

THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

What Corrections and Reentry Agencies Need to Know

What is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act?

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)—which was signed into law in 2014 and implemented by states in July 2016—is the nation’s primary source of federal funding for workforce development. Its main goal is to provide job seekers with the assistance needed to obtain employment and to meet employers’ needs for qualified workers. WIOA prioritizes employment services for veterans; recipients of public assistance; economically disadvantaged youth and adults, including people who are homeless; people with criminal records; and people who have limited basic skills and work experience, in addition to funding services for other populations. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) requires states to report on the number of people receiving WIOA-funded services according to the barrier to employment they face, such as homelessness or a criminal record.

WIOA replaces the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 and aims to better connect the workforce system with the education system and create effective responses to economic and labor markets challenges at the local, state, and national level.¹

How WIOA Funding Works

Each state receives WIOA funding based on a formula that considers the size of the state’s labor force, its unemployment rate, and the size of its economically disadvantaged youth and adult populations.

These funds are administered under four titles:

- **Title I**—Workforce Development Activities, administered by DOL
- **Title II**—Adult Education and Literacy, administered by the U.S. Department of Education (DoED)
- **Title III**—Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933, administered by DOL
- **Title IV**—Rehabilitation Act of 1973, administered by DoED

A governor-appointed workforce development board (WDB) then oversees how each state’s WIOA funds are applied. In March 2016, governors of all 50 states submitted WIOA plans to DOL’s Employment and Training Administration (DOLETA) describing their goals and strategies for the use of WIOA funds and how they might pursue opportunities to coordinate services with other state and federal programs.²

1. For more information about WIOA, visit doleta.gov/wioa/Overview.cfm.

2. All state plans can be found at www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/wioa/state-plans/index.html.

Each state is divided into local workforce development areas—geographic jurisdictions that are overseen by a local WDB. These local WDBs are required to submit to their governor local WIOA plans that are aligned with the state plan. Each local workforce development area is responsible for delivering services.

UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS

Approximately one in three adults in the U.S. has a criminal record,³ and men with criminal records account for about 34 percent of all nonworking men ages 25 to 54.⁴ Nationally, there is a total estimated loss to the economy of \$78 to \$87 billion every year as a result of people with criminal records being unemployed or underemployed.⁵ Policymakers across the political spectrum recognize the scope and importance of this issue, and employment has been identified as a key reentry issue that must be addressed to reduce recidivism and improve public safety.

This fact sheet provides corrections and reentry agencies with an overview of how WIOA funds can support employment and education services for people in the justice system and those who are returning to communities.

One-Stop Centers

Most WIOA services are provided through a national network of one-stop career centers (also known as American Job Centers). DOLETA requires state WDBs to report on the number of people served through one-stop centers, disaggregated by the type of priority group they belong to and by a set of common performance metrics, such as employment and earnings.

One-stop centers are located in each LWDA and offer a range of services through partnerships with employment service providers, public assistance programs, community colleges, and other education and training providers. The services provided at each one-stop center may vary, but all one-stop centers offer a core set of resources and services, such as information on job openings; assistance with job searches, resume writing, and interviewing; access to on-the-job training and other work experiences; and funds for job training. One-stop centers may also partner with community-based reentry programs and workforce service providers that offer reentry services.

REENTRY SPECIALISTS IN NEW JERSEY PROVIDE TARGETED ASSISTANCE

Several states, including New Jersey,⁶ use WIOA funds to hire reentry specialists who are trained to address the employment needs of people returning to the community after incarceration. The reentry specialists work out of one-stop centers and, in addition to serving other types of clients, are points of contact for people who are referred to the one-stop center by corrections and reentry staff, as well as for job seekers with criminal records who visit the center without a referral.

3. See www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=5870

4. Binyamin Appelbaum, “Out of Trouble, but Criminal Records Keep Men Out of Work,” *The New York Times*, February 28, 2015.

