

Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act

March 17, 2010

The reauthorization of Workforce Investment Act (WIA) offers an opportunity to ensure that federal job training policy actively contributes to providing women and their families with a route to economic self-sufficiency during the current recession and beyond. An explicit purpose of WIA is to “increase the employment, retention and earnings of participants...” Data on recipients of WIA services suggest that WIA services may fail both low-income service users and female service users. Since 2005, there has been a dramatic fall in the number of low-income clients receiving WIA services.ⁱ While men and women are about equally likely to have received WIA services, upon exiting the program women on average have substantially lower earnings than men.ⁱⁱ

Thus, WIA perpetuates the pay gap and inequalities between men and women in the workplace. Of the 24.8 million American adults living in poverty in 2008, 15.2 million (or 61%) were women.ⁱⁱⁱ More women are working today than ever before, yet single women who maintain families are disproportionately unemployed, and most women who do have jobs are in occupations that do not provide wages and benefits adequate to support a family. In close to four out of ten families with dependent children, women are the main bread winner, either because they are single mothers or because they earn more than their husbands.

Men’s jobs have been especially hard hit in the current recession but women’s unemployment rates have also risen rapidly and are especially high for women who head families. The 12.6 percent unemployment rate for unmarried women who head families was higher than the national average of 10.3 percent in October 2009.^{iv} Among African American single women maintaining families, the unemployment rate was 15.0 percent. Young women still trail young men in economic well-being. Compared to young men, young women earn less, have lower incomes, are less likely to be employed, and are more likely to be poor.^v

One way to improve women’s earnings outcomes through WIA is to prepare more of them for employment in nontraditional, higher-wage occupations. Nontraditional occupations for women are those jobs in which women make up less than 25% of the workforce.^{vi} In 2008, of the 68 million women in the workforce more than half were clustered in only 25 of 504 occupations. In those 25, median weekly earnings ranged from \$349 for cashiers to \$1,011 for nurses. The average was \$573 per week, or \$29,796 annually.^{vii} For men, nursing is a nontraditional occupation. For women, there are many jobs, including construction and many manufacturing and

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1001 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC, 2001, Phone 202.464-1596
Contact: Susan Rees, srees@wowonline.org

technical fields that do not require a college education. Women can increase earnings 20-30 percent by entering a nontraditional career path. Yet, a 2002 report by Institute for Women’s Policy Research for Legal Momentum revealed that if women seeking job training had been given the information and opportunity, 64% would have been interested in at least one non-traditional job from a list of 15 choices.^{viii}

In the twelve month period April 2007 to March 2008, the occupational categories for men and women exiting “Adult” and “Dislocated Worker” training under WIA were considerably different.

April 2007 – March 2008: Percentage of Men and Women in Occupational Categories Upon Exit of Training Derived from USDOL PY 2007 WIASRD Records				
Occupational Category of Training	“Adult”		“Dislocated Worker”	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Farming, fishing, forestry, construction, and extraction	9.3	0.8	7.1	0.8
Installation, repair, production, transportation, material moving	55.6	8.3	55.2	7.0
Service occupations	7.1	30.0	4.9	24.0
Sales and clerical	6.7	17.4	4.7	26.9

WIA’s reinforcement of traditional patterns of occupational segregation, and the generally negative effects of such segregation for women, is also shown by other WIA data. In Program year 2006, the top eight occupations of training for the Adult and Dislocated Worker components combined were completely different for men -- than for women. With regards to salary, average post-training earnings exceeded \$13,500 for male exiters from each of the top eight occupations of training for men. By contrast, average post-training earnings were less than \$12,000 for female exiters from six of the top eight occupations of training for women.

Program Year 2006			
Men		Women	
Top 8 Occupations of Training	Average Earnings (in \$)	Top 8 Occupations of Training	Average Earnings (in \$)
Truck Drivers, Heavy and Tractor-Trailer	14,882	Nursing Aides, Orderlies, and Attendants	8,686
Bus Drivers, Transit and Intercity	16,515	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	15,091
Welders, Cutters, and Welder Fitters	13,752	Registered Nurses	21,028
Production Workers, All Other	16,384	Medical Assistants	10,230
Electricians	15,931	Office Clerks, General	10,253
Network and Computer Systems Administrators	20,472	Medical Records and Health Information Technicians	10,949
Heating and Air Conditioning Mechanics and Installers	15,546	Medical Secretaries	10,749
Computer Support Specialists	16,433	Executive Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	11,567

Yet while women’s earnings have become ever more crucial to family incomes, employment is much less likely to provide a route out of poverty to women than men. Jobs typically held by women pay substantially lower wages than those typically held by men, and two out of three minimum-wage workers are women.

