

# Data Access and Integration in Workforce Programs: Policy Recommendations for WIOA Reauthorization

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With the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Congress has a chance to increase access to data and make it easier for those across the workforce development system to make informed decisions. Job seekers need more and better data to inform their education and career choices, workforce development professionals need it to effectively serve job seekers, and policymakers need it to shape long-term workforce policy that boosts economic mobility for everyone. Results for America urges Congress to consider the following recommendations as part of the WIOA reauthorization:

- 1 | **Facilitate state access to federal and cross-state data to enable robust data and evidence-informed decision making and performance reporting.**
- 2 | **Increase investment in statewide longitudinal data systems that include workforce data.**
- 3 | **Invest in state and local workforce data systems and capacity to provide better service to job seekers and participants in education and training.**

These recommendations would empower job seekers to make informed decisions, help workforce development professionals better serve customers, and promote more research on local, state and federal workforce development efforts.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1 | Facilitate state access to federal and cross-state data to enable robust data and evidence-informed decision making and performance reporting.

WIOA should explicitly direct the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to play an intermediary role in connecting states with federal and state data sources. Allowing state agencies to securely access individual-level data from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics and other federal agencies would facilitate more comprehensive outcome reporting and performance analysis. For example, it would allow workforce development professionals, including workforce development boards and grantees, to capture outcomes for participants who may have moved out of state and whose earnings are not reported in state unemployment insurance systems.

Access to this data can make a significant difference in how program outcomes compare across geographies. It would also facilitate research that allows workforce development professionals to improve services for job seekers, and for providers to evaluate and continuously improve their programs. While the [State Wage Interchange System \(SWIS\)](#) enables states to share individual-level unemployment insurance data, [state workforce agencies](#) find the SWIS data sharing process cumbersome and inefficient. Additionally, it is difficult for states to use SWIS data for anything beyond basic WIOA reporting, and many states would like greater access to data for research and performance improvement purposes. Federal leadership on data sharing can offer a more streamlined solution.

Stronger federal leadership would also help facilitate cross-agency and cross-state data sharing, since developing data sharing agreements can be a lengthy and challenging process for states. WIOA should direct DOL to make approved data sharing agreement templates and sample code available to states on DOL's website. This would give state agencies the tools to access more data for reporting and research. DOL could also encourage states to join [multi-state data collaboratives](#) or to use the Coleridge Initiative's [Administrative Data Research Facility](#) (ADRF) for research and evidence-based policymaking, since the ADRF is a secure platform that allows states to share individual-level data with one another without having to go through DOL.

Increasingly, workforce system partners serve regions and think about workforce development regionally, rather than solely along state lines. For example, the [Pathways to Competitiveness Project](#) sought to align training programs in five counties spanning Pennsylvania and Ohio with the skill needs of manufacturing employers in the region. Moreover, job seekers, workers and learners increasingly cross state lines, making the need for cross-state data sharing more important than ever. Congress should also direct DOL to explore the long-term feasibility of creating a unified, national data platform to ease WIOA reporting and cross-state data sharing, rather than states and local areas having to maintain their own data systems.

WIOA should also direct DOL to create a data dictionary guiding state and local workforce boards and state unemployment insurance offices to report data in a uniform and standardized way. Describing employment, skills and credentials using the same vocabulary and entering data in the same way will make it easier to link individual data across the system. The impact of a data dictionary would be even greater if it extended to other federal programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

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## 2 | Increase investment in statewide longitudinal data systems that include workforce data.

WIOA should authorize and dramatically expand funding for DOL's [Workforce Data Quality Initiative](#) (WDQI), which awards competitive grants to states to add workforce data and functionality to statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS). Specifically, WIOA should include at least [\\$40 million](#) for WDQI grants for each fiscal year of the legislation. The WDQI has only awarded \$92 million to states since the first round of grants in 2011, compared to the more than \$800 million the U.S. Department of Education has awarded to states over the same period as part of its [Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant Program](#). WDQI funding has been insufficient for the level of need, slowing the development of SLDS containing both education and workforce data. By connecting data on individuals' long-term educational and career trajectories, SLDS will allow for more research and greater insight for policymakers, workforce development professionals and job seekers – but only if these data systems include high-quality workforce data. [Only 27 states](#) have added workforce data to their SLDS and [11 states](#) have never received a WDQI grant. These 11 states should receive a priority for new grants. In awarding these grants, DOL could also prioritize states that participate in a [multi-state data collaborative](#) or that work with the [Coleridge Initiative](#) to securely share data for research purposes.

