

Priority of Service for High-Need Adults

STATE PLAN LOCAL PLAN POLICIES & GUIDANCE BUDGET CHOICES

CLASP's [Opportunities for Action](#) is a series of short memos with recommendations for state and local areas to fully realize the options in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to help low-income and lower-skilled youth and adults achieve economic success.

With respect to WIOA Title I Adult funding, priority for employment and training activities must be given to “recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient... The appropriate local board and the Governor shall direct the one-stop operators in the local area with regard to making determinations related to such priority” (WIOA, Section 134(c)(3)(E)). Under the Workforce Investment Act, priority was required to be given to public assistance recipients and low-income individuals, but only when States and local areas determined that allocated funds were limited. Under WIOA, priority must be provided to these high-need populations, regardless of the level of funds. WIOA also expands the priority to include individuals who are basic skills deficient ([TEGL 3-15](#)).

State Plan

CLASP recommends that the WIOA State Plan include a description of how the Governor will ensure priority of service for Title I Adult career and training services to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient. Draft federal regulations for WIOA require local plans to include the process by which priority of service must be applied by the one-stop operator (proposed [§679.560\(b\)\(21\)](#)). Because WIOA requires both the Governor and the local workforce board to direct the one-stops on how to implement priority of service (WIOA, Section 134(c)(3)(E)), the local boards should have a complete understanding of the Governor’s direction on this important provision. To assist the local boards in documenting the Governor’s direction as a required element in their local plan, the WIOA State Plan should include specific directions on how to implement this priority of service, with details that go above and beyond the check-box assurances required in the State Plans.

1. The State Plan should define in detail what it means to provide priority of service, direct local boards to conduct outreach to these populations, and explain how to make determinations using illustrative examples. (See box on page two for potential operational definition and examples.)
2. The State Plan should set a benchmark for the percentage of Title I Adult participants who are in the priority populations. CLASP recommends a threshold of 70 percent. (*See endnote for the rationale for a 70 percent benchmark.)
3. The State Plan should notify local areas that their implementation of priority of service will be measured based on this benchmark. Local areas that fail to meet the benchmark should receive technical assistance from the state, particularly to ensure they implement effective outreach to priority of service populations.
4. The State should align state programs to ensure effective outreach to individuals receiving public assistance, including considering the option to submit a Combined Plan that includes TANF, SNAP E&T, and other human services programs.

Definition: Priority means the right to take precedence over non-covered persons in obtaining services. Depending on the type of service or resource being provided, taking precedence means:

1. The covered person receives access to the service or resource earlier in time than the non-covered person; or
2. If the service or resource is limited, the covered person receives access to the service or resource instead of or before the non-covered person

Examples:

- Three individuals apply for training services. One is receiving public assistance, one is low income, and the other does not fall into a priority category. There are two training slots available. In this scenario, the first two individuals take precedence over the third, meaning that the public assistance recipient and low-income person will receive training services and the non-covered person will not.
- The workforce board purchases 10 slots for a short-term training program. Fifteen persons apply, 7 of whom are eligible for priority of service and 8 of whom are not. All 7 of those entitled to priority of service will receive training slots, while only 3 of the non-covered persons will receive training slots.

Local Plan

Proposed [§679.560\(b\)\(21\)](#) says that the Local Plan must “include the process by which priority of service must be applied by the one-stop operator.” CLASP recommends that the State Plan include such direction; if a state follows this recommendation, the local plan can include such language from the State Plan. In addition, CLASP recommends that the local plan set a benchmark of 70 percent for the percentage of Title I Adult participants that are from priority populations. (*See endnote for the rationale for a 70 percent benchmark.)

Policies and Guidance

Per [TEGL 3-15](#), local areas must establish written policies and procedures to ensure priority for the populations described above for participants served in the WIOA Adult program. This applies to any eligibility determination beginning on or after July 1, 2015.

In order to achieve the recommended benchmark of 70 percent of Title I participants being priority of service populations, State and Local policies should require that local areas:

- Have a priority of service policy that is made publically available;
- Identify eligible individuals at point of entry and determine how they will be informed of priority status;
- Pair job training with child care and other supportive services that enable priority populations to participate;
- Offer training appropriate for the education levels of typical public assistance recipients (i.e., not only training with prerequisites of 12th grade reading levels);
- Provide regular referrals from TANF and SNAP E&T to WIOA Title I Adult; and
- Exchange data to inform TANF and SNAP E&T agencies when their beneficiaries are participating in WIOA-funded services (such data exchanges can also ensure that ABAWDs served by WIOA are counted as participating in approved SNAP training to maintain their SNAP benefits).

Related CLASP resources: [Priority of Service brief](#); [Priority of Service webinar](#); and [Comments on proposed regulations](#).

Questions? Contact Anna Cielinski, CLASP senior policy analyst, at acielinski@clasp.org.

Give us feedback!

* Prior to WIA, the Jobs Training Partnership Act (JTPA) required that 90 percent of funds for adults be targeted for those who were low-income. When WIA went into effect in 1998, with sequence of services, universal access to core services, and a priority of service provision that was effectively optional, the share of WIA adult exiters receiving intensive or training services who were low-income dropped from 71.3 percent in Program Year (PY) 2001 to 48.7 percent in PY 2013. However in PY 2008, two states that chose to implement priority of service under WIA had a large share of low-income adults in the pool of exiters receiving training services. In Washington State nearly 80 percent of adult exiters receiving training services were low-income. In Illinois the participation rate in training services was 83 percent. Under WIOA, with strong priority of service provisions, a 70 percent benchmark for many states is aspirational, but achievable.