

Public Understanding of and Reactions to GSPED

by Judith A. Vandegrift, Morrison Institute for Public Policy
in consultation with Joel Wright, Wright Consulting Services

In the early 1990s, thousands of Arizonans participated in creating a plan to develop Arizona's economy. Arizona's Strategic Plan for Economic Development, better known as ASPED ("A-Speed"), set the stage for economic development based on industry clusters—"geographic concentrations of competitive firms in related industries that do business with each other."¹ To implement the plan, GSPED ("G-Speed") was born: the Governor's Strategic Partnership for Economic Development.

The newly-adopted philosophy underlying ASPED/GSPED was that:

"Arizona in the 1990s requires a transition from an economy driven by population growth toward an economy that prospers by adding value to products and services [where] the success of a high-value-added economy is measured by increases in the standard of living, not simply by job creation or population growth."²

The plan emphasized that "making the transition means shifting the primary focus of wealth creation from natural resources to human resources."³

In the past year, GSPED has been the focus of revitalized attention as a result of the creation of the Office of Workforce Development Policy (OWDP) and a new governing board, the Governor's Council on Workforce Development Policy. The OWDP is co-located at the Arizona Department of Commerce (DOC) with the public-sector branch of GSPED.⁴ With this merger, state-level efforts to unite economic and workforce development are occurring with new vigor.

The state envisions actively promoting GSPED's vision of economic development, and linking workforce development efforts with GSPED. This means fundamentally changing the way the state does business. And, similar to most "new" initiatives, there are those who embrace the challenges implied and those who prefer the status quo.

Arizona's GSPED Industry Clusters (1998)

- , Bioindustry
- , Environmental Technology
- , Food, Fiber and Natural Products
- , High Technology
- , Mining and Minerals
- , Optics
- , Plastics and Advanced Composite Materials
- , Senior Living
- , Software
- , Tourism
- , Transportation and Distribution

These industries, together with their suppliers—and others whose services are essential to their economic well-being (or foundations)—make up industry clusters. These industry clusters form the core of Governor's Strategic Partnership for Economic Development.

Prior to forging ahead with a new agenda to link economic and workforce development using GSPED as an organizing framework, the OWDP commissioned a statewide opinion poll to assess public attitudes toward these potentially controversial ideas. This briefing paper summarizes the results of the polling.

Polling was designed to assess the public's understanding of GSPED and reactions to using the concept of industry clusters as a tool for organizing both economic and workforce development efforts. Highlights of the 1998 poll are discussed briefly in relation to five topics:

- , Public awareness of GSPED
- , Support for GSPED
- , Attitudes toward GSPED
- , Attitudes toward workforce development
- , Linking workforce development with GSPED

Public Polling

In spring 1998, 2,200 Arizonans participated in a poll about GSPED.⁵ Respondents represent 600 parents, 600 businesses, 500 teachers and 500 school administrators (i.e., principals and superintendents). Paralleling the demographic composition of the state, 70% reside in either Maricopa or Pima Counties; the remaining 30% represent rural counties. Roughly half (47%) of the respondents are male; 53% are female. Focusing primarily on registered voters, 43% of the respondents are Republicans, 42% are Democrats, 11% are Independents, and 4% are not registered or preferred not to answer. A majority of those polled are white (83%), while 17% represent minorities.

Sample sizes yield results that are statistically accurate within a 95% level of confidence (with margins of error not exceeding ± 4.5 percentage points).

Summary of Results

Public Awareness of GSPED

The first question respondents were asked was whether they had ever heard of GSPED. **Only 14% said they had heard something (a lot or a little) about GSPED; 86% had not heard of it by name.** A second question asked: "To the best of your knowledge, are businesses in your area involved in the GSPED effort?" Only 3% of the respondents replied "Yes" — that businesses were, in fact, involved in GSPED.

