



Reality Check: Promoting Self-Sufficiency  
in the Public Workforce System



# A Promising Practices Guide for Workforce Boards



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Building pathways to economic independence for women and girls since 1964.

# Executive Summary

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## An On-Line Resource

*Reality Check* combines a printed executive summary with an online resource—an interactive electronic document—that will provide information to help you in your work. The online guide is available at [www.WOWonline.org](http://www.WOWonline.org). The website will offer you detailed information about the case studies referenced in seven practice areas. Corollary materials developed by the workforce boards accompany the description of each case study. Each case study also identifies key areas that lead to successful implementation of the practice area, challenges that occurred along the way, contact information to key staff involved in the development of the practice area and other helpful information to help WIBs implement procedures that best promote economic well being for workers and their families.

## Purpose of This Guide

*Reality Check* is a resource for the members and staff of local and state Workforce Investment Boards (WIB's) and others responsible for addressing the workforce development needs of their communities, WIB's are policy boards with legislated responsibilities under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). WIB's are charged with creating and maintaining a workforce system that responds to the needs of job seekers and employers and that strengthens the local economy.

Workforce boards face many challenges—limited resources, changing economies, complex political environments, and balancing the wants of industry and the needs of their communities. At the same time, as the convener of key stakeholders in their communities, workforce boards often play a significant role in building the economic well-being of a community through developing and implementing innovative practices.

*Reality Check* provides examples of practices that have defined and implemented the concept of self-sufficiency to further the goal of creating an economically sound and thriving community through a well-functioning workforce system. The leaders of the WIBs highlighted have revealed themselves as visionaries and the practices and online tools can help others establish similar policies and programs.

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## The Workforce Investment Act and Self-Sufficiency

In 1998, the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) replaced the Job Training Partnership Act as the federal government's primary workforce development program. WIA-funded programs serve both unemployed job seekers and employed adults seeking different or better employment.<sup>1</sup> Clients can obtain a range of services including job search and career information, support services, and access to training at One-Stop Centers.

WIA establishes the set of activities that states and localities are required to provide with

allocated funds including eligibility criteria, overarching goals, performance measures, and selection of service providers. At the same time, important provisions are left up to state and local workforce boards, giving boards flexibility to design program and policies tailored to their specific labor market and employment needs.

Title I and Title II of WIA and the federal regulations<sup>2</sup> make several references to self-sufficiency. The most significant and most utilized Self-Sufficiency reference defines eligibility for intensive services.<sup>3</sup> Federal regulations make clear that state or local workforce boards must set the criteria for determining whether employment leads to

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<sup>1</sup> Section 106 of WIA 1998 states that one of the purposes of the law is to "increase the employment, retention, and earnings of participants, and increase occupational skill attainment by participants." (Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Title One, Subtitle B, Section 106)

<sup>2</sup> 20CFR 663.220 and 20CFR 663.230

<sup>3</sup> Under WIA, One Stop clients have access to services on a sequential basis: core, intensive and training services. Intensive services are the bridge between the programs offered within the One Stop and the actual, hands-on training programs that can prepare workers for jobs. Under Sec. 134(d) (3) (A) (ii) workers in jobs not leading to self-sufficiency are eligible for intensive services. The law states that eligibility for intensive services includes those "who are employed, but who are determined by a one-stop operator to be in need of such intensive services in order to obtain or retain employment that allows for self-sufficiency."

<sup>4</sup> CFR Title 20 Part 663.230 clarifies that State or Local Boards must define self-sufficiency: "State Boards or Local Boards must set the criteria for determining whether employment leads to self-sufficiency. At a minimum, such criteria must provide that self-sufficiency means employment that pays at least the lower living standard income level, as defined in WIA section 101(24). Self-sufficiency for a dislocated worker may be defined in relation to a percentage of a layoff wage."

self-sufficiency. While many areas utilize the WIA established minimum threshold<sup>4</sup> a growing number of local boards have established higher standards than set by the federal law and have used them in a number of innovative programs and practices as reflected in this guide.

All states have access to a self-sufficiency standard or similar measure.<sup>5</sup> In 2003, Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) and the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) conducted a joint survey of over 100 local workforce boards to explore how self-sufficiency standards were being utilized. The survey found that nearly half (46%) of responding Local Boards defined self-sufficiency higher than the federal default. Of those, more than one third (36%) were using the Self-Sufficiency Standard established through WOW's Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project.<sup>6</sup>

## What is the Self-Sufficiency Standard?

The WOW Self-Sufficiency Standard is a measure of how much income families need to cover their basic costs, depending on where they live and who is in their family.<sup>7</sup> The Standard adds up the costs of housing, child care, food, transportation, health care and taxes and subtracts out tax credits to calculate the income a family would need for long-term economic self-sufficiency—assuming no public or private supports or subsidies. The Standard takes into account the cost differences associated with the number and age of children and where the family lives.<sup>8</sup>

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is a useful tool for workforce policymakers at the local, state and federal levels because it is both geographically-specific down to the county level and is calculated using a consistent methodology—allowing state and federal policymakers to

compare outcomes across the state or across the country. More information on how the self-sufficiency has changed communities is available at: <http://www.sixstrategies.org>.

## About this Guide

Workforce boards that have successfully integrated the lens of self-sufficiency into their work possess shared characteristics. While mindful of WIA requirements, these boards have often articulated broader goals for their work, aiming to improve both the economy and the overall quality of life in their area. In some instances Boards are willing to invest in long range client and community goals that are likely to pay off down the road even if it is at the expense of excelling at the defined WIA performance goals directed to short-term aggregate measures. For instance, a workforce board goal may encourage providing intensive or longer training to prepare workers for placement in better or quality jobs rather than encouraging quick placements in less desirable jobs.

The ability of a board to stay the course often depends on a strong commitment by either appointed WIB members or key WIB staff and, in the best of circumstances, when both WIB members and WIB staff work together to drive the process.

Reality Check documents 22 case studies of state and local WIBs that are using Self-Sufficiency Standards or similar measures as a defining characteristic in their work. While this list is not meant to be exhaustive, the practices described here represent some of the most promising practices in the field.

