

# Evidence and Evaluation: Policy Recommendations for WIOA Reauthorization

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As Congress works to reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), lawmakers should seize the opportunity to improve our nation’s workforce development system so it increasingly invests in what works and prioritizes results. Results for America offers the following WIOA reauthorization recommendations to encourage evaluation and promote the definition and prioritization of evidence in the workforce development system.

- 1 | Define and prioritize “evidence-based” solutions in WIOA.**
- 2 | Set aside 1% of WIOA funds for evaluation.**
- 3 | Establish a Workforce Development Innovation Fund.**

These recommendations will lead to more effective and efficient investment of federal dollars, promote strategies that successfully connect job seekers to employment, meet employers’ need for talent, and boost economic mobility for everyone.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1 | Define and prioritize “evidence-based” solutions in WIOA.

WIOA does not currently define “evidence-based.” A clear definition –including the required quality, number and results of evaluations –would provide clarity and consistency to the field. Results for America’s [definitions](#) of “evidence-based program” and “evidence-building program” can serve as models for WIOA reauthorization:

- “Evidence-based program” means a program with either impact evidence or implementation evidence that is relevant and credible and has an informed rationale.
- “Evidence-building program” means a program that has an informed rationale and is undergoing an impact evaluation or implementation evaluation that is relevant and credible.

Defining evidence is the first step in prioritizing it. Once “evidence-based” is defined, WIOA grant programs can require or encourage workforce boards to invest federal dollars in evidence-based strategies.

WIOA does not direct funding toward evidence-based strategies, leading to inefficient use of limited WIOA dollars and fewer job seekers benefiting from the most effective strategies. WIOA reauthorization should guide state and local workforce boards toward evidence-based strategies, for example by requiring boards to spend a gradually increasing percentage of WIOA Title I funds on such strategies and/or by directing the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to provide boards with the information and incentives needed to adopt those strategies.

For instance, WIOA reauthorization could direct DOL to create a Supplemental Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) made up of training providers across the country using evidence-based strategies. State and local workforce boards that partner with providers on the Supplemental ETPL could be given flexibility from other WIOA requirements, such as the proposal to require a percentage of WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker funds be spent on training.

Three state workforce agencies currently define and prioritize evidence for their programs: [Colorado](#), [Pennsylvania](#) and [Texas](#). In 2020, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) developed a new [evidence framework](#) to define and prioritize evidence of effectiveness in its grantmaking, with the goal of expanding the use of evidence-based strategies in its workforce development system. TWC is now using its evidence framework across multiple grant programs, including the Adult Education and Literacy Employer Engagement Initiative, Texas Talent Connection Grant Program, and Building and Construction Trades grants. Moving forward, the Texas Workforce Investment Council, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area plan to use TWC’s evidence framework when issuing grants. To learn how Colorado and Pennsylvania are defining and prioritizing evidence, read our [case studies](#) below.

## 2 | Set aside 1% of WIOA funds for evaluation.

Since fiscal year 2013, Congressional appropriators have included bill language in their annual appropriations for DOL permitting the Secretary of Labor to set aside not more than .75% of certain DOL program funds for evaluations. We recommend including a provision in WIOA permitting the Secretary of Labor to invest not more than 1.0% of WIOA program funds for evaluations. These evaluation set-asides should be exempt from funds designated for “research, studies, and multistate projects” under Sec. 169(b). Setting aside program dollars to promote more evaluation and evidence-building at the national level would help achieve economies of scale and more generalizable results when multiple national sites are used to test a particular workforce strategy. Scaling evaluation efforts will help identify effective workforce strategies and provide greater insight into where those strategies are most effective.

## 3 | Establish a Workforce Development Innovation Fund.

WIOA reauthorization should include U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet’s [Better Jobs through Evidence and Innovation Act](#), which would establish a Workforce Development Innovation Fund (WDIF) within DOL. Workforce development professionals in the field hold deep expertise and wisdom about how to serve job seekers and employers. WIOA reauthorization should expand support for state and local workforce boards, non-governmental organizations, tribal organizations, higher education institutions, and other entities to test and scale innovative workforce strategies. This would promote discovery and expansion of effective strategies that connect job seekers to high-quality employment, respond to employers’ evolving talent needs, and promote long-term economic mobility and self-sufficiency. The proposed WDIF would be a tiered innovation fund, meaning it would direct larger funding amounts toward workforce programs that have demonstrated success and are ready to be scaled, while directing smaller amounts of funding toward newer programs that need further testing and evaluation.

