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# Columbia-Willamette Workforce Collaborative Quality Jobs Initiative






## Comprehensive Benefits



Over the past year, the [Columbia-Willamette Workforce Collaborative \(CWWC\)](#) began the process to develop the [Quality Jobs Framework \(Framework\)](#). The Framework is part of the [Quality Jobs Initiative](#), a cross sectoral effort that seeks a regional approach to (1) define quality jobs, (2) provide guidance on standards employers can be encouraged or incentivized to adopt, (3) identify resources to help employers implement in accordance with their workplace needs, and (4) develop a roadmap of actions and implementation steps.

The Quality Jobs guides provide an in-depth look into each of the six Quality Job strategies for the Portland-Southwest Washington metropolitan area. The guides provide strategies, indicators and an interactive workbook to help improve job quality within your business. This guide explores the strategy Comprehensive Benefits.

The Quality Jobs strategies include:

	<b>Self-Sufficiency Wages</b>	A quality job provides sufficient income to afford a decent standard of living. For example, jobs that offer pay consistent with established published self-sufficiency standards that consider family composition and cost of living.
	<b>Safe Working Conditions/Worker Engagement</b>	A quality job offers employees dignity and respect and welcomes engagement in workplace operations. For example, jobs that are subject to anti-discrimination and anti-discrimination policies and provide reasonable accommodation to employees with disabilities.
	<b>Predictable Hours</b>	A quality job offers employees predictability on the number of hours they are offered per week to minimize hardship on employees and their families.
	<b>Comprehensive Benefits</b>	A quality job provides basic benefits that increase economic security, improve health and overall well-being. Quality jobs include healthcare, childcare, transportation, wellness programs, and access to retirement savings programs, among other supports.
	<b>Accessible Hiring and Onboarding Practices</b>	A quality job offers transparent and accessible hiring and onboarding practices to ensure that employer and employee are set for success.

## Employers

### STRATEGIES

#### 1 **Extend benefits to all employees, including frontline staff and lowest paid workers.**

Employers can cover the full medical insurance premiums, provide increased paid time off (PTO), bonuses (annual and sign-on), paid parking, profit-sharing, or other benefits usually only provided to higher ranking employees to all employees. Benefits should also expand to support mental health in addition to physical, women's and LGBTQ+ health, and disability-inclusive benefits. Extending these benefits to all types of employees can help recruitment, retention, and overall stability of an employer's workforce.

#### Sample Metric



- Percentage (%) of frontline employees who have full benefit packages.

#### 2 **Provide workers with paid sick leave, parental leave, medical leave, and other vacation or paid time off.**

Employers are expected to comply with leave programs required under local, state, or federal regulations. In the State of Washington, nearly every worker qualifies for the state's Paid Family and Medical Leave<sup>1</sup> if they worked a minimum of 820 hours in a qualifying period, and employers with 150 or more employees are required to contribute to employee's premiums or operate a voluntary plan that meets or exceeds the State's benefits. Oregon's Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance<sup>2</sup> program will go into effect in 2023, with employees who earned at least \$1,000 in the previous year and others being eligible to receive benefits, and employers sharing the cost with workers (or receiving financial assistance if fewer than 25 employees). These existing, baseline paid leave laws can be enforced by the appropriate government body.

#### Sample Metric



- Presence of leave policy that offers more PTO than minimum legal requirements and allow for carry over days.

### 3 Provide or subsidize transportation for employees.

Many workers lack reliable day-to-day transportation. They lack a private vehicle or access to public transportation due to their shift schedule, home location, etc. To ensure workers can safely and reliably travel to a physical work location, TriMet<sup>3</sup> and C-TRAN<sup>4</sup> offer free consultations to employers who want to create company transit plans. Transit options might include providing free public transit passes to employees or organizing subsidized or fully covered van/bus pools for employees. Employers can also ensure employees who rely on public transportation are scheduled for shifts that align with bus schedules. Additionally, for workers who drive, employers can offer mileage reimbursement, especially for jobs where employees must use their personal vehicles to complete work-related tasks. Some employers even provide emergency rideshare gift cards or emergency loans for car repairs that can be paid back through payroll.

#### Sample Metrics



- Percentage (%) of employees offered a free or low-cost transportation option.
- Percentage (%) of employees who utilize employer's free or low-cost transportation option.

