## **DOL - Nov 2021 Convening Summary Notes**

On November 8-10, 2021, Results for America’s [State and Local Workforce Fellows](https://results4america.org/about-us/workforce-fellows/#:~:text=In%20the%20fall%20of%202019,improving%20employment%20outcomes%20for%20residents.), made up of members from state and local government agencies, workforce board leaders, and mayors' and governors' offices, convened to discuss job quality and its impact on their state and local work. Joined on November 10, 2021, by key members of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), the Fellows learned more about the DOL’s definition for job quality and key areas of focus within current and future workforce development initiatives.

**Guests**

* Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Research and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Labor
* Brent Parton, Senior Advisor for Workforce Development, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration

**Overview of DOL’s Vision for Job Quality**

The Biden-Harris administration wants to build an economy that works for everyone, with jobs that provide dignity, respect, and opportunities for advancement. Acknowledging that while wages are important, there are many additional, nuanced characteristics that impact what people perceive as a quality job. The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) is currently embarking on building a more consistent definition of job quality that distills these characteristics into seven clusters of job quality: (1) Worker voice and representation; (2) Job security; (3) Pay equity; (4) Predictable, stable scheduling and paid leave; (5) Retirement savings opportunities and health benefits; (6) Working conditions, and; (7) Opportunities for advancement and skill building.

The ETA is currently capitalizing on an opportunity to infuse this definition with the administration’s re-investment in infrastructure and workforce development. Looking across the wide portfolio of work, the first priority is to do no harm. Some questions ETA is considering as they conduct this work include:

* Are current or future workforce investment efforts reinforcing, not undermining, job quality?
* Are the programs administered tailored to sectors and models that can produce the quality jobs for underserved communities?
* What types of jobs do grantee/contractors create, support, and place participants into?

Additional priorities/recommendations include:

* Strategically reviewing how partners consider talent pipelines, recruitment, and retention, and where job quality fits into partnership models.
* Applying evidence-based strategies and career pathway programs to ensure programming results in placement within quality jobs. Examples include wrap-around service models, partnership with other federal agencies, connection with apprenticeship and community college programs, and collaborations where employers act as co-investors with public systems.
* Intentionally investing in the workforce development system through the Build Back Better agenda and WIOA reauthorization to create pathways into quality jobs for those who historically have been excluded from those jobs.

**Job Quality Feedback & Questions**

An opportunity was presented to the Fellows to provide feedback and ask questions of the DOL regarding four key areas of job quality. Detailed questions can be found below:

