Kitzhaber signed an Executive Order to re-charter state and local Workforce Investment Boards to play a greater role in aligning and innovating Oregon's workforce system. It states that part of the mission of a workforce board is to ensure that:

[T]he workforce system is aligned, provides integrated services and makes efficient and effective use of resources to achieve better outcomes for businesses and job seekers.

The Executive Order focuses squarely on the importance of non-duplication of services, cost efficiency, and a coordinated, leveraged approach to workforce development, service delivery, and programs. It calls for convening private sector and public partners to leverage resources and achieve common outcomes. It also directs the workforce system to find efficient, cost effective solutions that allow more Oregonians to earn a living wage and Oregon businesses to be competitive. Worksystems and the Aligned Partner Network agencies are on the leading edge of this redesign effort.

Two successful federal grant proposals incorporating the Aligned Partner Network model brought our community nearly \$7 million in resources serving more than 600 people.

System Alignment Reflects the Efficiency that Funders Want

Increasingly, funders seek to invest in community partner collaborations. This reflects funder understanding that as resources diminish, programs must strive to reduce duplication, focus on collective impact, and collaborate for better results. The Aligned Partner Network model offers an example of an established and working collaborative among deeply-rooted community-based partners and public agencies. The quality of this collaboration stems from a shared commitment and clear understanding of how each partner and agency supports that commitment. Deepened through mutual experience and continued collaboration, it stands out as a strong platform from which to implement a successful project.

- In 2012, The US Department of Labor (DOL) announced the Workforce Innovation Fund – a funding opportunity aimed specifically at aligning the workforce system with other major systems to achieve efficiencies, innovation and superior workforce outcomes³. Their goal was to identify replicable strategies for systemic alignment through rigorous evaluation by a third-party evaluation firm.

Worksystems was awarded \$5.5 million dollars from this fund to serve 500 metro area residents to implement a program design based on the Aligned Partner Network model and a Housing Works Pilot (see below). The program is driven by the premise that investment in workforce training activities for public housing residents will yield cost savings in the future as participants increase their income and decrease or eliminate their annual housing subsidy.

- In 2011, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released the Special Projects of National Significance (SPNS) funding opportunity through the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) program⁴. These three-year grants are meant to provide housing assistance and supportive services to low-income persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families. Key goals were better coordination and streamlined access to existing local services and resources for participants through community-wide strategies.

The Portland Housing Bureau was awarded a \$1.37 million SPNS HUD grant. Worksystems partnered on the submission, along with Cascade AIDS Project (CAP). This grant provided funds to CAP for career coaching, housing and supportive services, and paid for WorkSource facilitation of access to the public workforce system for enrolled participants.

Because the Aligned Partner Network is predicated on alignment, collaboration and strategic partnerships – principles increasingly sought by funders – it has offered a strong platform to bring competitive grant resources to our region in service of our local job seekers and system partners.

³ See <http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/eta/ETA20121237.htm> for description and list of awardees.

⁴ See http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/press/press_releases_media_advisories/2011/HUDNo11-225 for description and list of awardees.

The Evolution of the Aligned Partner Network Model

Prior to 2008, the region's public workforce system – WorkSource Portland Metro (WSPM) – provided Workforce Investment Act (WIA)-funded case management for a small number of job seekers selected based on the presence of barriers to employment. During 2008, in response to budget reductions totaling 47%, Oregon eliminated WIA-supported case management.

A mandated integration of services with the Oregon Employment Department also resulted in a dramatic increase in numbers served at WSPM centers (from 2,444 in program year 2007 to 47,852 in program year 2008) and a service environment that de-emphasized individualized support and promoted universal access. Although this expanded services to a greater number of job seekers, the new structure was not as responsive to the needs of customers who need long-term, relationship-based case management. Nonetheless, the system remained committed to providing workforce development services to vulnerable populations.

