

Workforce Development and Job Quality: Policy Recommendations for WIOA Reauthorization

July 2024

With the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Congress has the chance to improve the nation's workforce development system to better promote long-term economic mobility. Roughly [30 million people](#) in the United States work in low-wage jobs. These workers are less likely than higher wage earners to have benefits and are more likely to be women and people of color. Too often, WIOA perpetuates these inequities in our economy. The Harvard Project on Workforce [estimates](#) that over 40% of WIOA training participants go on to earn less than \$25,000 annually, with women and people of color disproportionately likely to enroll in training programs for low-wage occupations.

WIOA reauthorization should incentivize the workforce system to connect job seekers with employment that allows them to achieve economic self-sufficiency and that offers health insurance, retirement benefits and safe working environments. Results for America urges Congress to consider the following recommendations as part of WIOA reauthorization:

- 1| **Revise performance indicators to track long-term outcomes.**
- 2| **Establish new performance indicators related to job quality.**
- 3| **Encourage greater focus on job quality within Eligible Training Provider Lists.**
- 4| **Expand access to career navigation assistance and supportive services.**

These changes will help promote long-term economic mobility in the nation's workforce development system and ensure better, more efficient use of limited federal dollars.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 | Revise performance indicators to track long-term outcomes.

Currently, [WIOA performance indicators](#) focus on whether job seekers are employed during the second and fourth quarters after exiting the WIOA system and their median earnings during the second quarter after exiting. These indicators fail to capture how WIOA exiters are faring longer-term, and whether they are connecting to employment that offers earning growth, economic mobility and self-sufficiency. To promote greater focus on long-term outcomes, WIOA reauthorization legislation should direct the U.S. Secretary of Labor to revise WIOA performance indicators to include:

- Median earnings one, three and five years after exiting WIOA; and
- Median earnings increase one, three and five years after exiting WIOA.

2 | Establish new performance indicators related to job quality.

WIOA [performance indicators](#) place too little emphasis on job quality, as they narrowly focus on employment and median earnings, how well the workforce system serves employers, and whether job seekers attain skills and credentials. WIOA reauthorization should encourage the workforce system to focus more on connecting job seekers to good jobs. This will make job seekers more likely to achieve economic self-sufficiency and less likely to need workforce system services or public assistance in the future. Specifically, WIOA reauthorization should direct the U.S. Secretary of Labor to develop and test new job quality indicators in partnership with states, similar to the pilot program the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is currently doing with states on the [Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator](#). Job quality indicators should capture whether a job offers paid time off, health care and retirement benefits, as well as whether the employer adheres to labor laws and workplace safety regulations. Data on other important job quality components, such as career advancement and professional development opportunities, is more challenging to collect in the short term, but in the long term federal policymakers should explore ways to shift the system toward assessing job quality more holistically.

Read our [case studies](#) in the next section to see how CareerSource Tampa Bay in Florida plans to collect expanded data from local employers on the quality of their open job and how the Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium is integrating job quality metrics into work-based learning opportunities.

3 | Encourage greater focus on job quality when enrolling job seekers in training programs.

Too often, due to WIOA's limited funding and pressure to connect job seekers to employment as quickly as possible, WIOA-funded training connects job seekers to employment in occupations with low pay and high turnover. For instance, [participants enrolled in medical assistant and nursing assistant training programs go on to earn median wages of less than \\$24,000 annually](#), and women and people of color are overrepresented in training programs for low-paying occupations. Currently, job seekers can only enroll in training programs for occupations that are locally in-demand. WIOA reauthorization should expand this eligibility test to ensure occupations are not just in-demand but also 1) pay at or above the median wage for the area; and 2) do not have a high level of turnover. Pay and turnover data should be disaggregated by demographic factors where possible. In the long run, initiatives like [JEDx](#), a public-private approach for collecting and using standards-based jobs and employment data, can help inform this kind of decision-making through better and more timely labor market information.

4 | Expand access to career navigation assistance and supportive services to all workers.

Currently under WIOA, American Job Centers throughout the country offer a full range of assistance to job seekers. Staff at these centers and local workforce boards [decide](#) if job seekers need individualized career services to find employment. One-on-one career navigation assistance, such as career counseling, is a [proven, cost-effective strategy](#) for helping job seekers find higher-paying employment with benefits, particularly when coupled with high-quality training opportunities. Yet due to declining funding for WIOA in recent decades, American Job Center staff who provide these individualized career services are often underpaid, stretched in many directions, and juggling high caseloads.

