

# WASHINGTON COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE DISTRICTS AND THE TAXPAYER PERSPECTIVES

The Washington Community and Technical College Districts consider the return on investment from two taxpayer perspectives: broad and a narrow. The broad perspective counts all benefits regardless of recipient, while the narrow perspective counts only benefits that accrue back to the state government in the form of book or accounting revenues. Note that the narrow perspective is the accounting stance of the private sector: revenues on one side of the books, costs on the other, and profits equaling the difference. The CCbenefits model indicates that the Washington Community and Technical College Districts are a uniquely attractive investment for the state government. This finding is clearly indicated from the results of the narrow taxpayer perspective investment analysis. To better appreciate this finding, we develop these two perspectives more fully below.

## BROAD INVESTMENT PERSPECTIVE

The effectiveness of government programs is often expressed through the use of a benefit/cost ratio. A ratio greater than one is minimally necessary for a worthwhile public project, while a ratio greater than one is taken to indicate a particularly strong endorsement. Consider some examples. A transportation authority sells the public on a new road or bridge by demonstrating that savings in travel time and vehicle expenses greatly exceed the project's cost. Another example: the success of a government program aimed at revitalizing a depressed economy is said to be demonstrated when the incomes created by the program greatly exceed the program cost. In still a third example, expenditures on public parks are sometimes justified by showing that the value of the recreation, including scenic and other values that accrue to park users, exceeds the public outlay for park construction, operation, and the cost of extractive resources not used. In all these cases, note that overall benefits are counted and not just those that accrue back to the state government. This is the hallmark of the broad benefit-cost (i.e., investment) perspective.

The broad investment perspective imbedded in the CCbenefits model measures a diverse collection of community college benefits, including the increased earnings of students plus external benefits associated with savings on health care, reduced expenditures on crime (e.g., prosecution, incarceration and victim costs), reduced welfare and unemployment expenditures, and costs associated with absenteeism from work. These benefits accrue to different publics such as students, employers, victims of crime, the federal government, and state taxpayers. The broad perspective tallies this varied collection of benefits and measures this against the outlays of the state government. State government taxpayers can

view a broad perspective benefit-cost ratio greater than 1.0 as a minimal indicator of a worthwhile public investment.

## NARROW INVESTMENT PERSPECTIVE

Among the benefits tracked under the broad perspective is a subset that accrues to the state government. A portion of higher student earnings will be captured by the state government in the form of added tax receipts. Additionally, because the state government bears part of the cost of crime, its budget benefits from education-induced crime reductions. The same holds in varying degrees for the other assorted benefits of an educated populace. The bottom line: while the state government spends money in support of the Washington Community and Technical College Districts, they receive benefits in the form of increased tax receipts and an assortment of reduced expenditures or avoided social costs. The narrow investment perspective counts only benefits that could be entered into the books of the state government.

Worthwhile public projects routinely generate negative narrow perspective returns. Generally, the role of government is to provide services that the public wants, but the business sector finds unprofitable. Considerable funds are spent on public parks, for example, yet except for entry fees and some concessionaire or special events receipts, no moneys directly return to state taxpayers. From a narrow investment perspective, taxpayer returns are negative, and the park is justified by the benefits tracked under the broad perspective.

An important finding of the CCbenefits analysis of the Washington Community and Technical College Districts is that the results are not only strong from the broad perspective but unlike most government endeavors, the taxpayer investments generate strong results from the narrow investment perspective as well. Economists generally assume a 4.0% discount rate in analyzing government projects, assuming that governments can obtain unsecured loans at a rate of 4.0%, or receive a return of 4.0% on any excess funds were they to be invested.

**Since the Washington Community and Technical College Districts' narrow taxpayer perspective rate of return of 19.6% is substantially greater than 4.0%, the state government actually makes money on the investment—the colleges put more money back into the state treasury than they take out.** By funding the colleges, therefore, other beneficiaries of state funding are actually subsidized through the revenues generated by the colleges.