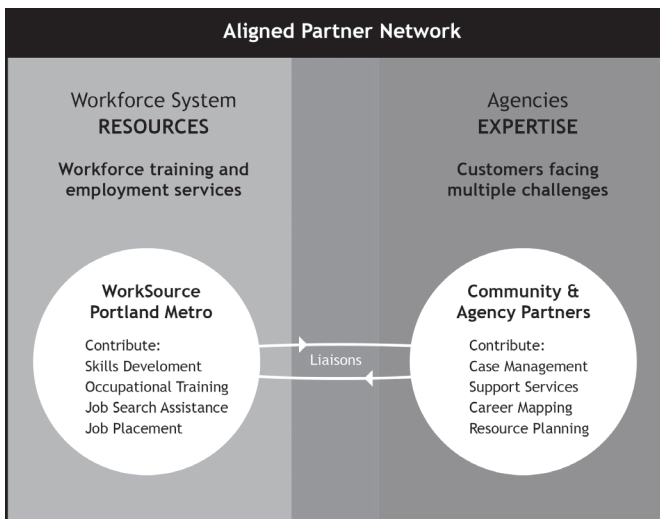
Anti-poverty programs and agencies dedicated to moving clients off public assistance have an inherent interest in increasing the employability of their clients through education, training, and job search assistance. Worksystems and social service partners share the belief that income is the road out of poverty. This common ground between the public workforce system and social service partners represents a tremendous opportunity for collaboration and systems alignment.

With this in mind, Worksystems worked with Home Forward (Multnomah County's Housing Authority) and the Multnomah County SUN Anti-Poverty Program on separate pilot programs during 2009 and 2010. The programs aligned the expertise and capacity of community agencies with that of the public workforce system to

eliminate program siloes and serve common customers in a coordinated way.

The pilots proved to all partners that leveraging each other's strengths leads to better outcomes. Through Worksystems' coordination, the workforce system provided technical assistance to partner staff, targeted training resources, and articulated training pathways for shared clients. This enables community-based case managers, or Career Coaches, to focus on developing trusting relationships with clients and helping them access resources, stabilize housing situations, develop career goals, improve job readiness skills, and navigate public systems. This strategy worked: the pilots were highly successful (see results on page 9).

With a tested strategy that produced excellent results for participants, the Aligned Partner Network was born. It has since expanded to a network of more than 20 agencies serving nearly 1,400 individuals as of January 31, 2014.



The Aligned Partner Network Partnership Structure

Each partnership in the Aligned Partner Network is between Worksystems and an agency that provides relationship-based, career-oriented coaching for their clients. Some agencies come to the partnership with a history of delivering services focused on helping clients to overcome barriers and obtain employment. Others enter the partnership with a social service delivery approach focused on helping people achieve housing stability, food security, mental health and/or achieve other life stability goal(s). To ensure alignment and a solid basis for collaboration, all Aligned Partner Network partners share the goal of self-sufficiency through employment and agree with the following principles behind the Network's service delivery approach:

- Job seekers with multiple barriers to employment are most successful at moving into jobs when they have individualized, relationship-based, long-term support from a dedicated Career Coach.
- The public workforce system, WSPM, has the tools and resources to train these job seekers to compete in today's job market, and to place them into career-track employment.
- Job seekers with challenges are most successful navigating the public workforce system when they have long-term, relationship-based support.
- Employment outcomes are optimized when community-based organizations and public agency staff implement career coaching that helps participants develop career plans that use public system resources for job skill development and connection to employment.

With this mutual commitment to align services, a formal Memo of Understanding clearly outlines the following roles and responsibilities.

Defined roles and responsibilities provides key support to the Aligned Partner Network partnership structure

APN Partner Agency agrees to:

- Designate staff members to provide intensive Career Coaching to targeted program participants.
- Ensure Career Coaches participate in regular training about the APN Model and WSPM products and services.
- Identify, enroll, and engage participants who are ready to move toward an employment goal.
- Facilitate the Career Mapping workshop for all job seekers interested in engaging in WSPM skill development activities.
- Facilitate individual career planning with each job seeker interested in engaging in WorkSource skill development activities.
- Provide ongoing career coaching, resource coordination, support services and transition support to participants served through WSPM.

Worksystems agrees to:

- Provide technical assistance to partners through WorkSource Liaisons who work with and train agency case managers.
- Provide technical assistance and access to a professional learning community through bi-monthly trainings with Career Coaches.
- Offer WSPM products and services for participants, including job matching and placement services.
- Set aside dedicated WSPM training resources for Aligned Partner Network participants.
- Deliver monthly participant-level data to support program development and effective career coaching.
- Convene with partner to evaluate partnership.

- Worksystems and APN Partner Agency agree to evaluate the partnership on a regular basis.

Worksystems invested system resources and partnered with local CBOs to collaboratively develop and implement services in all five WSPM Centers that meet the needs of this population.

Critical Elements of the Aligned Partner Network Model

Career Planning and Resource Navigation Support

The following elements support successful engagement in WSPM skill development services, giving participants a roadmap for training and job search activities, and identifying the resources necessary to succeed in training and their job search.