## Seven Areas of Practice

The case studies are organized into 7 areas of promising practices:

- **Profile #1**—Choosing a High Definition of Self-Sufficiency
- **Profile #2**—Counseling Customers About Income Goals, Career Paths and Work Supports
- **Profile #3**—Employing Sector Strategies
- **Profile #4**—Negotiating on the Job Training Contracts and Customized Training Services
- **Profile #5**—Increasing Access to Work Supports
- **Profile #6**—Assessing Outcomes Through Data Collection and Benchmarking Goals
- **Profile #7**—Responding to the Demographics of a Community

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the WOW Self-Sufficiency Standard described above, the Economic Policy Institute calculates similar, though less geographically and family-specific, cost of living budgets for all 50 states. In addition, some states have developed their own state-specific measures, using differing methodologies.

<sup>6</sup> These findings are consistent with a survey conducted by the AFL-CIO Working for America Institute (WAI) that found even stronger results: over 65% of Local Boards in 50 of the largest metropolitan areas adopted a self-sufficiency standard higher than the federal default.

<sup>7</sup> The methodology embodied in the Standard was developed by WOW's research partner, Dr. Diana Pearce, when she directed the Women and Poverty Project at WOW. Today she teaches at the School of Social Work, University of Washington. The Self-Sufficiency Standard undergirds the six strategies of the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project (FESS). The FESS Project is led by Wider Opportunities for Women and was created to provide tools to communities to help low income working families make ends meet.

<sup>8</sup> All data are collected or calculated using standardized or equivalent methodology, come from scholarly or credible sources such as the HUD's Fair Market Rents, are updated at least annually, and are age- and/or geographically-specific.

# Highlights

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## WIA Reauthorization

Effective July 2000, WIA replaced JTPA with a goal of strengthening the nation's workforce development system by streamlining and coordinating the delivery of multiple employment, education and training programs. WIA has been in a steady pattern awaiting reauthorization since 2003. Both the House and Senate have passed versions of reauthorized bills. The Senate and House bills have retained the original purpose of WIA: to increase participants' employment, retention, earnings and occupational skill attainment and to improve the quality of the workforce. Both versions also add a provision to promote informed choices by jobseekers.

The Senate bill also expands the concept of self-sufficiency in provisions relating to goals, client counseling, sector projects, and reporting. In addition, the bill offers a definition of self-sufficiency consistent with the Standards discussed in *Reality Check*.

The workforce boards described in this guide have demonstrated their willingness to achieve a high standard of services and quality regarding the work lives of their clients. The following common elements emerged:

- The workforce boards highlighted in *Reality Check* view self-sufficiency as a mechanism to build a comprehensive and systemic response to workforce development in their communities. Components of such a system include providing information on high wage jobs including the skilled trades; developing a career plan that assesses skills, aptitudes, and abilities connecting jobseekers to supportive services; and providing training for jobs identified in the community with the long-term goal of achieving a job seeker's economic self-sufficiency.
- Workforce boards are investing in staff training to assist One Stop and other staff to effectively translate the concept of self sufficiency to their customers.
- Workforce boards found that structuring their on-the-job training, contracts and sector strategies around a self-sufficiency framework greatly assisted them in engaging employers and meeting the employers' needs.
- Boards are finding that clients need to be exposed to the range of job and job training opportunities in order to make informed choices in developing short and long term career plans. The self-sufficiency framework is being used as a context in which outcomes in career planning can be established and then measured.
- WIBs who have successfully engaged employers as fully invested partners in conjunction with self sufficiency strategies have done so to the benefit of the employers as well as the customer—each entity must embrace the mutual benefit of working together.
- WIBs that establish customer progress toward self-sufficiency as a measure of success are creating tools to track that progress, and to inform program development. Acknowledging that different demographic groups experience the workforce system differently and have different service needs, WIBs are also analyzing outcomes and customer satisfaction by demographic group. These WIBs are tailoring both their outcome data and their customer satisfaction data to self-sufficiency measures.

## Workforce Investment Boards

Profiled in this Report

Workforce Investment Board	Promising Practices
Boston Private Industry Council	Employing Sector Strategies (#3)
Capital Workforce Partners Connecticut	Responding to the Demographics of the Community (#7)
Chicago Workforce Board	Counseling Customers about Income Goals, Career Paths and Work Supports (#2)
Fresno County Workforce Investment Board	Negotiating On-the-Job-Training Contracts and Customized Training Services (#4)
Illinois Department of Employment Security	Counseling Customers about Income Goals, Career Paths and Work Supports (#2)—and Assessing Outcomes through Data Collection and Benchmarking Goals (#6)
Illinois Workforce Investment Board	Assessing Outcomes through Data Collection and Benchmarking Goals (#6)
Lancaster County Workforce Investment Board	Employing Sector Strategies (#3)
Maine Jobs Council	Counseling Customers about Income Goals, Career Paths and Work Supports (#2)
Maryland State Workforce Investment Board	Assessing Outcomes through Data Collection and Benchmarking Goals (#6)
Metro South/West Regional Employment Board	Choosing a High Definition of Self-Sufficiency (#1)— and Assessing Outcomes through Data Collection and Benchmarking Goals (#6)
Montana Workforce Investment Board	Negotiating On-the-Job-Training Contracts and Customized Training Services (#4)
Navajo and Apache County Workforce Investment Board	Responding to the Demographics of the Community (#7)
Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board	Counseling Customers about Income Goals, Career Paths and Work Supports (#2)
Racine Workforce Development Center	Increasing Access to Work Supports (#5)
Sacramento Employment and Training Agency	Choosing a High Definition of Self-Sufficiency (#1)
San Francisco Private Industry Council	Choosing a High Definition of Self-Sufficiency (#1)
Seattle King County Workforce Development Council	Counseling Customers about Income Goals, Career Paths and Work Supports (#2)—and Assessing Outcomes through Data Collection and Benchmarking Goals (#6)
Utah State Workforce Investment Board	Increasing Access to Work Supports (#5)
Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago	Employing Sector Strategies (#3)—and Responding to the Demographics of the Community (#7)
Workforce Development Inc. Minnesota	Responding to the Demographics of the Community (#7)
Worksystems Inc. Portland Oregon	Employing Sector Strategies (#3)

# Promising Practice Profile #1

## Choosing a High Definition of Self-Sufficiency

### WIA Law/Regulations

Under the Workforce Investment Act's three-tiered structure for sequential delivery of services, working adults who do not earn enough income to be self-sufficient are eligible for intensive and training services (Sec. 134(d)(3)(A)(ii)). Workforce Investment Act (WIA) regulations establish that the minimum self-sufficiency threshold is the Lower Living Standard Income Level (LLSIL) (a Bureau of Labor Statistics calculation). The regulations also direct state and local WIBs to develop their own threshold for self-sufficiency, as long as it is at least equal to the LLSIL.