It is critically important to recognize that the answer to the "awareness" question sets the stage for interpreting the remainder of the results. **Since most people have not heard about GSPED, their responses to the remaining questions are not based on experience with GSPED or a deep understanding of its complexities. Rather, people are reacting to the questions posed. Results must be understood in this context.**

Support for GSPED

Regardless of whether people had heard of GSPED by name, they were read the following description:

The Governor's Strategic Partnership for Economic Development, or GSPED, is a partnership of business and community leaders, and state government officials, to develop a comprehensive system for building Arizona's economy. One of its key aspects is that it organizes Arizona's businesses and suppliers into

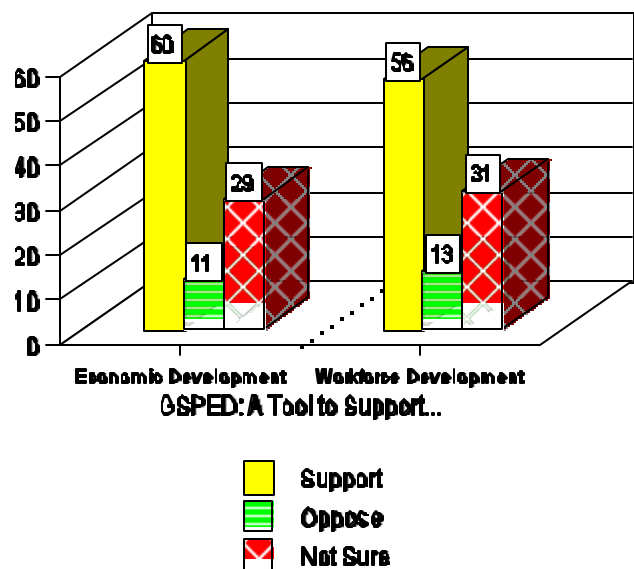
industry-based clusters—like bioindustry and high technology, for example—for the purpose of making Arizona more competitive.

Presented with this simple definition, respondents were asked whether they support or oppose using "the GSPED system" as a tool to develop Arizona's economy. They were also asked to indicate their support for GSPED as a tool to organize workforce development efforts in the state, with the explanation that this would focus education and training efforts and resources in various industry cluster groups.

Figure 1 shows that 60% of all respondents indicate support for the GSPED concept as a tool to develop Arizona's economy, while 56% support focusing education and training resources in various industry cluster groups. However, about one of every three people are unsure about GSPED's utility as a tool for either economic or workforce development. Relatively few respondents voice opposition to using GSPED as a means to orchestrate economic and workforce development efforts in the state.

Responses vary somewhat by constituent group. For example, support for GSPED is conspicuous among employers and parents ($\geq 72\%$), while more modest among educators ($\leq 46\%$).

Figure 1
Arizonans' Support For GSPED (N=2200)



Attitudes Toward GSPED

Peoples' attitudes toward GSPED were explored further using positively and negatively phrased questions. **For the following questions, responses indicative of support for GSPED are shaded.**

It's important that Arizona has an economic development system like GSPED.

Agree	Disagree	Not sure
54%	15%	31%

Organizing businesses and their suppliers into industry-based clusters, like GSPED does, helps people like me better understand business opportunities and challenges.

Agree	Disagree	Not sure
52%	16%	32%

GSPED is tailored toward high technology companies; other types of businesses don't fit.

Agree	Disagree	Not sure
23%	34%	43%

GSPED smacks of too much interference in private business by government.

Agree	Disagree	Not sure
26%	36%	38%

As responses to the above questions illustrate, one-third or more of those polled are not really sure about GSPED or its implications. However, among respondents with definite opinions, more tend to agree with statements that support GSPED and disagree with statements which cast doubt on GSPED's value.

Attitudes Toward Workforce Development

Peoples' attitudes toward workforce development issues also were explored in more depth. For the following questions, **responses which imply support for pursuing the development of a workforce development system are shaded.**

Many businesses have a hard time filling jobs with competent, well-trained employees.

Agree	Disagree	Not sure
77%	15%	8%

Workforce development efforts like GSPED will result in better-prepared and more productive employees.