Career Coaching provides long-term, relationship-based guidance and coaching for participants. Career Coaches assist participants to develop an individualized career plan (see Career Mapping) that guides successful engagement in training and job search activities and increases client self-sufficiency. They are also the gateway to the Partner agency's support service dollars (if available).

Trained by WorkSource Liaisons, Career Coaches develop expertise in career planning and guidance, and in the navigation of the WSPM system and all of its resources. As participants engage in and pursue a customized progression of services at WSPM, Career Coaches follow up with participants to ensure they are attending scheduled activities, troubleshoot problems, and help participants adapt career plans as skill development needs arise or change.

WorkSource Liaisons hold the APN model together. Charged with providing training and technical assistance to Career Coaches, they teach them to use the Career Mapping process and inform them about WSPM products and processes, including new services or resources. Liaisons meet regularly with Career Coaches to review participant career plans and offer advice on next steps, and provide technical assistance.

Career Mapping⁵ emerged as a best practice through a collaboration among Worksystems and community partners. When a participant has a threshold level of life stability and motivation to pursue employment, the Career Coach facilitates Career Mapping. During this process, the participant and Career Coach identify the participant's strengths and capacities, set short- and long-term career goals, develop concrete strategies for meeting these goals, and identify resources needed to reach their goals. Resources may include those provided by the partner agency, at WorkSource Portland Metro, and in the community.

Career Planning is based on the Career Map. It is revisited and updated as the participant reaches milestones and meets goals. The plan is shared with a WorkSource Liaison.

⁵ A USDOL-funded 2006 report entitled *Career Mapping for Disadvantaged Job Seekers*, asserts that highly barriered individuals who undergo the person-centered Career Mapping process "have better insight and awareness about their strengths, gifts, and capabilities and are better prepared to identify initial job goals meeting their profile and preferences." The tool was developed by Worksystems.

WorkSource Portland Metro Services and Dedicated Resources

Driven by a career plan and coaching about what to expect when arriving at WSPM Aligned Partner Network, participants have access to services for different skill levels, work histories and career goals, including:

Dedicated Training Service Resources: As participants move through their career plans toward employment, training may be required to qualify for targeted jobs.

Credentialing Programs: WSPM Scholarships support classroom training that leads to industry-recognized certification. Worksystems devotes more than one-third of its annual training budget for use by Aligned Partner Network agencies and participants.

Connect to Work Experience: This service, which is available only to APN participants, helps individuals build work histories through quality, short-term work experiences (internships) that align with their career plans.

On-the-Job Training (OJT): A WorkSource-negotiated permanent job placement that helps participants overcome experience and skill deficits by reimbursing employers for up-front training costs of new workers.

WSPM Job-Matching and Placement Services: When APN customers are ready to look for work they can access a variety of supports that match to their needs.

Job Matching and Referral: WSPM has longstanding partnerships with many area businesses that hire job candidates referred from WorkSource. Some WSPM staff are dedicated to matching job seekers to employment in healthcare, IT/software and manufacturing industries.

Connect to Work: This provides specialized job placement services for people with criminal histories, offering support and focusing on relationships with second-chance employers.

Connect to Work for English Language Learners: Staff provide specialized job placement services for English language learners.

Connect to Careers: Provides person-centered job development for job-ready, career-oriented candidates. Job Developers are vested with hiring incentives to address skill gaps and overcome stigmas to employment. This WSPM service is available only to Aligned Partner Network participants.

WSPM Workshops and 1:1 Services are offered in the region's five WSPM Centers. They help prepare customers to:

- o Develop a high-quality resume
- o Have a successful job interview
- o Use social media in a job search
- o Use computers in a workplace
- o Develop a professional network
- o Research training and credentialing options
- o Learn English job search vocabulary and U.S. employment practices

Results from the Aligned Partner Network

Since 2009, nearly 1,400 participants have been served through the Aligned Partner Network model, and partnerships continue to grow. The Network's two pilot projects yielded results for job seekers and systems that paved the way for further development of APN.

The Action for Prosperity Pilot⁶

In 2009, Worksystems and Home Forward targeted workforce and housing resources to participants in Multnomah County's system of anti-poverty programs in a pilot called Action for Prosperity (AFP). The goal was to help stabilize families and move participants toward self-sufficiency by layering housing support from Home Forward, wrap-around services and career coaching from Multnomah County, and workforce training from Worksystems to create an individualized progression of services.