*To discuss these recommendations with Results for America staff, please reach out to [kenneth@results4america.org](mailto:kenneth@results4america.org). For more information on using evidence and evaluation in workforce development, visit Results for America’s [Workforce Evidence-Based Spending Guide](#).*

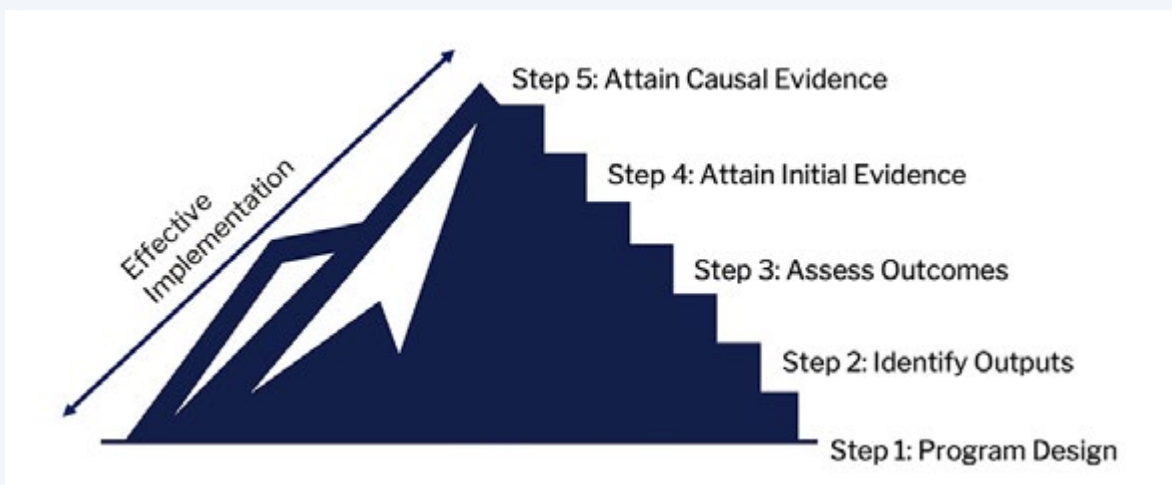
# CASE STUDIES FROM COLORADO AND PENNSYLVANIA

## HOW COLORADO PROMOTES HIGH-QUALITY TRAINING USING AN EVIDENCE CONTINUUM

In 2020, the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) developed an [evidence continuum](#) (see Figure 1 below) to evaluate workforce grant applications, with the goal of scaling use of this continuum across the state’s workforce grantmaking. In 2021, CWDC piloted the use of this evidence continuum to evaluate applications for \$2.25 million in [Reskilling, Upskilling, and Next-skilling \(RUN\) Workers Grants](#). RUN grants used State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to support training and industry-recognized credential attainment for up to 1,200 unemployed and underemployed workers. CWDC awarded RUN grants to [10 organizations](#) based in part on the level of evidence supporting the organizations’ proposed program models.

CWDC has provided technical assistance to ensure grant applicants understand the evidence continuum and how it affects the evaluation of grant applications. In 2022, CWDC awarded \$125,000 in SLFRF dollars to the Colorado Equitable Economic Mobility Initiative (CEEMI), a nonprofit working to scale evidence-based workforce programs in Colorado. With this award, CEEMI is developing and delivering [technical assistance](#) to help training providers build capacity to implement evidence-based approaches. CWDC has also included the evidence continuum in [Colorado’s WIOA State Plan](#) (page 64).

**Figure 1:** Colorado Workforce Development Council’s [Evidence Continuum](#)



## HOW PENNSYLVANIA SUPPORTS SECTOR STRATEGIES THROUGH EVIDENCE

In May 2020, the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry defined evidence of effectiveness for the state's public workforce system for the first time in its history. Specifically, this new evidence framework defined strong, moderate, preliminary and pre-preliminary evidence (page 49 of the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board [5/5/2020 Quarterly Meeting Briefing Book](#)). In August 2021, the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry began piloting the use of this evidence framework to award \$4 million in [Industry Partnership grants](#), a program to expand industry-focused workforce development strategies. Specifically, the department allotted a possible 10 points out of 100 based on the level of evidence supporting the applicant's planned approach. In program year 2022, the grant program supported 25 partnerships in critical industries like manufacturing, information technology and health care. The department used this evidence framework to score subsequent rounds of Industry Partnership grant applications in 2022 and 2023, with \$4 million in funding available each round.

After publishing the statewide evidence definitions, the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board surveyed over 100 local workforce partners to understand how the evidence definitions were impacting them. Respondents shared that staff expertise and capacity, data access, and non-staff related costs were the main barriers to building and using evidence, which the state board has worked to mitigate through dedicated funds for evidence-building within grant awards as well as improved technical assistance.