



*Chicago Workforce Board
Cook County Workforce Investment Board
DuPage County Workforce Board
Grundy Livingston Kankakee Workforce Board
Lake County Workforce Investment Board
McHenry County Workforce Investment Board
The Workforce Board of Northern Cook County
Workforce Investment Board of Will County*

WIA Reauthorization Recommendations

The Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago, a consortium of eight Workforce Boards working to address economic and workforce development on a regional basis, strongly encourage the U.S. Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions to take steps to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 this year. By strengthening the public workforce system through reauthorization of WIA, they can help our nation develop the skilled workforce it needs and provide its citizens with the career opportunities they deserve.

It is the position of the Workforce Boards that through the reauthorization process, changes to WIA should be focused on issues likely to enhance the program for employers, job seekers, and workers. The following recommendations were submitted for the Employment and Workforce Safety Subcommittee's consideration as they deliberate reauthorization and initiate changes that result in a more effective and efficient public workforce system.

Local Oversight and Administration: The locally administered workforce development system established under WIA should be continued. Chief local elected officials are charged with appointing business and community leaders to the Workforce Boards so that local needs are appropriately identified and addressed. Local Workforce Boards are instrumental in ensuring the workforce system addresses local needs and is business-driven, resources are maximized through the formation of collaborative partnerships, stakeholders are convened around critical workforce development issues and education/training programs are available that provide individuals with access to high demand jobs. Specifically, the following provisions should remain as currently provided in WIA:

- Roles and responsibilities of the chief local elected officials and locally appointed Workforce Boards.
- Majority representation of business on the local Workforce Boards, as well as state board.
- Local One-Stop Centers administered under the guidance and jurisdiction of local Workforce Boards and accountable to the Boards for the expenditure of all funds.
- Local public-private partnerships are encouraged but specifically how those partnerships can best support and enhance the local workforce development system is determined by the Workforce Boards.

Based on our experience in collaborating regionally, the Workforce Boards provide the following recommendation for enhancing programs administered under WIA:

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- USDOL and states should promote regional collaboration through financial incentives and competitive grant awards to Workforce Boards that, in collaboration with the private sector and stakeholders, will allow them to undertake initiatives that address regional workforce needs.

Training for the 21st Century Economy: Our nation's economic strength will depend on our ability to train and prepare skilled workers for the jobs of today and tomorrow. The WIA program provides an opportunity for individuals to acquire skills needed for first time employment, advancement in their careers, or re-employment in a new career. Fundamental to WIA's success is flexibility in programming given the uncertain nature of our current economic times; additional regulations at a time of uncertainty can make it very difficult to quickly respond to changing economic trends. Recommendations for your consideration include:

- Maintain comprehensive One-Stop Centers that provide a full range of services to individuals and businesses and a network of service delivery options.
- Continue current Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), also referred to as a "voucher system", which provide individuals a range of choices in selecting occupational training that may be available through a variety of training providers (e.g., community college, university, apprenticeship program, community based organization, etc.); the use of ITAs allows individuals to consider not only the quality of training but also factors that will ultimately impact their success in completing training and obtaining employment (e.g., duration, employment outcomes, location, class size, individualized support, etc.); maintain Workforce Board discretion in establishing ITA funding levels in an effort to maximize the use of available resources and based on reasonable training costs for high demand occupations in the local area.
- Encourage career pathway programs as a strategy for building a workforce customized to the needs of local labor markets and promoting diversity in the workplace.
- Establish a program component that ensures every worker has access to life-long learning opportunities at all ages and in numerous contexts including at work and at home, in addition to formal channels such as school and higher education, so they can improve their employability and earning potential through education, training, and career advancement.
- Allow local areas the flexibility to match training investments to the needs of local industries and workers.
- Eliminate the required sequence of services so local WIA systems can offer services (core, intensive, training) in any order or combination as required by the individual job seeker and local market conditions.
- Continue youth program with an emphasis on the needs of students transitioning from school to work and for out of school youth the development of skills needed to enter the world of work.

Economic Development and Innovation: The quality of our workforce is linked to the strength of our economy. With increased unemployment, we must maximize efforts to align workforce systems with regional and local education, economic development and business needs. The

following recommendations are offered to ensure that workforce development activities support economic development initiatives:

- Continue and expand the USDOL Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) and Regional Innovation Grants (RIGs) initiatives; support competitive matching grant programs for governors and Workforce Boards that encourage collaboration and coordination between workforce development organizations, economic development agencies, and the business community
- Expand emphasis on strategies and services to engage employers to make the system more relevant to the needs of business and better coordinate workforce and economic development

Accountability and Transparency: As chairs of the Workforce Boards and business leaders, we recognize the importance of accountability and transparency. We support full disclosure as to how WIA funds are expended and reporting of outcomes/results achieved. However, accountability and transparency should be required for all federally funded programs. Additionally, measures of success need to be reasonable in light of economic conditions and populations served. Therefore, we offer the following recommendations:

- Establish more meaningful performance measures which include all WIA programs (Title1, Job Corps, Adult Education, etc).
- Establish common measure across multiple workforce and partner programs.
- Ensure that measures are realistic (e.g., no measure for individuals receiving universal services).
- Provide local flexibility for adjusting measures based on economic conditions or demographics of populations served.

Funding: The following recommendations related to WIA funding would significantly improve the workforce system's delivery of services based on local area needs and result in more effective use of WIA funds:

- Continue targeted allotments for youth, adult and dislocated with increased transfer authority between the funding streams based on local demand for services.
- Increase the amount of the state allotment that is formula allocated to local workforce areas for the provision of direct services and administered under Workforce Boards.
- Provide separate and distinct funding for the local One Stop Centers at the national level or from each of the mandatory system partners.
- Include a "hold harmless" provision in legislation that limits any reduction in funding, from one year to the next, to no more than 10%.