



## Serving Youth with Disabilities Under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998: *The Basics*

### What is the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)?

The Workforce Investment Act (P.L. 105-220) (WIA) provides coordinated, effective, and customer-focused workforce development and employment services. Congress passed WIA in 1998. Title I of WIA provides for services to youth, adults, and dislocated workers through three formula-based funding streams. The youth provisions of Title I of WIA require states and localities to provide a comprehensive workforce preparation system that reflects the developmental needs of youth. The Act institutionalizes the One-Stop System as the delivery system of choice, requires the participation of 19 partner programs in the One-Stop System, and strongly encourages the participation of others. One-Stop services are provided at both physical and virtual sites, and serve as gateways to employment and training information and services found in communities. However, youth services are often provided in locations other than the One-Stop center.

### How does WIA benefit youth?

Under WIA, eligible youth receive a wide array of services in achieving academic and employment success.

#### Activities include:

- Tutoring and other academic instruction;
- Occupational skill training;
- On-going mentoring opportunities;
- Workforce participation, including work experience and job readiness training;
- Continued supportive services;

*This information brief is for anyone who interacts with youth with disabilities and would like to know about the programs under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. The brief provides background on those parts of the Workforce Investment Act that cover service to youth so that youth, families, and service providers can better connect to the workforce development system.*

- Incentives for recognition and achievement; and
- Leadership, development, decision-making, and community service.

WIA links traditional youth employment and training services with the core principles of youth development by requiring ten program elements that are discussed later.

### Who can participate in the Workforce Investment Act Youth Program?

WIA youth services are available for both in-school and out-of-school youth aged 14 to 21. To be eligible, youth must be low-income and face one or more of the following barriers:

- Basic skills deficient;
- School dropout;
- Homeless, a runaway, or foster child;
- Pregnant teen or teen parent;

- Offender; or
- Individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment.

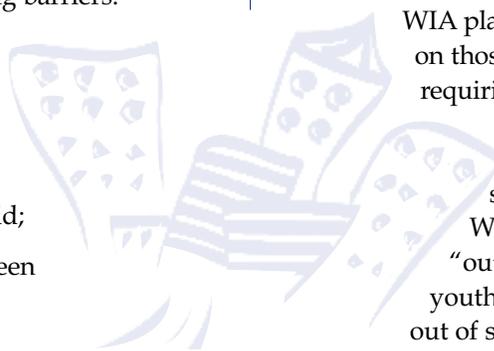
Even if the family of a disabled youth does not meet the income eligibility criteria, the disabled youth may be considered a low-income individual if the youth's own income:

- Meets the income criteria established in WIA section 101(25)(B); or
- Meets the income eligibility criteria for cash payments under any federal, state, or local public assistance program.

In addition, up to five percent of the youth served in a local area can be exempted from the low-income requirement, if they:

- Experience one or more of the barriers listed above;
- Are one or more grade levels below their age-appropriate grade level;
- Are an individual with a disability, including a learning disability (emphasis added); or
- Face a serious barrier to employment as identified by the local board.

WIA places heavy emphasis on those most in need, requiring that 30 percent of the funds be used on out-of-school youth. The WIA definition of "out-of-school" includes youth who have dropped out of school, as well as





youth who have graduated from high school or hold a GED but are deficient in basic skills, unemployed, or underemployed. To be defined as out-of-school, the applicant must not be enrolled in school or any alternative educational program when he or she registers for WIA services; however, the applicant may be placed in an educational program, such as a GED program or alternative school, as part of the service strategy after registration.

### What services are provided?

WIA mandates that ten *youth program elements* be included in WIA services provided to eligible youth. The specific services provided to a youth are outlined in the individual service strategy, which is developed based on the youth's individual needs. These program elements, which are consistent with youth development research, include:

1. Tutoring, study skills training, and instruction leading to completion of secondary school, including dropout prevention strategies;
2. Alternative secondary school services;
3. Summer employment opportunities that are directly linked to academic and occupational learning;
4. Paid and unpaid work experiences, including internships and job shadowing;
5. Occupational skill training, as appropriate;
6. Leadership development activities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social behaviors during non-school hours;
7. Supportive services;
8. Adult mentoring during program participation;
9. Follow-up for at least 12 months after program completion (this is required for all youth); and

10. Comprehensive guidance and counseling, including drug and alcohol abuse counseling and referral, as appropriate.

Low-income youth ages 18 to 21 may be eligible for dual enrollment in both the adult and youth WIA programs. This allows them to take advantage of *Individual Training Accounts* (ITAs) under the adult program while receiving the guidance and supportive services available under the youth programs. An ITA may be used to purchase training services from eligible providers.