WIA funded training and career advice is crucial to provide access to decent jobs for women and to help them and their families stay out of poverty. Most women who walk into their local WIA One-Stop Center already experience significant, and sometimes multiple, barriers to employment. Some are disadvantaged by narrow occupational advice received in the past by occupational choices that made as a result of gender stereotyping in society at large. Some are hampered by the dual role they play as both breadwinners and caregivers. Some face physical, emotional and educational barriers that result from age, disability, isolation, domestic violence and immigration. For one reason or another, many women need help opening the doors to training and

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employment. Access to education and training is the key to moving women to self-sufficiency through the acquisition of skills needed by an innovative, 21st century workforce.

Recommendations

Improve the long-term earning potential of women and all WIA customers

- Fully integrate the concept of self-sufficiency into workforce policy. Make self-sufficiency a purpose of the program; allow funds to be used to develop self-sufficiency measures; require career counseling for occupations leading to self-sufficiency; direct training funds to sectors that lead to self-sufficiency level wages; and report outcomes in relation to customers' self-sufficiency standards.
- Define self-sufficiency as a measure that specifies the income needs of families, by family size, the number and ages of children in the family, and sub-State geographical considerations.
- Ensure that the workforce system is structured to increase women's entry into high-wage jobs. To that end, states should be required to outline strategies for promoting women's access to high-wage, high-demand occupations in their state plans to provide technical assistance to One Stop staff serving women, and to provide women and all job seekers with information on high-wage, high demand and nontraditional career paths. Information on the hourly wage and fringe benefits should be provided for all job referrals and career advice.
- Require professional, ongoing career counseling about nontraditional occupations and their earning potential, career pathways and training options.

Address barriers to participation

- Require state and local plans to describe strategies they will use to serve populations that face significant barriers to employment. These include, single parents, displaced homemakers, TANF recipients, survivors of domestic or sexual violence, older workers, immigrants, ex-offenders and individuals seeking nontraditional employment.
- Expand referral to and delivery of supportive services to help all populations with barriers to employment. Such supports include child care, needs-based payments and other income support, transportation, post-placement mentoring and employer liaison.
- Provide technical assistance to administrators and faculty at workforce development training programs to address occupational segregation and enhance compliance with all Federal Equal Opportunity requirements. This should include assistance in developing gender specific recruitment and retention strategies and monitoring EO policies and enforcement.
- Ensure that state and local plans link prospective employers and registered apprenticeship programs to the technical assistance needed to develop, maintain, improve and enforce equal opportunity policies and procedures and address occupational segregation to support all participants who exit training.

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Increase participation in actual instruction and skill development

- Eliminate any and all language from the law that implies a sequence of services that requires job search first and leads to occupational training only after “core services” providing soft skills.
- Require deliberate outreach to low-income individuals who are underserved in adult basic education and occupational training courses. Current law requires such priority, but only when funds are “limited,” leaving unclear how this is to be carried out. Because the number of low-income participants has declined since 1998, the new law, like the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, should explicitly target these low-income participants.
- Implement training programs that integrate occupational training with language acquisition.

Better align the nation’s education and training programs

- Improve coordination between the workforce development, adult education, and career and technical education systems and promote better integration of occupational training, basic skills, and English language services. Require states to set targets that steadily increase over time the percentage of participants co-enrolled in WIA Titles I and II.
- Mandate that a portion of federally-funded Title II state grants be used for seeding and scaling up approaches that integrate basic skills and postsecondary education and training or which dually or concurrently enroll students in basic skills and postsecondary education and training. Expand work-based literacy and increase access in other ways — for example, through flexible delivery modes, including weekend, compressed, or accelerated formats, and technology-based strategies—to adult education and job training for lower-skilled incumbent workers.