### Overview

Numerous Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) across the country have chosen to establish a self-sufficiency level that is higher than the default language found in WIA. A 2004 survey by the Working for America Institute found that nearly two-thirds of the metropolitan workforce boards surveyed had begun using definitions of self-sufficiency drawn from the WOW Standard or similar measures to set goals for the workforce system in their communities.

While the reasons for establishing a specific definition of self-sufficiency vary, in general these WIBs believe they should play a central role in assisting customers to move toward genuine economic self-sufficiency. These WIBs want to raise the expectations of staff, administrators, partners and customers of the public workforce system, and then to deliver on those expectations.

### Introduction to Case Studies

Complete texts of each case study can be read online through Wider Opportunities for Women's website: [www.WOWonline.org](http://www.WOWonline.org)

#### Sacramento Employment and Training Agency, CA

The Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA) uses the CA Self-Sufficiency Standard to achieve several different objectives. SETA uses the Standard as a core element of their planning and goal-setting process, with the aim of ensuring that self-sufficiency is a driving force for everything the WIB and its One Stop Centers do. The Sacramento WIB has integrated the Standard into its full range of policy and practice, from labor market analysis, key definitions, eligibility, and career counseling, to developing training partnerships.

The WIB adopted income levels in line with the Self-Sufficiency Standard as its eligibility criteria for intensive and training services, enabling those who are working for less than \$10 an hour to be eligible for training.

The Agency's labor market research and analysis is focused on identifying growth industries in Sacramento with career ladders and occupations that pay self-sufficiency wages. Information about base wages is used to identify critical industries to target for job placements. In addition, the WIB and its career centers use the

Standard in budget and planning discussions in career counseling. The recent adoption of a computerized self-sufficiency calculator has greatly increased the efficiency of these budget-based career planning discussions, as potential wages, work supports and expenses can easily be adjusted and the bottom-line impact readily seen and analyzed.

#### Private Industry Council of San Francisco, CA

The San Francisco WIB adopted the CA Self-Sufficiency Standard to set eligibility guidelines for their WIA Formula Adult training program. The WIB reserves a minimum of 10 percent of its Adult WIA funds to be used for customers whose incomes are between 70 percent of the LLSIL and 75 percent of the Self-Sufficiency Standard in the event that Adult funds are left over after serving low-income customers.

The WIB also uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard in its Customized Training Program to give more workers the opportunity to pursue this training. The Customized Training Program is a cooperative venture in which employers contribute half the cost of training for WIA customers who receive training designed to meet the particular skill needs of the employer. The WIB gives priority to businesses in economically distressed areas and those offering jobs that typically demonstrate a high retention rate, wage advancement

opportunities, a likelihood of employee self-sufficiency and opportunities to sustain long-term employment and advancement within the company. The WIB uses 75% of the “one adult and one school age child” family size of the Self-Sufficiency Standard to determine currently employed trainees’ eligibility.

The recent development and adoption of a computerized self-sufficiency calculator has substantially increased the use of the Standard in working with customers. Career counselors help clients identify career ladders that reflect their interest and aptitude and that have the potential to lead them to a self-sufficiency wage.

### Metro South/West Regional Employment Board, MA

The Framingham Metro South/West Regional Employment Board (REB) includes 43 towns and cities. REB has adopted the MA Self-Sufficiency Standard to drive both program and evaluation design. At the same time, the REB wanted to concentrate its services on low-income customers so chose not to use the Standard in determining income eligibility which would have increased the pool of eligible clients without increasing the amount of services available.

The Regional Employment Board uses an intensive planning process that fully engages stakeholders and partners in the development of strategic and operational plans. The central question “How can we make sure that customers get to self-sufficiency” drives this WIB’s planning discussions.

The Regional Employment Board has adopted self-sufficiency wage goals and benchmarks. The Board has also adopted a sector training approach where they have targeted sectors that are high-wage and have multiple career ladder opportunities for entry-level workers (see *Practice # 3; Employing Sector Strategies*). The REB also shifted its youth programming to focus on sectors which have the potential of paying self-sufficient wages.

Most recently, the REB has convened a “One Stop Partners Group” to develop a comprehensive plan for service delivery across program/funding boundaries. Their goal is to develop system-wide service delivery strategies that work in concert to move customers to self-sufficiency.

*“The Self-Sufficiency Standard is a tool that helps us and customers who are trying to make a plan. It just makes our work easier when we embrace the Self-Sufficiency Standard.”*

—Robin Purdy,  
Deputy Director  
Sacramento Employment  
and Training Agency

*“Once you have made the decision that self-sufficiency is your priority, it fits into everything you do.”*

—Sylvia Beville,  
Executive Director  
Metro South/West Regional  
Employment Board



## Promising Practice Profile #2

### Counseling Customers about Income Goals, Career Paths and Work Supports

#### WIA Law/Regulations

While the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) does not detail services to be delivered under the broad heading of career counseling services, the Department of Labor Employment & Training Administration (ETA) has signaled its recognition of the importance of financial literacy and budgeting skills for WIA customers. ETA issued a Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) in 2001 encouraging One Stops to use the FDIC's Money Smart curriculum to teach basic financial literacy and budgeting skills to WIA customers.

#### Overview

Counseling that focuses on income goals, career paths and work supports can make an enormous contribution to the customer's ability to achieve self-sufficiency. Such career counseling strategies help customers set realistic goals and make better decisions about potential career paths and the education or training needed to pursue them.