5. Bucknor, Cherri and Alan Barber, “The Price We Pay: Economic Costs of Barriers to Employment for Former Prisoners and People Convicted of Felonies,” Center for Economic and Policy Research, June 2016.

6. For contact information for New Jersey one-stop reentry specialists, visit careerconnections.nj.gov/careerconnections/plan/foryou/exoffenders/ex_offender_services.shtml

Correctional Education

WIOA grants to states include funding for correctional education under Title II, which is administered by DoED. Each state can determine the specific correctional educational programs to be delivered—within federal guidelines—such as basic skills, GED courses, vocational training, and special education. States must also decide whether these funds will flow directly to corrections agencies or if grants will be awarded to community colleges or other training providers to offer educational programming in correctional facilities.⁷

WASHINGTON STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGES PARTNER WITH CORRECTIONS

Community and technical colleges in Washington State developed the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST), which uses a team-teaching approach in which students learn from two teachers: one who provides job training and one who teaches basic math, reading, and English. The model allows students to learn basic skills while also receiving vocational training in the area of their choice. Washington correctional facilities use I-BEST to teach automotive technology and carpentry, among other vocational skills. While the model was developed before WIOA was enacted and therefore does not utilize WIOA funds, it is considered a promising practice by DOL and is being replicated in other states.

Special Initiatives

Under WIOA, states can set aside up to 15 percent of their Title I allocation for special initiatives and innovative practices. These funds can provide opportunities to build on successful models or develop new models to prepare people with criminal records for successful employment. Additionally, these funds can be combined with other sources of funding to scale up or replicate successful models.

SPECIAL INITIATIVE SUPPORTS INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR BRIDGING WORKFORCE GAPS IN CALIFORNIA

California's WDB established the Workforce Accelerator Fund (WAF) in 2014 to develop innovative strategies to improve labor market and skills outcomes for WIOA priority groups, including people with criminal records. Using WIOA funds, WAF grants support projects that aim to accelerate skill development, employment, and re-employment for populations facing barriers to employment. In 2016, WAF grants were awarded to 17 different projects across the state and totaled \$2.7 million.

7. For more information about correctional education, visit www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/correctional-education.html.

8. See prisonpolicy.org/scans/The_Consequences_of_Dropping_Out_of_High_School.pdf.

Youth Programs

Research shows that youth who drop out of school between the ages of 16 and 24 are 63 times more likely to be incarcerated than college graduates. To target the needs of this population, WIOA requires that a minimum of 75 percent of a state's designated youth funding be spent on services for out-of-school youth (ages 16 to 24). Additionally, local workforce development areas must spend at least 20 percent of their non-administrative youth funds on assisting youth to gain work experience through summer jobs or transitional job programs. The remaining 80 percent of these funds can be spent on a range of programs and services, including education and training, mentoring, supportive services, and other activities that help youth transition to post-secondary education.⁹ These services are provided through partnerships with community-based reentry and workforce service providers.

BALTIMORE YOUTH EARN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT CREDENTIALS

More than 40 states utilize WIOA to fund YouthBuild, a community-based alternative education program that helps at-risk youth obtain GEDs and industry-recognized employment credentials. Each year approximately 10,000 low-income youth, including those leaving juvenile correctional facilities, enroll in about 260 YouthBuild programs in communities across the U.S.

Baltimore's Civic Works YouthBuild program provides construction training for 30 participants between the ages of 17 and 24 every year. Participants also receive educational assistance and those who complete the program receive job placement services.¹⁰

9. For more information about the WIOA youth program, visit doleta.gov/wioa/Docs/WIOA_YouthProgram_FactSheet.pdf.

10. For more information on YouthBuild, visit www.youthbuild.org.

The National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC) was established in 2008 by the Second Chance Act (Public Law 110-199) and is administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). The NRRC provides education, training, and technical assistance to state and local governments, tribal organizations, territories, community-based service providers, nonprofit organizations, and correctional institutions working to improve reentry. To learn more about the NRRC, visit csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc.

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