### How does the Workforce Investment Act work?

**One-Stops:** WIA promotes a One-Stop service delivery system to connect the broad range of workforce services available to youth and adults in a local community. One-Stops can serve as a starting place for youth to navigate their way into the world of work. Youth can also access WIA programs directly through local service providers where they may already be involved in other programs. Some of the core services of a One-Stop include: career counseling, job search and placement assistance, information about unemployment insurance claims, establishing eligibility for welfare-to-work programs, access to financial assistance for training, and information about other supportive services. Core employment-related services are available to all individuals without regard to income eligibility or other program eligibility requirements. One-Stops are also the access point for Individual Training Accounts and intensive services such as individual counseling and career planning, comprehensive and specialized assessments, and short-term prevocational services. Eligible youth may access various One-Stop offerings, and, after they reach 18, participate in adult services, as well as youth program offerings, depending upon the individual assessment of youth needs.

One-Stops can encourage youth to access their services by:

- Establishing linkages with schools, community-based youth-serving organizations, vocational/community rehabilitation programs, and school-to-work systems;
- Targeting out-of-school youth;
- Conducting youth tours of One-Stop centers;
- Placing youth program staff at One-Stops or training One-Stop staff in youth programs; and
- Creating separate youth resource areas.

**Youth Services:** WIA youth funds are distributed from the U.S. Department of Labor to states based on a formula, which takes into account the youth population, poverty, and unemployment rates. States, in turn, direct funds to local workforce investment boards (WIBs) based on the same formula. Youth services are delivered by entities that are competitively awarded a grant or contract by the WIB to provide such services. Local WIBs, or in some cases youth councils, seek proposals from service providers and make recommendations about the use of these providers to the local WIB. Each state is required to disseminate a list of eligible providers of youth activities.

In addition to the formula-funded youth programs, under WIA the Department of Labor youth programs portfolio includes two additional youth programs – the Youth Opportunity Grants and the Job Corps.

WIA specifies that the **Youth Opportunity Grants (YOG)** are to be used to increase employment and school completion rates of *all* youth between the ages of 14 and 21 who live in selected empowerment zones, enterprise communities, and other high-poverty areas. Unlike WIA formula-funded youth programs, Youth



Opportunity programs can serve all of the youth in the target area, regardless of income or family circumstance. Through a competitive grant process, DOL awarded 36 YOGs in February 2000 to local WIBs and/or Native American reservations to provide the ten program elements listed above, including intensive job placement and the requirement of two-year follow-up for every participant. YOG sites were also required to establish at least one or more YOG Community Centers, centralized locations for young people to participate in training and development activities. There are currently 36 YOGs operating across the nation – 24 are in urban areas, six are in rural areas, and six are located in Native American communities. Each of these grants is for up to five years of funding, pending funding availability and performance.

Founded in 1964, **Job Corps** is a residential education and job-training program for disadvantaged youth, ages 16 through 24. Most students enter the program without a high school diploma. Job Corps services may include: intensive education, vocational training, work-based learning, recreational activities, counseling and related services, and follow-up that includes post-center placement and support services. Job Corps operates 118 primarily residential centers located across the country and in Puerto Rico. WIA strengthened Job Corps by requiring applicants be assigned to centers nearest their home, identifying core indicators of performance (such as graduation, placement, retention, earnings, entry into post-secondary education, advanced training enrollment, and participant skill gains), and providing continued services for one year after graduation. Job Corps centers must have a business and community liaison and an industry council. The industry council reviews relevant labor market information, determines local employment opportunities, identifies the skills and education needed to gain those

opportunities, and recommends appropriate vocational training for the center.

**Governance:** Under WIA, the workforce investment system is overseen by state and local WIBs that must include representatives of individuals and organizations that have experience with respect to youth activities. Local business-led WIBs ensure youth programs are tailored to the needs of youth and the community. These local WIBs are responsible for establishing *youth councils* as a subgroup of the board. The youth council is composed of individuals representing a range of local stakeholders and youth service providers. The youth council must include:

- Members of the local WIB (particularly educators and employers);
- Representatives of youth service agencies (including juvenile justice agencies), public housing authorities, and Job Corps;
- Parents of youth eligible for WIA services, and
- Other individuals, including former program participants, who have experience relating to youth (including representatives of community-based organizations, vocational rehabilitation, and organized labor).

The youth council is responsible for:

- Developing portions of the local plan relating to youth;
- Recommending the providers of youth activities to be awarded grants by the local WIB (based on criteria contained in the state plan);
- Conducting oversight of these providers; and
- Coordinating the youth activities in the local area.

