

Fix WIOA to Work for Business

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) establishes the structure, programs, and funding for our workforce training system, which includes the national network of state and local workforce investment boards. Yet Congress has never appropriated full funding to WIOA nor has it invested in critical workforce strategies that support business, worker, and student needs.

Businesses depend on a pipeline of trained workers to expand and compete. And research shows that hiring a diverse workforce is good for business. Unfortunately, our workforce system doesn't work to deliver a pipeline of diverse, skilled workers the way it should. That's because WIOA — our nation's landmark workforce program (and the workforce program that black, brown, and indigenous workers are disproportionately enrolled in) is critically underfunded. Underfunded workforce policies aren't the only reason there's inequity in the labor market. But to build a robust, inclusive pipeline of trained workers, we must transform WIOA into an adequately resourced program that grants equitable access to skills training to all workers — **a program that's capable of delivering industry-aligned skills training that strengthens business.**

1 Invest in programs to provide equitable high-quality skills training, economic supports, and pathways to quality, in-demand jobs:

- Create a new 21st Century Sector Partnerships Grant Program of at least \$2 billion to develop a national network of high-performing industry/sector partnerships and to implement career pathways. Sector partnerships are local strategies that bring together businesses, training providers, community-based organizations, and workers groups that collaborate to develop effective talent pipelines.
- Provide high-quality skills training aligned with industry demand to workers with low incomes through a new Skills Training Grant that would help cover the costs of supportive services (transportation, childcare).
- Provide Digital Skills at Work grants to help upskill and reskill workers to use new technologies in the workplace across industry sectors.
- Expand training programs that teach digital, literacy, math, and language skills alongside job-specific skills (Integrated Education and Training).

2 Provide accountability for our workforce system to contribute to an inclusive economy:

- Expand outcome metrics and reporting to better assess the quality of skills training programs and measure worker progress. Performance metrics should include occupation-specific placement and quality credential attainment.
- Utilize WIOA funds for impact and implementation research, evaluations, and data systems. Without proper funding and support for analysis, the workforce system cannot build the evidence base needed to improve outcomes.
- Separate program-level and state data by race, gender, and ethnicity to identify inefficiencies and ensure workers with systemic barriers to skills training have appropriate access and support.
- Require WIOA state and local plans and workforce investment boards (WIB) to incorporate racial equity goals and workers' voices. WIBs are already required to have strong business participation, and WIOA plans must currently address the skills training needs of employers. Adding these perspectives will help develop a robust system that meets business talent needs and supports students to be successful.

3 Strengthen the delivery of career services to better help workers be successful in skills training.

- Most people who access workforce development services through WIOA rely on support from career services staff. Yet, there are not enough staff to meet demand, and there is little funding for the professional development of frontline staff.
- Strengthen services delivered through partnerships between local workforce boards and community organizations to pilot new outreach and service delivery approaches for people with structural barriers to employment.