Of the 287 AFP pilot participants at the start of the program, 9% were employed and 87% were living below 125% of the federal poverty level. At exit, 55% were employed; twelve months later, 61% were employed. Multnomah County found that despite very difficult economic circumstances, the housing and employment outcomes produced by AFP were sustained twelve months after the termination of services; and the high success rate of this program during difficult economic times bodes well for future program participants when the economy improves.

Results for 287 participants:

- o WSPM Workshops and 1:1 Prep. Services attended: **218**
- o WSPM On-the-Job and/or Classroom-Based Vocational Training completed: **129**
- o WSPM Internships: **53**
- o Obtained and Retained Employment: **61%**

The Housing Works Pilot

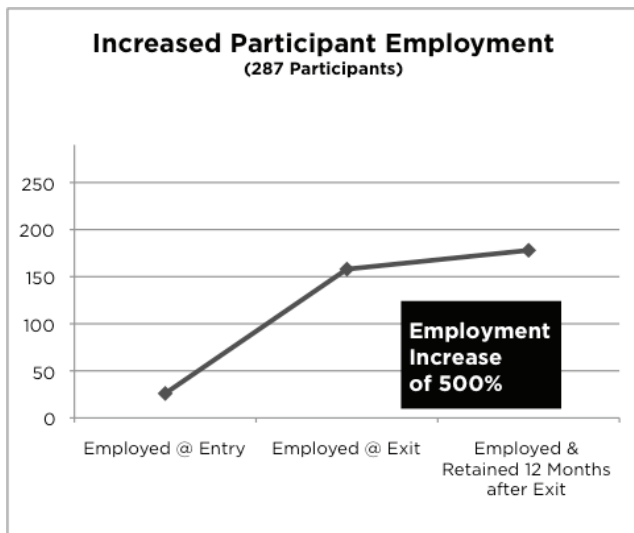
In 2010, with a grant from the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, Home Forward partnered with Worksystems to move very low-income participants into career-track employment in health care and office positions using a holistic approach to service delivery. In addition to providing services to this population, the Housing Works pilot demonstrated a cost-efficient model for helping long-term recipients of public subsidies move toward self-sufficiency. The program offered Home Forward residents an array of co-resourced workforce services, sector-based training, and other supports to move them into living wage jobs.

The model incorporated the critical APN elements including the WorkSource Liaison, leveraged training resources, and career coaching. Outcomes of the Housing Works Pilot were dramatic, including increased wages and employability for enrolled Home Forward residents. Of the 33 participants completing training, 22 attained new employment. Moreover, the average household income for participants increased by \$15,567, or 112%. The effect of those income gains extended well beyond the family by reducing annual housing subsidies by an average of \$4,877. Four participants ended their housing subsidies, and one of these four became a homeowner. The program proved a highly efficient use of public funds that offers hope for families and savings for the public.

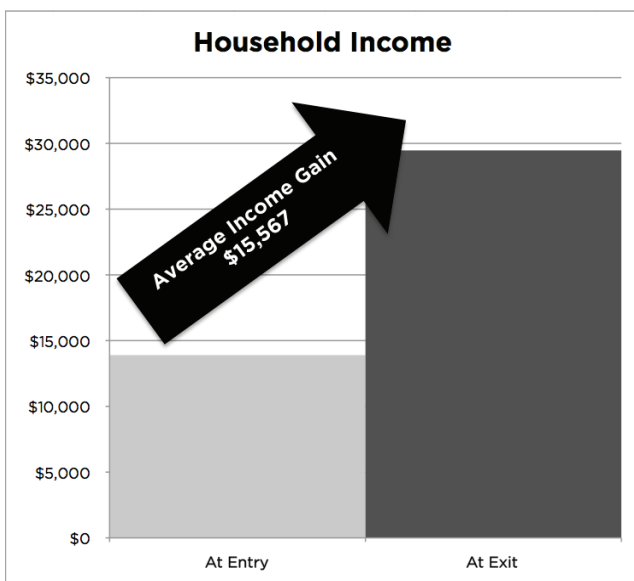
Results for 33 participants:

- o Participation in WSPM Workshops and 1:1 Preparatory Services: **114**
- o WSPM On-the Job and/or Classroom-Based Vocational Training completed: **19**
- o WSPM Internships: **13**
- o Average Household Income at Entry: **\$13,899**
- o Average Household Income at Exit: **\$29,466**

Layering housing support, wrap-around services, career coaching and workforce training increased employment significantly in 2009 pilot.