Access to [supportive services](#) such as child care or transportation assistance makes it [more likely](#) workforce training participants will be able to complete their training and move into higher-quality employment, yet only 17% of Adults and 6% of Dislocated Workers exiting the WIOA system in 2022 received supportive services. Since “supportive services” covers a range of supports, the share of WIOA participants receiving a particular supportive service, such as child care, could be even lower. To ensure more job seekers can achieve economic mobility, WIOA reauthorization legislation should expand funding for career navigation and supportive services, either by providing new, dedicated funding or by ensuring American Job Centers have greater flexibility in how they use existing funds. For example, American Job Centers should be allowed to fund supportive services without having to first demonstrate that a participant could not obtain supportive services through other programs. WIOA reauthorization could also expand funding for career navigation by including it in the definition of training.

To discuss these recommendations with Results for America staff, please reach out to kenneth@results4america.org. For more information on job quality strategies, visit [Results for America's Job Quality Playbook](#).

CASE STUDIES FROM FLORIDA AND COLORADO

HOW CAREERSOURCE TAMPA BAY IS USING A GOOD JOBS FRAMEWORK TO SHAPE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

CareerSource Tampa Bay (CSTB), the workforce board serving Hillsborough County, Florida, is focusing on job quality to help local employers address their recruitment and retention challenges, as well as contribute to job seeker economic mobility. As a participant in Results for America's [Good Jobs & Equity Project](#) since 2022, CSTB's internal job quality team has developed a Good Jobs Framework (see figure below) to guide and structure their work to advance job quality within the organization as well as to communicate to employers how CSTB thinks about job quality.

JOB QUALITY FRAMEWORK From CareerSource Tampa Bay



Using this Good Jobs Framework, CSTB is preparing to launch a new supplemental employer survey and updated Job Order form to support expanded data collection from Hillsborough County employers on the quality of their open jobs posted on [Employ Florida](#), the state's labor exchange. This data will be scored against CSTB's Good Jobs Framework and will feed a new data dashboard to track and communicate progress on job quality metrics to employers and CSTB staff. CSTB will also use this data to award a new Good Jobs Seal recognizing employers offering high-quality jobs, and will create a Tampa Bay Employer Hall of Fame on a new CSTB Good Jobs & Equity website. CSTB's job quality team has briefed 175 of their CSTB colleagues on this job quality initiative and its importance to the organization's overall mission.

CSTB has also developed and piloted job quality workshops for job seekers and employers in Hillsborough County. On the job seeker side, CSTB's workshop and accompanying workbook teach job seekers about job quality fundamentals and how to find high-quality jobs. CSTB piloted this job seeker workshop with returning citizens in the county, many of whom wanted to know how they could learn about the quality of a job before starting employment. CSTB is working with the Career Center at Hillsborough Community College to offer this job seeker workshop to students beginning in 2024.

On the employer side, CSTB developed and piloted a workshop to educate employers on job quality fundamentals and how job quality can be a powerful recruitment and retention strategy. CSTB developed a marketing plan and a suite of marketing materials to spread the word to local employers about CSTB's Good Jobs Initiative and how it can help employers source talent and benefit their bottom line. CSTB's initiative is part of a growing movement among workforce boards across the country to better serve job seekers and employers by focusing on job quality. Federal policymakers can support these efforts through a greater focus on job quality within WIOA reauthorization.

HOW THE COLORADO RURAL WORKFORCE CONSORTIUM IS INTEGRATING JOB QUALITY INTO WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The [Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium](#) (CRWC) is one of 10 local workforce areas in Colorado, serving 51 of the state's 64 counties. CRWC's mission is to strengthen the relevance and quality of workforce resources and services for job seekers and businesses throughout rural Colorado. Its vision statement is "Quality jobs for people, quality talent for business."

In line with this mission and vision, CRWC has launched a new initiative to integrate job quality into work-based learning opportunities in rural Colorado. CRWC's initiative aims to increase access for job seekers to meaningful work-based learning opportunities in occupations that lead to a living wage and ensure that work-based learning opportunities are part of career pathways.

CRWC has begun training its staff on job quality elements and delivering presentations on job quality to its sector partners. CRWC is reviewing its business services to determine opportunities for integrating job quality and is adding job quality elements to documents like its [Work-Based Learning Opportunity Request Form](#).

Using MIT's [Living Wage Calculator](#), CRWC is comparing work-based learning wages with the livable wages for each zone within their service area (Western, Central and Eastern Colorado). CRWC will also engage with employers to identify wage disparities between comparable occupations, explore the drivers of those disparities and identify potential strategies for reducing them.

In the short term, CRWC aims to increase wages for subsidized work-based learning and create a coalition of key partners committed to improving job quality in rural Colorado. Longer-term, they hope to improve job quality for workforce center participants placed into employment, with wages for work-based learning in rural Colorado at or above the living wage, and see a growing number of employers offering career pathways within their organizations.