The use of automated self-sufficiency calculators provides an added assist by simplifying the budgeting process and integrating work supports into budget calculations. The most sophisticated calculators enable the customer to test different combinations of income and work supports to understand the impact of those factors on their short and long term capacity to be self-sufficient. Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) have found that the combination of user-friendly tools and a skilled counselor who can provide guidance and feedback offer job seekers the greatest likelihood of making choices that will lead to self-sufficiency for them and their families.

#### Introduction to Case Studies

Complete texts of each case study can be read online through Wider Opportunities for Women's website: [www.WOWonline.org](http://www.WOWonline.org)

#### Seattle/King County Workforce Development Council, WA

The Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County believes that the federal poverty level is an inadequate and outdated measure of economic well-being. The WDC's Board of Directors instead adopted the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Washington as the local criteria for measuring economic self-sufficiency in the Seattle-King County One-Stop employment and training system.

The WDC then commissioned the development of an online calculator, based on the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Washington, to support long-term planning with customers of WDC-funded/administered employment and training programs. The Self-Sufficiency Calculator allows customers, together with employment case managers, to test the impact of different scenarios on their long and short-term economic well-being, benchmark wages against a realistic measure of local costs of living, and identify work supports to reduce expenses. The Calculator is designed to be used

in conjunction with other tools—including labor market resources and assessment tools—to conduct more in-depth, informed goal-setting and planning with customers that is focused on long-term economic self-sufficiency.

One Stop employment case managers were trained in use of the Calculator and required to engage customers in vocational planning (long term career goals and plan); financial planning, and identification of resources and work supports. While case managers can develop their own formats in developing the plans, they must be able to document that the self-sufficiency planning took place and track customer progress toward achieving specific action steps outlined through the planning.

#### Chicago Workforce Board and Illinois Department of Employment Security, IL

Following the development of an initial set of goals to increase customers' ability to achieve self-sufficiency, the Chicago Workforce Board (CWB) refined its goals to focus on helping customers develop career ladders that lead to self-sufficiency. The CWB decided to integrate a self-sufficiency calculator based on the self-sufficiency standard used by Women Employed, a community-based organization.

The calculator helps customers determine what is "adequate income" to cover their expenses,

find out if they can get government help with child care, food stamps, etc., and assess if a job they are considering will pay enough to meet their family's needs.

The calculator was initially tailored to the specifics of self-sufficiency wages and income supports for the City of Chicago. The use of the Chicago calculator with WIA customers was so successful that the Illinois Department of Employment Security Inc. decided to develop a similar tool for the entire state, and make it available online. Self-sufficiency wages and information about public benefits are now available statewide on a county-by-county basis. A guide accompanies the calculator which includes information on what the IL Self-Sufficiency Standard is and how it can help the customer. A major focus of the information integrated into this calculator is its emphasis on getting more education or training as part of building a career path.

### Maine Jobs Council

The Maine Jobs Council's 2005-2007 State Plan places a system-wide focus on promoting employment and skill training opportunities that provide "livable" wages leading to worker economic security. The six-point plan includes establishing state level policies that target career development and advancement credentials for low income adults and entry level incumbent workers. The focus will be on training and job placement opportunities with employers in growing industries who offer their workers training and advancement opportunities through a clearly defined "career ladder".

The State Plan mandates that procedures be put in place to fully inform low-income clients about temporary work supports and expand access to support services such as child care and transportation. The Plan also includes increasing the number of job placements that provide access to health care benefits.

At the same time, the Plan established self-sufficiency benchmarks. Through a focused planning process, the Council set a wage

standard at one fixed dollar amount applicable to all individuals on a statewide basis, as a guideline for setting wage progression goals.

### Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, PA

In an effort to enhance direct placement efforts, the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board (WIB) expanded its service delivery strategy to include the use of an existing online self-sufficiency budget calculator, along with a comprehensive series of supplementary counseling tools.

Both the calculator and the counseling tools were developed by a local community-based organization, PathWaysPA, who guided staff on implementation and provided intense training to facilitate the use of these materials during individual and group sessions.

The counseling materials include two major innovative resources:

- *Human Resources Packet*: This easy-to-use packet includes information on subsidies, tax credits, and other programs in simple terms and instructs people on how to apply for these benefits. It is an invaluable tool for counselors seeking to assist customers with accessing a full array of tax credits and transitional work supports. The application forms and rule sheets contained in the packet are regularly updated to ensure that counselors and customers have the most current information.
- *Paths to Self-Sufficiency Workbook*: This step-by-step guide is designed for hands-on use by customers during their career exploration and self-sufficiency planning process.

Until recently, the self-sufficiency tools were targeted for use with people seeking WIA funded training. Recognizing the need to support all those with immediate employment needs, these services were extended to the general population of One Stop Center customers.

*"If you enroll a low-wage worker and then give them access to work supports, then before you ever spend a WIA dollar, you have increased their self-sufficiency."*

—Kris Stadelman,  
Chief Executive Officer  
Seattle/ King County  
Workforce Development Council

# Promising Practice Profile #3

## Employing Sector Strategies

### WIA Law/Regulations

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) requires that training services be directly linked to occupations or sectors that are in demand. [134(c)(4)(G)(iii)] However, WIA does not offer any detailed discussion of this issue nor how to develop a sector approach.

Innovative WIBs are developing their own goals to embrace sector strategies and their focus on high-demand, high-wage jobs with career ladders.

### Overview

Many Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) have learned that a combined focus on high-wage and high-demand occupations (or sectors) is necessary to ensure customers are able to move to economic self-sufficiency. While some customers will be able to train immediately for a job yielding a self-sufficiency wage, many will need to pursue a career path that leads them to self-sufficiency over a series of jobs within a sector, increasing skills and earning power along the way.

Sector initiatives are industry specific workforce development approaches that respond to both the needs of employers and jobseekers. The National Network of Sector Partners [[www.nedlc.org/nnsf](http://www.nedlc.org/nnsf)] identifies four common elements that distinguish sector initiatives from conventional programs.