### 4 Offer childcare (and elder care/other family care) and other supports to employees.

Employers can implement a variety of strategies to support employees who are parents and caregivers. These can include flexible spending accounts (pre-tax dollars) to cover or supplement child, elder, or other family care costs. Large employers can facilitate childcare services onsite or nearby through a partnership with an outside childcare provider. Employers can avail their employees of free childcare referral services and resources, such as ChildCare Aware of Washington<sup>5</sup> and Find Child Care Oregon.<sup>6</sup> These organizations can help employees navigate federal subsidy programs such as TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program); as well as state subsidy programs such as Working Connections Child Care<sup>7</sup> (Washington) and Employment Related Day Care<sup>8</sup> (Oregon).

## **5 Implement or improve flexible hours and paid time off policies that support employees' personal well-being and family.**

Employers should consider how work scheduling and PTO can meet the needs of both employees and employers. PTO is critical for worker mental and physical well-being, productivity and is good for business. Employers should offer a generous PTO policy, above the minimum state or local requirements. Surveys report on the positive effects of taking time off, including increased positivity, energy, and productivity.<sup>9</sup> Beyond offering generous PTO, employers should create a workplace culture that encourages workers to use the PTO offered to them.

- a. Employers can start workers out with a balance of PTO and allow workers to take time off after they accrue PTO or borrow against future PTO from their first day of employment in case of emergency. Allowing flexible leave for new hires provides a critical additional layer of stability for employees, particularly for parents and caregivers.
- b. Consider flexibility and partial day PTO. Partial day PTO allows workers to take PTO for a couple of hours at a time (e.g., 2-4 hours) to attend scheduled appointments or pick up a sick child from school. Flexible PTO policies help accommodate unplanned emergencies or pre-planned events that inevitably arise during work hours that are critical for managing work-life balance.
- c. Establish or continue flexible work arrangements, as allowable, including remote work or flexible hours.
- d. Create a floating holiday policy. For example, if your business is closed on Christmas Day, allow workers who do not observe Christmas the flexibility to work on that day. Accordingly, workers can apply the Christmas holiday to a holiday they plan to observe instead.
- e. Provide training and guidance to supervisors on how they can plan workloads when an employee takes time off is a good way to minimize undue stress and maintain productivity leading up to, during, and after an employee takes time off. Encouraging advance scheduling and coordination in advance of vacations is also a strategy to minimize overburdening team members.



## 5 **Sample Metrics**



- Implementation of flexible hours or progressive PTO policies.
- Percentage (%) of employees who lose unused PTO days.



## 6 **Create or improve existing employee financial wellness programs.**

Employers can offer financial literacy resources (e.g., budgeting, tax preparation, debt management, student loan repayment, etc.) to help reduce financial stress. These services can be provided through community-based organizations or public agencies that provide these services. The National Fund for Workforce Solutions' Guide to Employee Financial Wellness<sup>10</sup> offers detailed instructions on how to get started. Employers can set aside paid time for their employees to participate in these classes or consultations to allow for full utilization.

### **Sample Metric**



- Percentage (%) of employees enrolled/participated in financial wellness program offerings.

## 7 Offer and promote the use of Employee Assistance Programs.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) offer employees confidential assistance with life concerns like stress, mental health, substance abuse, relationships and more. Often EAPs may be built into payroll or benefits services, and employers should promote the free benefit to employees. Separate from health insurance, an EAPs can help employees with internal work issues as well as provide support for personal difficulties outside of work. Employers can take extra steps to publicize these resources to their employees to ensure wide utilization such as setting aside paid time for their employees to participate in consultations.

### Sample Metric



- Percentage (%) of employees enrolled in EAP.

## 8 Establish or expand portable retirement savings and medical benefits programs.

“Portable benefits” are connected to an individual, rather than their place of employment. There are many types of portable benefits programs that cover PTO, medical benefits, and retirement savings benefits. These programs are meant to expand basic benefits to workers who are not covered by existing labor laws, such as contract workers.

Existing examples include NDWA Labs, the innovation arm of the National Domestic Workers Alliance. Alia,<sup>11</sup> their portable benefits program, allows individuals who hire domestic workers to contribute regularly to their workers’ PTO and group insurance benefits. Similarly, OregonSaves<sup>12</sup> is a retirement program offered through the State of Oregon for workers who lack a workplace retirement plan.