The Housing Works pilot demonstrated the model's ability to significantly increase household income.



⁶ Data presented here are from Multnomah County's analysis of the AFP Pilot, presented in the *Final Report on Program Outcomes and 12-Month Follow-Up Report*. Available at <http://bit.ly/1rGySDV> and <http://1.usa.gov/1dwBznG>

Worksystems devotes more than one-third of its annual training budget for use by Aligned Partner Network agencies and participants.

New and Expanding APN Partnerships

With a record of success, this model enjoys continued support from existing APN agencies and attracts new partners. Some examples include:

- The Aligned Partner Network pilot with Multnomah County yielded tremendous and lasting results. This partnership continued beyond the pilot year and its systemic alignment has served 692 individuals to date.
- In 2013, the City of Portland and Portland Development Commission aligned their \$1.1 million in Economic Opportunity Initiative resources with the Aligned Partner Network model. This city initiative had been funding case management-based workforce development programs since 2003. Now known as the Economic Opportunity Program (EOP), administered through Worksystems, the seven funded EOP projects use tools such as Career Mapping, and use the public workforce system as the foundational workforce training and job attachment vehicle for their participants.
- In 2012, Washington County Community Corrections (WCCC) began an Aligned Partner Network partnership to move parolees into career-track employment. Initial grant-based funding dried up in September 2013. When Oregon State Legislature's House Bill 3194 authorizing additional money to WCCC for the biennium passed the Oregon Legislature, WCCC identified involvement in the Aligned Partner Network as a key strategy to reduce recidivism. The partnership re-launched in January 2014.

Workforce System Improvements: Innovating to Serve Partners

The success of the model is measured in more than participant-level outcomes. Partner agencies, including WorkSource, have experienced innovation and improvements in service delivery. For example, job seekers from Aligned Partner Network agencies often needed support to overcome barriers like criminal histories, low English language proficiency, low basic skills or histories of substance abuse. Worksystems invested system resources and partnered with local CBOs to collaboratively develop and implement services in all five WSPM Centers that meet the needs of this population. As most of these services are available to the general public, innovations that originated from the APN are benefiting the larger community.

The development of similar services is ongoing, thanks to open conversations between WorkSource Liaisons, Career Coaches, APN agency managers, and Worksystems staff. This dedicated effort toward continuous improvement increases the reach of the Aligned Partner Network model. By harnessing the expertise and resources of public agencies, community organizations, and the public workforce system, the Aligned Partner Network provides a coordinated and coherent progression of services that will continue to assist people to move into career track employment for years to come.

Aligned Partner Network Members

Individual Partners

- Cascade AIDS Project
- CODA Inc.
- Community Action
- Easter Seals
- Experience Works Senior Community Service Employment Program
- Luke-Dorf
- Mercy Corps NW
- Oregon Department of Human Services
- Volunteers of America
- Washington County Community Corrections
- Washington County Jail

Economic Opportunity Program Partners

The Economic Opportunity Program is a collaboration between the Portland Development Commission and Worksystems that provides career-track training and employment services to low-income residents of the City of Portland.

- Central City Concern
- Human Solutions
- Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization
- SE Works Prisoner Reentry Employment Program
- SE Works Professional Immigrant Credentialing Program
- Self Enhancement, Inc

Housing Works Partners

Housing Works is a Department of Labor Workforce Innovation Grant awarded to Worksystems to expand on a successful pilot between Home Forward and Worksystems to provide career-track training and employment services to public housing residents.

- Home Forward
- Housing Authority of Washington County

Multnomah County Action for Prosperity Partners

The Multnomah County Action for Prosperity is a collaboration between Multnomah County, Home Forward, the Oregon Department of Human Services, and Worksystems to provide career-track training and employment services to low-income residents of Multnomah County served in the County's SUN antipoverty system. Service partners include:

- Multnomah County, SUN Service System
- Catholic Charities
- Human Solutions
- Impact NW
- Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization
- Native American Rehabilitation Association of the Northwest, Inc.
- Native American Youth Family Center
- Neighborhood House
- Self Enhancement Inc.

WorkSource Portland Metro Partners

- Career Enlightenment
- CODA Inc.
- Goodwill Industries
- Innovative Changes
- Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization
- Mt. Hood Community College
- Oregon Employment Department
- Portland Community College
- SE Works

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