In pursuing sector strategies, a number of WIBs have adopted a regional approach, forming partnerships with nearby WIBs, as well as regional employers and education/training providers. Leaders in the field are targeting more than 15 different industries across the nation such as manufacturing, health care, information technology, construction, childcare, printing, and many others. Many WIBs choose the health care sector, in large part because the sector is experiencing labor shortages almost everywhere in the country, and demand projections are high. In addition, the sector offers a range of higher-skill, higher-wage occupations. The challenge in this and other sectors is to create accessible career ladders and education and training opportunities that will allow customers with low education and skill levels to progress along a career path that will lead to self-sufficiency.

### Introduction to Case Studies

Complete texts of each case study can be read online through Wider Opportunities for Women's website: [www.WOWonline.org](http://www.WOWonline.org)

#### Boston Private Industry Council, MA

The Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) has operated multiple health sector programs that together provide a comprehensive array of services for workers and employers including accessible career ladders that lead to self-sufficiency. The cornerstone of the PIC has been engaging the health care employers to invest in the development of the lower-skilled employees while leveraging private resources to support specific health care training and employee development. The Council provides educational loans, offers loan forgiveness programs and scholarships to encourage workers to move into the health care field. One local hospital provides increased wages for graduates of certain PIC programs.

#### Lancaster County Workforce Investment Board, PA

Since 2001, the Lancaster County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) has focused its service efforts on seven industry sectors (health care, biotechnology, agriculture and food processing, construction, communications, metals and metal fabricating, and automotive) that hold the promise of "gold collar" jobs (high skills, high wages and high demand) for the Lancaster area. A hallmark of its success has been involving a wide range of stakeholders including business, workforce development, economic development, education and local government. With a strong focus on creating accessible career ladders for low-income individuals, the Board is currently running industry partnerships in food processing, metal fabricating, and industrial maintenance stressing pre-vocational services such as literacy and advancement through incumbent worker training. Local workforce and economic development partners

are now working on measures of return on investment for their business customers.

### Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago, IL

As part of the Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago's (WBMC) regional agenda, the group adopted a sector-based approach to workforce development with a strong focus on career pathways that lead to economic self-sufficiency. The WBMC conducted a comprehensive region-wide community audit to identify target sectors and where skill building was most needed. *Reality Check* highlights the WBMC's focus on the manufacturing sector, one of the six identified in the audit. WBMC launched the initiative with a Manufacturing Summit bringing together over 200 stakeholders to explore career pathways from entry level positions to those with significantly greater responsibility. The WBMC sector work is carried out under the State-sponsored Critical Skills Shortage Initiative. Through this initiative, funding was made available to support workforce leadership and execution of activities.

### Worksystems, Inc. Portland, OR

Worksystems, Inc. (WSI) is a regional board that has adopted a sector approach to work with business and industry. WSI has led two different health care sector initiatives in partnership with Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU), Portland's largest employer, and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which represents more than 4,000 workers at OHSU. In one initiative WSI implemented an onsite training program for certified nurse assistants, medical assistants and radiology technologists. The second initiative targeted incumbent workers to help them explore career ladders within the OHSU system. The program also uses Job Link, an interactive web based career tool that assesses customers' skills and interests from the perspective of moving workers to self-sufficiency. Job Link provides information about what education is necessary to move up a particular career path and wages in those higher level jobs.

The National Network of Sector Partners

[[www.nedlc.org/nnsf](http://www.nedlc.org/nnsf)]

identifies four common elements that distinguish sector initiatives from conventional programs:

- Target a specific industry, crafting solutions tailored to that industry in that region.
- Include a strategic partner with deep knowledge of the targeted industry and its companies and link them with organizations such as community-based nonprofits, employer organizations, organized labor, community colleges, and others.
- Provide training strategies that benefit low-income individuals, including the unemployed, non-traditional labor pools and low-wage incumbent workers; and
- Promote systemic change that cultivates a win-win environment by restructuring internal and external employment practices to achieve changes beneficial to employers, low-wage workers, and low-income job seekers.

# Promising Practice Profile #4

## Negotiating On-the-Job Training (OJT) Contracts and Customized Training Services

### WIA Law/Regulations

In writing the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Congress sought to tighten the requirements around use of on-the-job training (OJT) funds to ensure they resulted in meaningful training and skills development, as well as permanent employment for those who participated. Many rules for OJT contracting have been spelled out in legislation and regulations, as well as additional guidance letters from USDOL that have resulted in significant improvement in OJT outcomes:

WIA Section 101(31) defines OJT and outlines basic parameters. Sec. 134(d)(4) provides additional detail on requirements for training services, including OJT.

WIA Regulations at 20 CFR Parts 663.700 through 663.720 contain the provisions for conducting on-the-job (OJT) and customized training activities. They include specific information regarding general, contract, and employer payment requirements.

### Overview

Many states have developed On the Job Training (OJT) requirements for contractors that are more specific than those mandated by WIA. In response, local boards have established the goal of moving trainees to a wage that meets the local self-sufficiency standard.

Direct policy statements requiring that OJT contracts be used to train high-skill, high-wage occupations are concise and effective. Setting a specific wage threshold provides additional clarity for these policies.

Concurrent with strong policy, engaging business in a win-win approach to develop the highest standards for on-the-job training and outcomes is a must. For instance, in both of the following examples, employers played an integral role in developing the criteria for standards in contracting with employers and defining the types of jobs on which OJT dollars could be spent.

The profiled boards also recognize that it is equally important that the OJT curriculum and strategies respond to the needs of the trainee. Providing for or offering related services for trainees such as occupational, pre-vocational or literacy training substantially increases the success of trainees, particularly those who are moving up from very low-wage, low-skilled employment.

### Introduction to Case Studies

Complete texts of each case study can be read online through Wider Opportunities for Women's website: [www.WOWonline.org](http://www.WOWonline.org)

#### Fresno County Workforce Investment Board, CA

The Fresno County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) uses a formal employer-rating system to determine eligibility for on-the-job-training (OJT) contracts. Key elements of the ratings are focused on elements that contribute to self-sufficiency, including quality of wages and benefits, opportunities for skill advancement, wage gain and advancement in career ladders within six months of hire. Only top-ranking (platinum) employers are eligible for OJT contracts. To actively encourage and assist employers in attaining platinum status, the WIB entered into a partnership with the local Small Business Development Center to help employers improve their rating scores.