### Sample Metric



- Percentage (%) of workers utilizing portable benefits.

# Comprehensive Benefits Quality Jobs Workbook

1.	<p>Extend benefits to all employees, including frontline staff and lowest paid workers.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="306 525 1398 630"> <tr> <td data-bbox="306 525 371 575"></td> <td data-bbox="371 525 1398 575">Percentage (%) of frontline employees who have full benefit packages.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="306 575 371 630"></td> <td data-bbox="371 575 1398 630">_____ %</td> </tr> </table>		Percentage (%) of frontline employees who have full benefit packages.		_____ %				
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# Comprehensive Benefits Quality Jobs Workbook

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## Additional Resources

The [Building Industry Association \(BIA\)](#) offers employers access to comprehensive and competitive employee benefit options. BIA offers over 30 medical plans and a selection of dental options from which employers can choose.

[www.retirementconnection.com](http://www.retirementconnection.com) provides resources for those 50 and better and the providers that serve them.

[Workforce Southwest Washington's Business Services Team](#) can assist businesses in drafting job descriptions which accurately describe your benefits to potential employees.

[WorkSource Vancouver and Cowlitz/Wahkiakum Community Resources List](#) provides information on local childcare, financial, healthcare, mental health and other support services and resources.

[Results for America's Quality Job Playbook](#) offers guidance on metrics [to measure and evaluate benefits](#) as a piece of job quality. The playbook includes information on [caregiver support](#), [employee ownership](#), [renewable learning funds](#) and [home ownership incentives](#).

[Washington Health Benefit Exchange](#) seeks to redefine people's experience with health care. Their mission is to improve how Washington residents secure health insurance through innovative and practical solutions, an easy-to-use customer experience, our values of integrity, respect, equity and transparency and by providing undeniable value to the healthcare community.

[The Washington State Department of Commerce Family-Friendly Workplace Program](#), in partnership with the Association of Washington Business and the Department of Children, Youth & Families, is offering no-cost, professional business consultations and technical assistance to help employers assess and determine which solutions meet their workforce needs.

[The Southwest Washington Contractors Association](#) provides members access to 401(k) benefits, a Retrospective Rating Program to receive a refund or rebate on their Washington State Labor and Industries (L&I) premiums, continuing education programs, and life and health insurance programs.

## End Notes

- 1 Washington Paid Family and Medical Leave. <https://paidleave.wa.gov/>
- 2 Oregon Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance. <https://www.oregon.gov/employ/PFMLI/Pages/default.aspx>
- 3 TriMet. “Commuter Options: Flexible transportation options for your employees.” <https://trimet.org/employers/>
- 4 C-TRAN. “Passes and Special Programs.” <https://www.c-tran.com/fares/passes>
- 5 Child Care Aware of Washington. <https://childcareawarewa.org/>
- 6 Find Child Care Oregon. <https://findchildcareoregon.org/>
- 7 Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families. “Working Connections Child Care.” <https://dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/getting-help/wccc>
- 8 Oregon Department of Human Services. “Child Care Assistance.” <https://www.oregon.gov/dhs/assistance/child-care/Pages/index.aspx>
- 9 American Psychological Association. “Vacation Time Recharges U.S. Workers.” <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2018/06/vacation-recharges-workers>
- 10 National Fund for Workforce Solutions. “Guide to Employee Financial Wellness.” [https://nationalfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Guide\\_Employee\\_Financial\\_Wellness\\_M2\\_FINAL-2.pdf](https://nationalfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Guide_Employee_Financial_Wellness_M2_FINAL-2.pdf)
- 11 Alia. <https://www.myalia.org/>
- 12 Oregon Saves. <https://www.oregonsaves.com/>

# Engage with the Quality Jobs Initiative

Quality Jobs guides are available on the [Workforce Southwest Washington Quality Jobs page](#) for all strategies, including:

- Self-Sufficiency Wages
- Safe Working Conditions/Worker Engagement
- Predictable Hours
- Comprehensive Benefits
- Accessible Hiring and Onboarding Practices
- Training and Advancement Opportunities

Learn more about the [Quality Jobs Initiative](#) and read the entire [Quality Jobs Framework](#) online.

## Contact us!

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