

MAXIMIZING DISCRETIONARY DOLLARS

How the Governor's WIOA Discretionary Fund Can Serve Adults & Youth Facing Barriers to Employment

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The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) planning efforts are one way the public workforce system can chart new or expanded pathways to employment and economic opportunity for chronically unemployed adults and youth. The Governor's WIOA Discretionary Fund can also be used to expand access to employment, training, education, and support services for adults and youth facing barriers to employment.

WIOA allows Governors to reserve some state funds to support state-funded projects. Historically, these funds have supported the implementation of career pathways, bridge programs, sector initiatives, and other innovative workforce approaches. As states develop strategies for ensuring that the WIOA system promotes access to employment, education, training, and support services for jobseekers facing barriers to employment, Governors' discretionary resources can be beneficial. For example, these resources can be used to implement initiatives that build on evidence-based and promising practices to serve jobseekers facing barriers through underutilized strategies; to serve populations who have historically made up a smaller share of the overall population served by the public workforce system; and/or to partner strategically with other public systems to maximize available employment and support services on behalf of jobseekers facing barriers.

This resource offers promising ways that states could leverage and use their discretionary funds for the benefit of adults and youth facing barriers to employment.

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Jobseekers facing barriers to employment often do not qualify for direct entry into career pathways programs, and can benefit from employment models such as transitional jobs, social enterprise, and supported employment.

Encourage the Development of Career Pathways Models that Include On-Ramps to Employment.

One of the functions of state WIOA boards is to assist the Governor in developing strategies to support the use of career pathways to provide individuals facing barriers to employment with workforce activities, education, and support services to enter or retain employment.¹

People facing barriers to employment, however, often do not qualify for direct entry into career pathways programs. These jobseekers often benefit from participation in “earn and learn” employment models, which can be on-ramps into career pathways. Career pathways pilots that include strategies that offer wage paid, real work opportunities such as transitional jobs, subsidized employment, social enterprise, and supported employment may be an especially strategic use of Governors’ discretionary resources.

Because WIOA allows communities to offer wage subsidies through on-the-job training (OJT) equal to 75 percent of employer wages (as well as the traditional wage subsidy structure under OJT equal to 50 percent of employer wages), states may want to explore a continuum of wage subsidy approaches or step-down models such as those implemented in states with ARRA TANF Emergency Funds. To support career pathways for workers facing barriers to employment, these approaches should offer concurrent and contextualized literacy and adult basic skills instruction, which can help prepare participants to access WIOA-funded training and sector initiatives that will lead to good jobs.

Promote Concurrent and Contextualized Transitional Jobs and Contextualized Adult Basic Education.

WIOA supports implementing innovative adult education and training models, such as integrated education and training that balances adult education and literacy activities, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training concurrently.²

An integrated education and training approach can be beneficial for adults, especially when coupled with employment and training strategies that provide workers with opportunities to “earn and learn,” or blend their workforce preparation, education, and occupational skills training with much-needed earned income. In particular, transitional jobs programs that offer concurrent

At Chicago FarmWorks, an urban farm in Chicago that runs a transitional jobs (TJ) program and grows food for low-income local families, TJ workers participate in a contextualized adult basic education curriculum. This lets TJ participants earn income while building their literacy and numeracy skills and learning about career pathways with family-sustaining wages.

contextualized adult basic education have shown promise in building jobseekers' literacy and numeracy skills while jobseekers earn income and grow their work-based skills.

Leveraging WIOA discretionary funds to offer state-funded pilot projects that use earn and learn employment strategies would be directly aligned with WIOA's goals and meet a critical need for adult jobseekers.

The Governor's WIOA Discretionary Fund can support public system partnerships to help ensure that opportunity youth have access to the intensive workforce interventions they need to succeed in employment.

Partner with Systems Serving Youth and Implement Intensive Workforce Interventions.

WIOA places a priority on serving out-of-school youth, many of whom are opportunity youth facing the most significant challenges to employment such as extreme poverty, homelessness, or justice-system involvement. These youth often need very intensive assistance in getting and keeping employment and are at risk of being left behind if not for deliberate efforts to design and implement intensive workforce interventions.

The Governor's WIOA Discretionary Fund can be an important resource to support partnerships among the public workforce system and other systems that disproportionately serve opportunity youth—such as juvenile justice, child welfare and foster care systems, and the youth homeless system—to design workforce interventions that align with evidence-based and promising practices.

Encourage Partnerships with Other Systems to Maximize and Strengthen Continuums of Employment Services and to Leverage Resources.

Multiple public systems can fund employment, training, and support services for a wide range of individuals who face barriers to employment. Governors can leverage their discretionary resources to fund pilot projects that seek to build off current system strengths and connect with WIOA resources.

For example, there is significant federal and state attention around the design and implementation of employment services through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program. Now may be an especially strategic time in your state to identify ways to leverage the Governor's WIOA Discretionary Fund to develop, test, or roll out new or expanded efforts that link SNAP E&T and WIOA services in order to ensure that low-income individuals have access to a range of workforce services and supports. Doing so could help identify additional untapped federal resources to bolster employment services and supports for jobseekers facing barriers to employment.

Now may be an especially strategic time to identify ways to leverage the Governor's WIOA Discretionary Fund to develop, test, or roll out new or expanded efforts that link SNAP E&T and WIOA services.

State projects that combine employment with HUD-funded rapid rehousing may be a strategic use of WIOA's discretionary resources. These types of projects also align with the public workforce and the homeless services systems' shared goal of increasing employment and economic opportunity among homeless jobseekers.

Promote Employment & Rapid Rehousing Pilot Projects to Help Stabilize People Experiencing Homelessness.

Increasing employment and economic opportunity among homeless jobseekers aligns with the goals of the workforce development system under WIOA and the homeless services system. Homeless services systems across the country are beginning to implement the HEARTH Act, which requires communities to demonstrate changes in employment income for homeless jobseekers as they exit the homeless services system. Employment programs and activities funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are also named as required partners of the WIOA system. These programs and activities include the Community Development Block Grant program, Continuum of Care, Family Self-Sufficiency program, Jobs Plus program, and the Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency program.³ As a result, it is in the best interest of these systems to work together to increase employment and economic opportunity for jobseekers facing barriers, including homeless jobseekers.

In particular, state projects that combine employment with HUD-funded rapid rehousing may be a strategic use of WIOA's discretionary resources and align with both systems' goals. Program models combining rapid rehousing and employment interventions have shown promise in stabilizing jobseekers in housing and creating pathways to employment. Indeed, employment is critical for rapid rehousing to be successful.

Rapid rehousing participants often need intensive services to get and remain employed and thus remain housed. Employment strategies such as transitional jobs, subsidized employment, IPS Supported Employment, or others that blend wage-paid, real work are especially promising in getting much-needed income into the hands of individuals and families living in poverty, promoting work-based skill building, and supporting individuals and families in taking steps to remain stably housed.

References

1. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, 29 U.S.C § 3101 [Sec. 101(d)(1),(4)–(5), and (7)–(11)]. (2014).
2. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Programs and Activities Authorized by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act; U.S. Department of Education, DOE Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for 2015, 80 Fed. Reg. 20967 (April 16, 2015) (to be codified at 34 CFR pts. 461, 462, 463, 472, 477,489, and 490).
3. U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. (2015). *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) unified and combined state plan requirements* (DOL Supporting & Related Material Draft ETA-2015-0006-0002). Retrieved from <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=ETA-2015-0006-0002>

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