The WIB also established a number of other policies to ensure that training dollars would be directed to jobs that lead to self-sufficiency. For instance, the WIB allocates funds for sup-

portive services such as transportation assistance if it is needed to help trained employees stay in their jobs.

#### Montana Workforce Investment Board

As a large rural state with over 147,000 square miles and a total population of less than 1 million, Montana faces many challenges in assisting WIA customers to achieve self-sufficiency. In response, the Montana WIB identified several priorities for its OJT dollars. Montana focuses on high-skill, high-wage occupations, allots more hours of training in each job zone, and has clear policy language relating to the integration of apprenticeship and OJT contracts.

An important component of the program is its emphasis on flexibility and responsiveness. For instance, the Montana Workforce board requires the OJT contracts anticipate a training period that is long enough to encompass the time needed for the actual training and *additional time* in recognition that there may be some unexpected periods where the trainee is unavailable. Although this approach may make the training contracts more costly in the short-term, it has substantially improved the success rate of OJT participants and the program as a whole.

# Promising Practice Profile #5

## Increasing Access To Work Supports

### Overview

In this practice, profiled WIBs understand that for many customers, work supports are a critical piece of the puzzle in enabling them to take advantage of the types of education, training and employment that will lead to self-sufficiency. Work supports are those programs available through public assistance—federal, state, or local—that enables workers to function more effectively in their work. For instance, stable housing, access and use of safe and appropriate child care, health care coverage and access to transportation can decrease absenteeism and turnover.

The two case studies here represent WIBs that are committed to ensuring that customers' work support needs are not just identified, but *met*. Such an approach often requires a significant shift in priorities and restructuring of programs. In these examples, the WIBs have taken the leadership and responsibility of linking One Stop clients to work supports rather than making a simple referral. WIBs have placed greater emphasis on doing the work themselves and have valued the importance of uninterrupted progress for the customer.

The administrative agencies are responsible for piecing together the needed services, developing a strategy to pay for those services, and distributing the costs among funding sources sensibly and fairly. Where several agencies are responsible for delivering different services or work supports, the agency staff works collaboratively. No agency takes the attitude of "that's not my job;" instead, they ask "what can my agency contribute to this aspect of the customer's needs?" All partners know they are operating in an environment where different agencies/funding sources have different rules, and they strive to make the navigation process seamless for the customer.

The integration of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) systems tends to produce the greatest access to work supports. However, it is not necessarily the integration that produces this result, but the philosophy and motivation behind the integration that fosters a holistic approach to service delivery.

### Introduction to Case Studies

Complete texts of each case study can be read online through Wider Opportunities for Women's website: [www.WOWonline.org](http://www.WOWonline.org)

#### Racine Workforce Development Center, WI

The Racine Workforce Development Center has fully integrated a host of agencies and programs within their service delivery system including support services. Individual funding streams (i.e. TANF, WIA, the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program and other programs) have been combined, eliminating the need for individuals to make separate applications to each agency. All of customers'

support service needs are identified through the assessment process. Support services, including child care assistance, are made available to those customers who need them in order to participate in training or employment. Support services other than child care are paid for with WIA dollars.

The county took the lead in establishing an integrated service delivery system. The vision-driven process was led by the County Executive, who took care to address political concerns at the state and local level, including the myriad turf issues. The county committed to a \$12 million bond issue to build the Workforce Development Center.

### WIA Law/Regulations

WIA defines *supportive services* as services such as transportation, child care, dependent care, housing and needs-related payments, that are necessary to enable an individual to participate in WIA activities.<sup>1</sup> The law does not address the larger array of work supports, including Food Stamps, health care, tax credits and others that can be vital in assisting WIA customers in their progress toward self-sufficiency, particularly while they are in jobs at the lower rungs of their chosen career ladder.

While WIA requires that the initial assessment done for each customer include an assessment of support service needs, it does not require that these needs be addressed. One-stops are obligated only to provide customers with referral information relating to the availability of supportive services in the local area. In addition, the law allows local WIA funds to be spent on supportive services *only* if the customer is unable to obtain them through other programs. This combination of provisions can unnecessarily deter WIBs from thoroughly addressing work support needs.

<sup>1</sup> Sec. 101(46). Definitions

*"Once you are employed,  
you are not done learning  
or advancing."*

—Alice Oliver,  
Manager of Workforce  
Development Center  
Racine Workforce  
Development Center

*"It's not helpful just to  
throw the training dollars at  
them and hope it works—we  
need to address the barriers  
from the start."*

—Curt Stewart,  
Public Information Officer  
Utah Department of  
Workforce Services

### Utah State Workforce Investment Board

Through state legislation, workforce development and welfare functions are combined within one agency, the Department of Workforce Services operates 36 full service One Stop employment centers. The DWS mission statement includes a commitment to making supportive services available in the context of a comprehensive workforce development system.

A team of service providers—employment counselors, eligibility specialists and information specialists—is available to work with each

customer. As a result customers' work support needs are quickly identified, customers obtain information about their eligibility for various work supports. Importantly, they are assisted in having access to those services all in one visit.

The staff participates in a comprehensive and ongoing training program to learn about the range of work supports available to clients. Additionally, computer based tools enable the counselors and clients to have easy access to information about the type of available work supports and eligibility guidelines.

# Promising Practice Profile #6

## Assessing Outcomes through Data Collection and Benchmarking Goals

### Overview

The types of performance measures established by enabling legislation can have enormous influence on the kinds of services delivered. In this instance, the ongoing challenge for local and state workforce boards is establishing concrete benchmarks that will clearly demonstrate how well a system is performing, while at the same time capturing the more nuanced aspects of success. In addition, the boards must balance the administrative burden created by the data collection required with the need for detailed information to understand how well the system is working.