* **For jurisdictions that have already forged ahead on job quality, how do you define job quality and how do you measure it? For places that have not, why not?**
  + - Key components of job quality include:
      * Simultaneously addressing the needs of employees while allowing businesses to thrive.
      * Moving beyond good wages to a more holistic view of job quality that does not contain a specific wage, nor classify jobs as “good” or “bad.”
      * Integrating job quality as part of larger, governmental economic development strategies.
    - Examples of job quality frameworks.
      * + [Colorado job quality framework](https://cwdc.colorado.gov/job-quality) works to “attract, create, and elevate.”
        + [San Diego job quality framework](https://workforce.org/job-quality-wkdev-guide/) contains three key components: job necessities (defined by law, stable scheduling, living wage), job opportunities (training, promotion, advancement), and job features (health and wellness).
* **What are the payoffs and what are the potential roadblocks to implementing job quality measures?** 
  + Payoffs
    - Not only attracts new companies offering quality jobs to the area, but also promotes those existing, local companies that are providing quality jobs.
    - Helps to attract new and retain current talent.
    - Messaging job quality to employers as an opportunity for education and collaboration removes some initial resistance.
  + Roadblocks
    - Widespread difficulty focusing on job quality, or understanding how it fits into current work, when attention is focused on ARPA funding and getting people back to work.
    - Data collection occurs at the employer-level currently; however, many characteristics of job quality would be sourced from the employee level. Many states are struggling with how to avoid data integrity issues if employers are self-reporting on these metrics over employees.
    - Issues of local control and differences in wages across geographies make it difficult to apply a standard job quality definition or approach in places where there is currently not sufficient political will.
  + *Questions*
    - How can we fight against the ingrained processes and expectations of current DOL programs toward job placements? Job quality standards are hard to implement when funding streams are saying “success equals placement” without regard to the quality of that placement.
      * *Alex:* We are aware that WIOA metrics are a core baseline, but people see it as the gospel of quality performance. We are considering how to integrate concepts of job quality into updates to WIOA metrics because we know it won’t be implemented or prioritized unless folks are measured on it.
    - How is DOL undertaking revision to WIOA standards?
      * *Alex:* We are exploring options to revisit performance indicators. Tax records can provide promise to understand mobility, but there are legal obstacles.
      * *Suggestion:* Student loan borrowers have clients signing tax release forms. As providers, we’re already giving people lots of paperwork to sign when they enroll in our programs. There could be an opportunity to obtain release at the time of enrollment.
    - How are you considering the data integrity issues of employer self-reported data regarding job quality?
      * *Alex:* Thinking about metrics and data, we understand concerns regarding self-report at the employer level for metrics that are individual to the employee. State wage records and tax data are possible options. DOL will be releasing research on these questions using federal statistical surveys to understand the launch pad for wage growth for specific populations and across various regions.
    - Can we shift primary success measure for DOL funded programs (eg. WIOA) to be increased income, not job placement, measured by IRS tax data pre/post program?
* **What capacities or resources are needed to successfully implement job quality concepts and metrics?**
  + Support understanding the metrics to measure for the “softer” job quality characteristics.
  + Federal-level, longitudinal case studies on what has happened with businesses who have invested in job quality. How have they fared against their competitors?
  + A playbook for employers to begin a job quality initiative would be very helpful, including collected models, best practices, and different ways to measure and operationalize job quality within WIOA programs.
  + Collateral to inform and educate jobseekers on how to evaluate the quality of employment opportunities.
  + Collateral or engagement opportunities for local employers for the DOL convey the benefits of a job quality framework for states and communities.
  + *Questions*
    - Do we have a report that captures employers’ perspectives/voice on job quality similar to the Gallup worker report?
      * *Alex:* Not currently, but DOL would be interested in exploring the topic within our research agenda.
* **What roles should federal, state, and local governments play in developing and measuring job quality concepts?**
  + Provide guidance for definitions of job quality, metrics to measure, and how to collect data
  + Create collateral for multiple audiences about job quality, its benefits, and its implementation
  + Conduct research to build the case for job quality initiatives
  + Partner with leading agencies in the field to uplift job quality
  + *Questions*
    - We are trying to build opportunities for employers to talk to employers. How can we partner to create tools and stories to raise up the voices of employers who are already championing this work? What are the smaller bites can take to start implementation?
      * *Alex:* DOL is hoping to provide technical assistance and examples of success stories as we make the case for job quality to other agencies.
* **Other Questions**
  + Does DOL have any perspective on how local/state workforce systems can begin to leverage WIOA funds to address job quality?
  + From the perspective of DOL, how might we leverage training funds to improve the quality of front-line jobs or jobs in general through WIOA?
  + How might we incorporate into this discussion retail and service sector jobs, which provide critical employment launch pads, but don't always meet wage standards?
  + It was noted that infrastructure revitalization often incentivizes jobs that are historically mostly male and mostly white. What initiatives are being developed to help to diversify.
  + In terms of job quality initiatives, are smaller employers more receptive and nimble vs. larger or more established businesses?
    - *Suggestion:* Smaller employers have been especially impacted by the pandemic and don’t have bandwidth to implement changes, even if they want to. A better angle for smaller companies might be to focus on job quality standards through procurement at public utilities, hospitals, counties/cities and workforce boards. Then, small business suppliers would need to come in line to compete.

**Potential Next Steps**

RFA has identified several potential opportunities to continue engagement with the DOL:

* Conduct a followup session Workforce Fellows as progress continues at the federal level
* Conduct a survey with Workforce Fellows to gauge perception/reception of potential policy or program changes
* Conduct a discussion with a larger variety of external partners, outside of and including Workforce Fellows
* Develop a Job Quality Playbook