

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Title I: Youth

Overview: Title I of WIOA includes funding streams for adults, dislocated workers, and youth. WIOA youth funding is intended to provide comprehensive interventions that “support the attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, entry into postsecondary education, and career readiness for participants.” (WIOA, Sec.129(c)(2)).

WIOA makes development of career pathway strategies a function of the state and local workforce boards and a permissible activity under all parts of the Act. The career pathway approach provides a framework for state and local unified planning that reorients existing education and workforce services (including those authorized under WIOA) from myriad disconnected programs to one system focused on individuals’ post-secondary and economic success.¹⁶

Type of Program: Formula grants to states and localities. A portion of the funds remains at the state level for the governor’s discretionary use (discretionary funds), while the rest is distributed by states via formula to local workforce areas through Workforce Development Boards (local funds). Boards are required to contract these funds to local providers through a competitive process.

Eligibility and Targeting: WIOA is designed to serve low-income youth who face barriers to continued education and employment. Eligibility is defined separately for out-of-school youth and in-school youth. At least 75 percent of formula funds must be allocated for out-of-school youth.

Out-of-school youth are those aged 16-24 who are not attending any school as defined by state law and meet at least one of these criteria: dropped out of school; is within compulsory school age but did not attend during the previous school year; has obtained a secondary school diploma or equivalent but is low income and basic skills deficient or an English language learner; is in the juvenile or adult justice systems; is homeless, a runaway, or either in or aged out of foster care; is pregnant or parenting; is an individual with a disability; and/or is low-income and “requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.”

In-school youth are low-income individuals aged 14-21 who are attending school and meet at least one of these criteria: is basic skills deficient; is an English language learner; is homeless, a runaway, or either in or aged out of foster care; is pregnant or parenting; is an individual with a disability; and/or “requires additional assistance to complete an education program or secure and hold employment.”

Services/Program Support: Services provided depend on the specific service strategy customized to each youth. However, local areas are required to make available specified youth program elements, including dropout prevention and recovery, linkages between academic and occupational learning, paid and unpaid work experience with academic and occupational education components, training for a specific occupational cluster, career counseling, and exploration of and preparation for postsecondary education and training.

Non-federal funds: There are no state matching requirements under WIOA Title I Youth.

HOW PROGRAM CAN SUPPORT CAREER PATHWAYS

Local areas are required to conduct an individual needs assessment for each youth, then make services available based on a customized strategy. Each youth's service strategy must include a career goal and provide access to a variety of services. To meet a range of youth development needs, WIOA establishes a set of 14 services—program elements—that must be available in each local area for inclusion, as appropriate, in a participant's plan.

These services include: tutoring; study skills training; instruction leading to secondary school completion (or its recognized equivalent), including evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies; alternative secondary school offerings; paid and unpaid work experiences, including summer employment opportunities directly linked to academic and occupational learning; pre-apprenticeship, internships, and job shadowing; on-the-job training; occupational skills training focused on postsecondary credentials with labor market value; concurrent education and workforce preparation in a specific occupation or cluster; leadership development opportunities, including community service and peer-centered activities that encourage responsibility and other positive social behaviors; supportive services; adult mentoring that lasts at least 12 months and may occur during and/or after program participation; follow-up services; comprehensive guidance and counseling, including drug and alcohol abuse services counseling, as well as referrals to counseling, as appropriate to individual youth's needs; financial literacy; entrepreneurial skills training; career counseling and exploration; and other activities to prepare for the transition to postsecondary education and training.

Local Workforce Development Boards oversee planning for the use of youth funds and the delivery of services. Each local board may designate a standing youth committee, which should include community-based organizations with a record of successfully serving youth, to guide planning and operations related to youth services.

In light of its required program elements, this funding stream is ideally suited to the development of supported

career pathways for youth who need more intensive assistance in obtaining a secondary credential, as well as navigating college transitions or obtaining occupational training, postsecondary credentials, and self-sustaining employment. Previously, under WIA, some governors used state discretionary funds to support career pathways for youth.¹⁷ Local workforce boards also used their local WIA funds to support career pathway programs for low-income in-school and out-of-school youth.

In **Maryland**, the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board used WIA youth funds to support the Career Academy, an alternative education center jointly administered with the Mayor's Office of Employment Development. The Career Academy provides multiple pathways for students to obtain an academic credential, including earning a high school diploma, enrolling in a GED program, enrolling in a Diploma Plus program, and enrolling in Job Corps. In the Diploma Plus model, students earn a diploma and college credits through the Early College Enrollment program at Baltimore City Community College.¹⁸

PROGRAM LIMITATIONS

There are no income requirements for the majority of eligible out-of-school youth—with two exceptions. The following individuals must be low income in order to receive services through WIOA: (a) has obtained a secondary school diploma or equivalent but is low income and basic skills deficient or an English language learner; or (b) is low income and “requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.”

In-school youth must be low income. The low-income definition includes previous eligibility language from WIA. Maximum household income for participation is set at 70 percent of the lower living standard. However, eligibility is also expanded to include individuals who receive or are eligible to receive a free or reduced-price lunch. Additionally, for the purposes of youth services through Title I, the low-income criterion can include “youth living in a high-poverty area.”

All grants and contracts for youth services must be awarded based on a competitive process, making it more difficult to negotiate customized training or pipeline programs with specific employers.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERS

WIOA establishes career pathways development as a function of the local board and specifically cites the career pathway strategy for youth: “CAREER PATHWAYS DEVELOPMENT.—The local board, with representatives of secondary and postsecondary education programs, shall lead efforts in the local area to develop and implement career pathways within the local area by aligning the employment, training, education, and supportive services that are needed by adults and youth, particularly individuals with barriers to employment.”(WIOA, Sec.107(d)(5)).

WIOA requires local areas to use youth funds to conduct an objective assessment “for the purpose of identifying appropriate services and career pathways for participants.” Additionally, WIOA requires that at least 20 percent of youth formula funds be spent on paid and unpaid work experiences that incorporate academic and occupational education for out-of-school youth and in-school youth.¹⁹ Such work experiences can be a critical piece of a career pathway program.

The responsibilities for programming WIOA Title I Youth funding fall to local workforce areas. States can assist local areas in moving in this direction in several ways:

- Establish a state youth standing committee (or similar entity) to bring together leaders from across systems and sectors in order to provide state and local efforts with strategic guidance on coordinating and aligning resources and programming across the education, workforce, and state-administered youth-serving systems. While not required by WIOA statute, several states have established a state youth council or similar entity.
- Provide technical assistance to strengthen the strategic activities of local boards in order to facilitate

coordination among education, workforce, foster care, and juvenile justice systems and provide local areas with labor market and career information.

- Set aside a portion of state discretionary funding to offer incentives for developing local career pathway models. Use the state funding to leverage the expenditure of local WIOA youth funds to create career pathways linked to growing areas of the state or regional economy.