Although the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) references the concept of self-sufficiency, it does not fully define the term nor incorporate the goal of self-sufficiency into its system of performance measures and required data collection. However, several Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) have concluded that collecting and analyzing certain data can help to identify the types of programs/policies that are working to move workers towards self-sufficiency and those that are not.

Establishing benchmarks based on a realistic definition of self-sufficiency can help workforce boards design the type of programs that will move people off of public benefits and allow them to support themselves in the long run while helping Boards assess the ability of training providers and One Stop Centers to prepare jobseekers for jobs that pay self-sustaining wages.

### Introduction to Case Studies

Complete texts of each case study can be read online through Wider Opportunities for Women's website: [www.WOWonline.org](http://www.WOWonline.org)

#### Metro South/West Regional Employment Board, MA

The Metro South/West Regional Employment Board adopted the MA Self-Sufficiency Standard as a goal to drive both program and evaluation design. In phase one, the self-sufficiency benchmark data is being used for self-evaluation and program improvement, without funding penalties. The longer-term goal is to establish the Standard as a formal benchmark accompanied by data collection that could be used to determine funding of service providers.

The decision of the Metro South/West Regional Employment Board (REB) to formalize the MA Standard in its evaluation process was preceded by a pilot study in 2000. The purpose of the study was to measure the effectiveness of the REB's low-income adult and dislocated worker programs. The assessment of these programs were based on the Standard, which

had already been calculated for communities in Massachusetts. Based on the reports findings, the authors observed that a "paradigm shift" is created by setting a higher goal for wage outcomes: i.e., to move customers toward a self-sufficiency wage. They found that setting high wage goals can lead to program improvements, a greater emphasis on helping workers enhance their educational skills, and measure progress in meeting employers' needs for skilled labor.

#### Seattle/King County Workforce Development Council, WA

The Seattle/King County Workforce Development Council (WDC) developed a database that tracks detailed information on customers' progress toward a self-sufficiency wage. This database works in tandem with Seattle's Self-Sufficiency Calculator (described in Practice # 2), which is used by One Stop case managers.

The Council's long-term vision is to shift the focus of their workforce development system away from short-term job placement and toward longer-term vocational

### WIA Law/Regulations

WIA law, regulations and Department of Labor Employment & Training guidance letters detail a range of performance measures in the successful implementation of the federal law [Sec. 136—Performance Accountability System]. The "core indicators" of performance for adult and dislocated worker services center on entry into and retention in unsubsidized employment, wages, and attainment of an education credential or skills. The wage measure focuses on earnings change after six months of employment.

WIA permits states to establish additional performance measures in cooperation with the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration<sup>1</sup>. States are also free to collect and analyze data in addition to that required under the law. Drawing on these policies, several WIBs have developed benchmarks to assess the degree to which their policies are moving customers toward Board-defined measures of self-sufficiency.

<sup>1</sup> Sec. 136(b)(2)(C). Definitions



*"The whole idea of self-sufficiency through career ladders is firmly embedded in what we do. I don't know if that ever could have happened when I was just using 200% of poverty [as the self-sufficiency threshold]."*

—Sylvia Beville,  
Executive Director  
Metro South/ West Regional  
Employment Board

counseling, wage progression, and economic self-sufficiency.

The WDC has begun tracking customer income and expense information and progress toward economic self-sufficiency as measured by the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Washington. Analysis of this data will allow the WDC to assess how well clients are closing the gap between income and expenses and whether or not they move closer to their self-sufficiency wage over the period of time they receive services through the one stop system. The progress toward self-sufficiency measure is based on the customer's *percent gain*. The WDC appreciates that progress can be slow and nuanced, but it can still be substantial. A percentage measure demonstrates that a client's success in moving toward self-sufficiency is relative to his/her own situation rather than only part of an aggregate measure.

### Illinois Workforce Investment Board and Illinois Department of Employment Security, IL

The Illinois Workforce Investment Board developed a 10-point benchmarking system to assess Illinois' workforce on an annual basis that was made public in a report released in 2002. One of the 10 points is the percentage of individuals and families at economic self-sufficiency as defined by the IL Self-Sufficiency Standard. The WIB is now in the process of

releasing a second benchmarking report that also includes a self-sufficiency benchmark.

Prior to establishing the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a benchmark, the Illinois Department of Employment Security had funded the creation of an Internet-based self-sufficiency calculator to help individuals and families understand their minimum income needs. Based on the successful use of the calculator and the information it provided to both clients and program managers, at the time of this research, the Board determined that the Illinois Self-Sufficiency Standard was the best available measure of an individual or family's ability to meet one's basic needs without public or private assistance. The Illinois Department of Employment Security is analyzing how many Illinois families fall above and below the Self-Sufficiency Standard.

### Maryland State Workforce Investment Board

The Maryland Workforce Investment Board (WIB) adopted a system wide measure for self-sufficiency as one of nine core measures to evaluate its performance. The "Self-Sufficiency Rate" measured the proportion of customers served and placed with earnings at 150 percent of the poverty level or higher.

# Promising Practice Profile #7

## Responding to the Demographics of the Community

### Overview

Several of the Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) in this section developed creative ways to respond to changing demographics in their community and to ensure that programs and services kept pace with changing customer needs. Another WIB responded to more fixed economic and geographic challenges. These practices represent important forms of innovation and demonstrate how even small changes can open the way for greater change.

### Introduction to Case Studies

Complete texts of each case study can be read online through Wider Opportunities for Women's website: [www.WOWonline.org](http://www.WOWonline.org)

#### Navajo and Apache County Workforce Investment Board, Snowflake, AZ

The Navajo and Apache County Workforce Investment Boards service delivery area covers 10,000 square miles, a few town centers and a scattered population. Given its limited resources, the WIBs have focused on building strong working partnerships with virtually every social service agency and employer in the county. To meet the dual needs of wage-earning and skill-development for an unusually large low-income population, the WIBs developed approaches that combine compressed education and training cycles, strategic use of stipends, creative transportation arrangements and the regular use of combined training/work experience arrangements. This strategy allows the WIB to assist customers to begin moving immediately toward self-sufficiency and, often, providing some form of compensation.