**What does WIA say about civil rights protections?**

WIA has clear *nondiscrimination and equal opportunity provisions* in Section

188. This section brings all WIA programs and activities under the prohibitions against discrimination in the Age Discrimination Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (disability), Title IX of the Education Amendments (gender), and the Civil Rights Act (race, color, or national origin).

This WIA regulation prohibits discrimination based on disability for participation, benefits, or employment by programs and activities funded or otherwise financially assisted in whole or in part under WIA (including One-Stops and subcontractors). This includes: denying an opportunity for benefits, training, or services; providing an

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth is working to ensure that youth with disabilities are provided full access to high quality services in integrated settings to gain employment and independent living. NCWD/Youth is:

- Supporting state and local policies that promote full access to high quality services for youth with disabilities;
- Strengthening the services provided by organizations responsible for delivery of workforce development services; and,
- Improving the awareness, knowledge, and skills of individuals responsible for providing direct services to youth.

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unnecessarily segregated opportunity; or applying criteria that exclude qualified individuals. The penalties for programs that do not comply range from a compliance order to civil proceedings in District Court.

**How are programs and services measured under WIA?**

WIA is a performance driven program. The success of service providers, local workforce areas, and states will be determined by the extent to which they achieve the negotiated performance goals. WIA established a different set of core indicators of performance for younger and older youth than for adults. The core indicators for youth ages 14 through 18 are:

- Attaining basic skills, as well as work readiness and occupational skills;
- Obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent;
- Placement and retention in postsecondary education or advanced training, military, employment, or apprenticeship opportunities; and
- Customer satisfaction for both participating youth and their employers.

For youth aged 19 through 21, measures similar to adult measures apply, including:

- Entry into unsubsidized employment;
- Retention in unsubsidized employment six months after entry into the employment;
- Earnings received in unsubsidized employment six months after entry into the employment;
- Attainment of recognized credential relating to the achievement of educational skills, which may include attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, or occupational skills, by participants who enter unsubsidized employment, or who enter postsecondary education, advanced training, or

unsubsidized employment; and

- Customer satisfaction for both participating youth and their employers.

State workforce boards, also required by WIA, are authorized to establish additional core indicators of performance, subject to negotiation with the U.S. Department of Labor and local WIB. The key to the success of the performance accountability system is the extent to which the data derived from performance measurement is built into a process for continuous improvement of services and activities for both youth and adults.

*The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 is up for reauthorization by the Congress in 2003.*

**What actions can better connect youth with disabilities to the WIA?**

Youth, their families, and those that work with them can:

- Visit the local One-Stop to find out what resources are available there. (WIA youth services may also be offered by secondary institutions, post-secondary institutions, school-to-work programs, and other community-based service providers);
- Become more familiar with WIA eligibility requirements and the supporting material that must be provided to show that eligibility requirements are met;
- When at the One-Stop, ask for the list of eligible service providers; and
- Find out about careers, accommodations, and assessments for youth with disabilities;
- Youth can ask for an individual assessment and take an active role in the creation of their service plan;
- Parents and youth can ask to become members of the local youth council that reviews and recommends service providers, as well as developing the local plan;

- Even if not serving on the council, all who care about youth with disabilities can attend meetings of Youth Councils and local WIBs to ensure that youth with disabilities are included in their activities, services, and priorities.

**Resources:**

To find out about programs in a specific local area, visit the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) website directory of local and state workforce investment boards: [www.nawb.org/asp/wibdir.asp](http://www.nawb.org/asp/wibdir.asp) or America’s Service Locator directory of One-Stop Centers: [www.service locator.org](http://www.service locator.org).

For information about Employment and Training Administration services for people with disabilities, including One-Stop Centers, visit: [www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/resources/disability.asp](http://www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/resources/disability.asp).

For more detailed information about WIA, visit the Department of Labor’s website: [www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/wia.asp](http://www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/wia.asp). For more detailed information about the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration’s Youth Programs, visit the website at: [www.doleta.gov/youth\\_services](http://www.doleta.gov/youth_services). For more information on Job Corps, visit: [www.jobcorps.org/OneStop/](http://www.jobcorps.org/OneStop/).

For more information about the Office of Disability Policy in the Department of Labor, visit: [www.dol.gov/odep/](http://www.dol.gov/odep/).

For information on all disability-related resources of the federal government, visit DisabilityInfo.gov at: [www.disabilityinfo.gov](http://www.disabilityinfo.gov).

For more information on better connecting youth with disabilities to the workforce development system, visit the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth at: [www.ncwd-youth.info/](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/). ♦