### 3 | Invest in state and local workforce data systems and capacity to provide better service to job seekers and participants in education and training.

WIOA should provide state and local workforce boards with an infusion of flexible funding to upgrade, modernize and link their data systems, and should direct DOL to create data sharing agreement templates and disseminate best practices for upgrading, modernizing and linking data systems. The “workforce development system” is a catch-all term that involves multiple departments administering programs at the federal, state and local levels, each with its own rules around how data should be collected, stored, shared and used. This translates into day-to-day headaches and hurdles for workforce development professionals across the country as they serve job seekers at American Job Centers and through training providers. WIOA has sought to promote greater coordination between the different entities operating in the workforce system, but siloed data systems make basic tracking of whether job seekers are co-enrolled in multiple programs very difficult at the local level.

On any given day, [American Job Center staff often use multiple data systems](#) that are not integrated or compatible with one another. Case managers [report](#) having to enter the same data into multiple systems, limiting the time they can spend providing job seekers with high-quality, individualized career counseling, while providers face major obstacles in coordinating, assessing and evaluating their programs. Moreover, the last WIOA reauthorization required significant and expensive changes to state data systems but did not provide additional funding to help states implement those changes. Congress should also direct DOL to explore the long-term feasibility of creating a centralized data system that integrates all mandatory and voluntary partner program data from the state and local levels into a national data platform, rather than states and local areas having to maintain their own data systems.

In a [case study](#) below, we describe Virginia’s efforts to improve the job seeker experience through data infrastructure improvements.

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## CASE STUDY

### HOW VIRGINIA IMPROVED THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE THROUGH DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

Before 2020, Virginians looking for help finding a job or acquiring new skills might have had to navigate and apply to nine different state agencies, never being certain which services would be the best fit. Because of siloed data systems across agencies and programs, application and intake processes were duplicative. To address these challenges, Virginia developed and launched four new interrelated initiatives:

- **Commonwealth Data Trust:** The Commonwealth Data Trust is a [legal framework](#) governing how Virginia state agencies can share individual-level data with one another to improve service delivery and decision making. The Commonwealth Data Trust allows workforce system partners, including state and local workforce boards, to securely and responsibly link their data across case management systems in real time using a Virginia-owned, open-source, cloud-based software solution implemented in partnership with its developer, BrightHive.
- **The Virginia Career Works Referral Portal:** This easy-to-use, self-directed portal provides Virginians with a single point of entry to check eligibility for and enroll in a broad range of workforce and human services, such as TANF and SNAP. By gathering data on a person's needs and barriers to employment in a unified application before making referrals to specific programs, the portal dramatically streamlines enrollment processes and reduces duplicative data entry for customers and staff. This allows frontline staff at American Job Centers to devote more time to helping job seekers. Under Gov. Glenn Youngkin's administration, the Referral Portal is being transitioned to the Department of Workforce Development and Advancement.
- **Virginia Career Works Dashboard:** This dashboard makes available to the public data analysis and visualizations about the state and regional labor markets, unemployment, wages, workforce program outcomes and other indicators.
- **Internal Performance Dashboard:** This dashboard provides frontline staff, field managers and agency leadership with secure operational reports to guide decision making and improve workforce service delivery.

By linking the Commonwealth Data Trust, the Referral Portal, the Virginia Career Works Dashboard and the internal performance dashboard, the Commonwealth of Virginia is ensuring that their workforce customers receive the services they need to fully engage in education and workforce development programming.

This data integration also helps workforce officials use real-time data to manage workforce programs. Frontline staff can use the data to improve service delivery, while state agencies can use it to make strategic, long-term investments in economic opportunity and mobility. For example, through this data integration effort, workforce officials learned there was less overlap in the WIOA and TANF customer bases than they had assumed. Officials found they needed to be more intentional about promoting co-enrollment between the two programs to focus workforce dollars on Virginians who need services most, magnifying the impact of both funding streams. Moreover, the data integration helped these officials identify potential co-enrollees to proactively approach.