Align and strengthen data reporting and performance measures

- Adopt common measures across federally funded programs with a workforce development goal, including data disaggregation and performance gap analysis requirements.
- Track credential attainment (with some standards for what constitutes a substantial “industry recognized” credential), placement, retention, earnings gains, and entry into nontraditional occupations. Reject measures that categorically encourage low-investment approaches such as “efficiency” measures or that discourage service to hard-to-serve clients such as average/median earnings. Measures should also be adopted for the range and number of skill credentials achieved through WIA-funded training.
- Collect and report data disaggregated by gender, race, ethnicity age, individuals preparing for nontraditional occupations, as well as special populations tracked under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act and No Child Left Behind (single parents,

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displaced homemakers, individuals with a disability, LEP individuals, economically disadvantaged and individuals pursuing a nontraditional career) .

- Reporting requirements should also include data on actual earnings levels for individual job seekers. Earnings should be measured against a standard of self-sufficiency. State WIBs should be required to conduct a performance gap analysis using the disaggregated data to determine populations that are either underperforming or are underserved to justify program improvement efforts.
- Data should be reported by the Secretary of Labor to Congress annually and made available to the public via the Internet.
- Performance measures should take local market conditions into account. Allow local areas the flexibility to adjust negotiated performance levels according to changing local economic conditions.
- Remove disincentives for serving the disadvantaged. Allow approaches such as tiered performance measures, regression models (per JTPA), and performance incentives for local areas or providers that focus some of their attention on serving individuals with significant barriers to employment (defined as “special populations” in current law), so that local providers/areas will not be penalized for lower outcomes or higher costs associated with such efforts.
- Align performance measures for certain clients. Job training and adult basic education programs are subject to different outcome and accountability measures and reporting requirements making it difficult for workers to receive both types of services in one program. WIA should be amended to allow outcome requirements for ABE clients seeking employment skills to be aligned with Title I performance measures.
- In Title II, reporting requirements should reflect a new focus on increasing the rate at which all students attain career and postsecondary success. Ensure that federal adult education accountability is focused on objective, measurable, evidence-based indicators of student progress toward credentials valued in the labor market.
 - Measure all core outcomes (educational gains, entered employment, retained employment, receipt of secondary school diploma or GED, and entered postsecondary education or training) for all Title II participants, instead of tracking outcomes only for students who report a goal related to the measure; and
 - Measure postsecondary enrollment and success in completing the equivalent of one semester of occupational training or college-level math or English, or earning a credential of demonstrated value in the labor market.

Conclusion

The National Coalition on Women, Jobs and Job Training believes workforce investments should focus on helping women, and all job seekers, into family sustaining jobs by providing targeted career advice and supports. Such a focus will help women and their families by increasing their

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ability to secure middle class jobs; help employers by increasing the availability of high quality job applicants, and help communities by building a local tax base.

ⁱ Baider, Allegra. 2008. *Congressional Action Needed to Ensure Low-Income Adults Receive Critical Employment and Training Services under the Workforce Investment Act*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

ⁱⁱ Hegewisch, Ariane and Helen Luyri. 2010. *The Workforce Investment Act and Women's Progress: Does WIA Funded Training Reinforce Sex Segregation in the Labor Market and the Gender Wage Gap?* Washington, DC : Institute for Women's Policy Research; Briefing Paper.

ⁱⁱⁱ Legal Momentum, [Reading Between the Lines: Women's Poverty in the U.S. 2008](http://www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/womens-poverty-report-2008.pdf), Sept. 2009 at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/womens-poverty-report-2008.pdf>

^{iv} Liz Weiss, Heather Boushey, [The Recession Brings Higher Unemployment to Unmarried Women](#) , Center for American Progress, Nov. 6, 2009.

^v Legal Momentum [Young Men Still Economically Better Off than Young Women](http://www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/youngwomenbetterthanmen.pdf) , Sept. 2008 <http://www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/youngwomenbetterthanmen.pdf>

^{vi} U.S. DEPT. OF LABOR, QUICK FACTS ON NONTRADITIONAL EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN (2009), available at <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/nontra2008.htm>.

^{vii} Wider Opportunities for Women, [Women's Work in 2008](#), analysis of US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Averages, 2008.

^{viii} [Working First But Working Poor: The Need for Education and Training Following Welfare Reform](#). A report to Legal Momentum by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2002

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