#### Capital Workforce Partners, CT

Capital Workforce Partners (CWP), the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) for the greater Hartford, CT area, uses detailed customer satisfaction data broken down by demographic variables to identify and resolve service problems specific to particular demographic groups that is more detailed than what would be learned from the standard survey. The data allows CWP to develop cultural competence in service design and delivery, and to ensure that all customers receive the services

necessary to move them toward genuine economic self-sufficiency.

Capital Workforce Partners produces three reports based on the responses to the customer satisfaction survey. The three audiences are businesses, jobseekers (available at One Stop Centers and on the web) and WIB leaders and staff. The customer surveys can serve as an early warning device to alert the WIB to service delivery problems.

#### Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago, IL

The Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago (WBMC), a consortium of nine Workforce Boards, is in the process of developing Bridge programs in industries they have already targeted in their sector initiatives: health care, manufacturing, and transportation/warehousing/logistics (described in Practice #3). This strategy was developed as part of a larger regional effort to focus workforce development activities on assisting all customers to achieve genuine economic self-sufficiency.

The Bridge programs provide a broad foundation for career-long learning, through on-the-job and formal postsecondary education and training to assist individuals who lack basic skills and knowledge. The WBMC developed unique partnerships that led to a technical assistance conference on creating Bridge programs. Technical assistance was provided on a team wide basis. Teams included various community college departments, community based training organizations, social service providers and/or a union.

### WIA Law/Regulations

The collection of customer satisfaction information for both participants and employers is required under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in Sec. 136. The WIA interim final rule requires that each state collect at least 500 participant and 500 employer survey responses annually. Each local WIB is also required to attain a target customer satisfaction level negotiated with their state. Most states use the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for their customer satisfaction surveys. States may enter into contracts with vendors to provide the actual sampling and interviewing services.

Federal requirements call for the use of three core customer satisfaction questions for use with individual participants. WIBs have the option of asking additional questions. There is no requirement that the customer satisfaction data be disaggregated by demographic group.

*“Characteristics of customers and local economies matter.”*

—Kris Stadelman,  
Chief Executive Officer  
Seattle/ King County  
Workforce Development Council

Over a dozen partnerships are now in the process of implementing bridge programs. Based on feedback from institutions interested in starting bridge programs, a community-based women's employment program compiled a comprehensive guide “Bridges to Careers for Low-Skilled Adults: A Program Development Guide.”

### Workforce Development Inc., MN

In Rochester, much of the growth in the local labor force is in immigrant communities whose members face both linguistic and cultural barriers in the workplace. The Mayo Clinic and other health care providers approached the WIB to ask for help in addressing the shortage of workers to fill health care positions. In response Workforce Development, Inc. (WDI)—the Rochester area WIB—developed a range of specialized approaches to promote the

self-sufficiency of three communities within the immigrant workforce. The three communities are Somalis, Sudanese and Hispanics. The approaches include the design of innovative, occupation-focused instructional software for individuals with limited English proficiency and the establishment of a healthcare sector initiative that includes services tailored to meet the needs of immigrant jobseekers and that includes career ladders that lead to self-sufficiency wages.

Workforce Development, Inc. educated employers about the special cultural and language needs of their potential employees. After WDI identified cultural and language biases in many of the state healthcare certification exams, state agencies have revised the test format and also created a “Promise of Language” program to help potential applicants.

## Next Steps

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### Read the Guide Online!!

The full version of the *Reality Check* guide is available online at [www.WOWonline.org](http://www.WOWonline.org)—Wider Opportunities for Women's website. Visit *Reality Check* online to learn more about each of the practices profiled in the Executive Summary:

**Full Length Case Studies**—Detailed accounts of how each WIB came to adopt their self-sufficiency policies and programs. Learn about the potential benefits that drove them and the challenges they overcame in developing these innovative practices.

**Supporting Materials**—Supporting materials developed by boards to support their practices and which are profiled in this guide—copies of policies, staff training materials, and other internal and external documentation.

**Contact Information**—Specific contact information is included in each section, to obtain more information and learn directly about the experience.

### Contact Wider Opportunities for Women

If you are interested in exploring any of the practices profiled in this guide, please contact WOW for additional support.

Through the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Program (FESS), WOW works with several national workforce development organizations—including those that participated in the advisory group for this guide. Further, we have extensive networks of state FESS Project partners to assist state and local Workforce Investment Boards with the adoption and implementation of economic self-sufficiency policies and programs.

WOW staff can help you consider particular practices of interest to your board. In addition, we can link you with local stakeholders in your area and other national organizations with complementary expertise in workforce development.

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### Disclaimer

The conclusions and opinions contained within this document are those of Wider Opportunities for Women, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of others involved in the design of *Reality Check*. Any errors are the responsibility of Wider Opportunities for Women.

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## Wider Opportunities for Women

Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) is a national organization that has been helping women and their families achieve economic independence and equality of opportunity for over 40 years. Through our national Family Economic Self-Sufficiency (FESS) Project, we work with thousands of organizations in more than 35 states to design programs and policies that put low-income, working families on the path to economic independence. A cornerstone of that work is the development and implementation of the Self-Sufficiency Standard, a localized measure of how much income it takes for working families to make ends meet without public or private subsidies of any kind.

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The information in this report is based on a national research project to uncover and spotlight strategies and initiatives within the public

workforce development system to incorporate the concept of economic self-sufficiency. The information in the report is based on individual interviews with each featured WIB. With the assistance of the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB), and the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP), WOW collected research questionnaires from over 200 Workforce Investment Boards, documenting the use of Self-Sufficiency Standards and similar measures in public workforce programs and policies.

Special thanks to Kathy Patrick for her role in collecting and reviewing the practices and developing *Reality Check*. Thanks to Maureen Golga, Susan Messina, Joan Kuriansky, Deborah Cutler-Ortiz, Mark Greenberg, Phil Sparks, and Shea Shackelford for their respective contributions to researching, writing and editing this guide.

During the process of developing this report, WOW engaged key stakeholders as part of a working advisory group. Their clear commitment to strengthening the public workforce system combined with keen insight into issues facing that system led the authors in developing the form and function of this guide. We deeply appreciate their invaluable time and insight.

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