Agree	Disagree	Not sure
59%	9%	32%

Most employees and workers are satisfied with their jobs and not interested in additional education or training.

Agree	Disagree	Not sure
15%	77%	8%

Most people coming out of high school entering the work world are well-prepared for the jobs available.

Agree	Disagree	Not sure
13%	77%	10%

For the three out of four questions that do not reference GSPED specifically, respondents have strong opinions. Most express that businesses have a tough time finding employees, employees desire additional education and training, and high school graduates are not, in general, prepared for available jobs. And while one-third are unsure about GSPED in the remaining question, more than half of those polled agree that GSPED holds promise as a means to develop better-prepared and more productive employees.

Linking Workforce Development with GSPED

Finally, attitudes were explored regarding the potential impact of developing a workforce development system linked with GSPED. Responses to four issues are summarized in Table 1. Specifically, Table 1 shows that a majority of respondents indicate that they support targeting resources to specific populations (e.g., high school students, the working poor, single parents) in order to prepare them for



Table 1
Linking Workforce Development with GSPED:
What Will It Take?

It will take...	Support	Oppose	Not Sure
Targeting resources	71%	6%	23%
Closer cooperation	69%	10%	21%
Business commitment	65%	14%	21%
Program consolidation	59%	9%	32%

employment. Respondents further support closer cooperation and communication between business/community leaders and state government in deciding how education and training programs are developed and how funds are spent, and note that it will take business people committing time and effort to help develop the system. Finally, over half of all respondents support the consolidation of at least *some* existing publicly funded workforce development programs.

Conclusions

There are three major findings from this analysis of spring 1998 GSPED polling data.

• **“Brand name” recognition for GSPED is low.**

Many people do not recognize the acronym, GSPED. Polling results suggest that GSPED needs to be aggressively marketed should the state pursue plans to use GSPED to link economic and workforce efforts. There are a number of respondents who are simply “unsure” of what GSPED means. Only after there is adequate awareness and understanding of GSPED can the state be assured that there is a solid platform of support upon which to build. There is no good reason **not** to develop “brand name” recognition. After all, McDonald’s® isn’t referred to as “the place to get good burgers and fries at a reasonable price”—it is McDonald’s®, and people automatically associate it with reliable products and services.

• **All constituent groups polled are receptive to many ideas that underlie Arizona’s**

proposed plans to develop the economy and workforce.


In spite of uncertainty among some constituents, there is a high level of support for GSPED and what it implies— *at least as it was explained in the survey instrument*. Support for GSPED and related workforce development efforts is higher than opposition for every question posed. For example, GSPED is viewed by many as important and helpful for understanding Arizona’s economy. It is seen as holding promise for developing better-prepared and more productive employees. Positive perceptions bode well for using GSPED as an organizing framework to link economic and workforce development—especially since people had the opportunity to express their opposition.

• **Developing a workforce system linked with GSPED will take work.**

Indications are that the public supports creating a workforce development system aligned with GSPED—but not without a price tag. In short, business and community leaders and state agency personnel **must** work together. Decisions about resource allocation and, possibly, program consolidation clearly **will** require time, effort, and unprecedented levels of cooperation between the public and private sectors.

Endnotes

1. Excerpted from “Arizona’s Economy is Everyone’s Business,” A supplement to the *Arizona Republic*, March 1992.
- 2-3. Ibid.
4. There is a private-sector branch of GSPED which operates as a 501(c)(3) organization in conjunction with its DOC affiliate.
5. Baseline data on GSPED were collected as part of the third annual poll on School To Work (STW). STW polling results are summarized in a separate briefing paper.



For additional information about Arizona’s School To Work initiative, contact:

Gary Abraham, Director or
Mimi Bull, Marketing & Technical Assistance Coordinator
at (602) 280-8130.

School To Work is a division of the Arizona Department of Commerce, Office of Workforce Development Policy.

C. Diane Bishop, Assistant Deputy Director

