

The Workforce Investment Act: Making it Work

The [Workforce Investment Act](#) (WIA) was passed by Congress in 1998, replacing the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) as the largest single source of federal funding for workforce development activities. WIA authorizes federal employment and training programs for adults, disadvantaged youth, and dislocated workers (Title I); adult education and literacy programs (Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act); and vocational rehabilitation programs (Title IV). WIA was intended to strengthen the nation's workforce development system by creating a universal access system of one-stop career centers, streamlining and coordinating the delivery of multiple employment, education, and training programs available to a range of workers from low-income adults and youths to dislocated workers.

WIA has not lived up to its promise. Underfunded and structurally inefficient, WIA neither has met the long-term employment and training needs of the most disadvantaged job seekers nor adequately supported employers' need for a skilled workforce. Congress made substantial new investments in WIA as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. However, WIA has never been reauthorized. We hope that Congress tackle both the funding and structural issues by reauthorizing WIA this year to ensure that workers receive the services and supports they need to go back to work and begin rebuilding our economy.

WIA Reauthorization

We anticipate WIA reauthorization this year. Although the House has done little toward reauthorization, the Senate has made WIA reauthorization a priority. The reauthorization of WIA is an opportunity to refocus the workforce investment system on raising the skills of the American workforce and better connect WIA with other education, training, and work support programs to create multiple pathways to postsecondary and career success. Here is some of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law's recommendations for WIA reauthorization:

- Refocus WIA on high-quality education, training, and support services and access to jobs that pay family-supporting wages and have advancement potential, and end WIA's reinforcement of occupational segregation.
- Prioritize serving the most disadvantaged job seekers. Eliminate the current "creaming" problem by creating performance measures that encourage the provision of services to those who are low-income, have limited skills, and have barriers to employment; provide dedicated funding for support services and income supports for individuals in training programs.
- Formalize coordination between WIA Title I (employment and training programs) and WIA Title II (adult education and family literacy programs) so that programs and funding streams can be more easily blended and entry points to workforce development services are increased.
- Employ sector-based strategies and bring together training providers, adult education providers, and industry-specific employers, and ensure that the curricula are developed with industry experts.

- Expand resources to bridge programs to foster collaboration between adult education and training providers and higher education to provide an entry point for low-skilled individuals to higher education, increased occupational training, and career pathways.
- Expand resources to transitional job programs to spur better collaboration with human service systems, and improve access to workforce development services for hard-to-serve populations.
- Develop and coordinate partnerships among community-based organizations (whether or not they provide education and training programs and services) and other training and education providers, such as community colleges and other educational institutions, to ensure that individuals are receiving the full range of necessary supportive services for the completion of education and training programs and attainment of career-path employment.

WIA Reinforcing Sex Segregation

Although WIA is supposed to prepare workers for higher-paying, higher-skilled occupations, these opportunities are shown to be less accessible to women under WIA. A recent report suggests that WIA may be exacerbating the occupational segregation and the pay gap between men and women. [The Workforce Investment Act and Women's Progress: Does WIA Funded Training Reinforce Sex Segregation in the Labor Market and the Gender Wage Gap?](#), released by the [Institute for Women's Policy Research](#), shows that federally funded training through WIA may reinforce sex segregation and the gender wage gap. The report finds, based on data from the [WIASRD Data Book](#), that

- women on average earn \$1,500 to \$2,000 less per quarter than men after federally funded career counseling or training; after completing services, women earn 79.5 percent of what men earn among adult participants and 74.1 percent of what men can earn among dislocated workers;
- the wage gap is not due to less training: on average women received more weeks of WIA-funded training than men;
- women are being trained as clerical, sales, and service workers—jobs traditionally filled by women; men in WIA programs are being trained for positions such as repair and installation that are traditionally male occupations and pay more; this occupational distribution of training resembles gender segregation in the broader labor force; and
- fewer than 3 percent of WIA exiters received training for nontraditional occupations, where the opposite sex accounts for at least 75 percent of workers.

WIA reauthorization offers a valuable opportunity to ensure that federal job training policy actively contributes to providing women and their families with a route to economic self-sufficiency. The following are some of the recommendations for WIA reauthorization from the [National Coalition on Women, Jobs and Job Training](#):

Structure Workforce System to Increase Women's Entry into High-Wage Jobs. Because women are often unaware of the nontraditional training route, states and local workforce boards should be encouraged to provide technical assistance and information to WIA one-stop staff members and WIA providers to counsel women and all job seekers about high-wage, high-demand, and nontraditional career paths.

Improve Access to Green Jobs. Many nontraditional occupations can be qualified as “Green Jobs,” which can offer women a pathway to better wages and benefits, entry at multiple-skill levels, and opportunity for advancement and lead to higher levels of job satisfaction.

Reduce Barriers to Participation. Many women who enter one-stop centers face additional roadblocks to employment: they may be a single parent; a domestic violence or sexual assault survivor; in need of child care; or a displaced homemaker. State and local plans should develop specific strategies to deliver supportive services to reduce barriers to employment and support women in completing training and obtaining and retaining jobs.

Workforce investments must be focused on helping women into higher-paying, family-sustaining jobs by providing targeted career advice, reducing barriers, and promoting access to high-wage, nontraditional occupations. The above recommendations provide an important vehicle for women to increase their incomes and obtain long-term economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families while improving gender equity in WIA services. The Shriver Center endorses these recommendations.

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