



EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING REPORTER

Your news source for workforce development and support since 1969

ETR 10/5/15, p. 60 (Courtesy reprint)

WIOA Implementation

WHAT WILL IMPLEMENTATION LOOK LIKE, MEAN ON THE FRONT LINES?

Several months ago, as federal officials accepted comments on regulations for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, a workforce development staff trainer and consultant posed a question: “How will a frontline staff person and their supervisor know if they are working in the WIOA way?”

There is plenty about the new law, now in a state of early implementation, that calls for changes in administration and planning at the state, regional and local workforce board levels. But certainly provisions of the law — such as changes in priority of service, the end of sequential services and an increased focus on out-of-school, older youth — will drive new developments in one-stop career centers and on other service delivery fronts.

Larry Robbin, executive director of Robbin and Associates, has had some time to think about his question and talk over WIOA with the staffers and managers who attend his trainings. Robbin recently shared some of these insights with ETR.

“WIOA is asking staff to do so much more,” he said, suggesting that the ideal one-stop staffer under the new law will be an “entrepreneurial employee” with “outstanding time management skills,” who is “a partnership builder and a partnership player.”

Some frontline workers are surprised that WIOA is expected to bring changes to the populations they serve.

“Leadership is not engaging them enough in conversations, and I also think some are worried that they are already working to capacity,” Robbin said.

According to the consultant, the shift from Workforce Investment Act to WIOA contrasts with the shift from the Job Training Partnership Act to WIA. Between JTPA and WIA, jobseeker services were not fundamentally different.

“Barrier removal hasn’t changed much in the past 25 years,” he said.

Not Jobs, Careers

WIOA, however, has provisions asking the workforce system to serve a lower-skilled and more distressed population while at the same time empha-

sizing career pathways.

“This isn’t a jobs bill. This is a careers bill, an upward mobility bill. And we haven’t done a very good job with that,” Robbin said.

Instead of teaching customers how to look for a job, one-stop staff must learn to be career coaches, helping clients not just move into jobs, but progress to better positions. They might consider connecting jobseekers with role models from similar backgrounds.

One-stop staff may need to provide more job retention services and learn to teach clients vocational self-efficacy, he said.

WIOA presents a significant change in priority of service, requiring that recipients of public assistance, other low-income customers and individuals who are basic skills deficient be given priority at all times.

Robbin recalled touring a career center with a reading specialist who wondered if the available materials were written at a low enough reading level for the customer population. If one-stops are to prioritize people lacking basic skills, this kind of thing matters and frontline workers and managers must pay attention, he said.

Collaboration

One-stop staff will need to collaborate to come up with ways to better serve more difficult and diverse clients, he said.

Robbin remembered an instance when one of his client agencies hired a new staffer to conduct job search workshops. The staffer recognized that there were 10 or so social service agencies in the general vicinity offering some type of job search workshop while working with different populations and in the context of different programs, so she started a working group that invited staff from these agencies to present to each other.

The workshop leaders learned from one another and placement rates rose.

Along those lines, Robbin said he wonders whether one-stops, local workforce agencies and their partners can share their in-house staff training. If agency A knows that agency B works well with a particular demographic, can agency B include some of agency A’s staff in its trainings, and to reciprocate, is there something agency B’s staff can learn

from agency A?

“With a push toward regionalism, we need to start thinking of regional capacity building efforts,” he said.

WIOA also brings numerous changes concerning youth, perhaps the most notable being a requirement that youth programs spend the majority of their funding on out-of-school young people. Other developments include an increase in the maximum age of eligibility, from 21 to 24, and a focus on placing youth in work experiences.

What Youth Want

The Employment and Training Administration’s proposed WIOA regulations also view the possibility that older young people could be served in both youth programs and through one-stops. The regulations, for instance, would allow older youth program participants to receive individual training accounts.

Robbin said he has been talking with scores of disconnected young people to build a workshop for the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals’ coming Youth Symposium (Chicago, Nov. 9 through 11) that will be called “Through Disconnected Eyes.”

“There is a huge disconnect between what adults think youth need and what youth want,” he said, urging service providers to think about how to engage disconnected young people.

WIOA no longer requires youth councils, but allows workforce boards to maintain youth standing committees.

Youth program providers must be aware that they may be competing with video games and even gangs for participants’ attention, and would benefit from treating young people as family members, making opportunities to gather and consider their input, Robbin said.

He encouraged frontline staff and managers to implement their programs with a “partnership model.”

“Can you point to any major change in your program that came to be because of an idea of a young person?” he asked. “The best way to know how to do this is for a partnership between adults and young people to figure it out.”

Robbin also noted that WIOA implementation accompanies the seeming rise of the so-called gig economy. Consulting and independent contracting are blossoming, as are companies such as Uber and Airbnb and even movements such as time banking — the exchange of services for credits that purchase services from other members.

In May, the Census Bureau reported that there were 23 million “nonemployer” businesses in the United States (for 2013). These are incorporated businesses without paid employees and can represent anything from a self-employed professional, such as an accountant, to someone running a part-time tutoring business. Their number is up by 269,705 over the year and 4.4 million over the decade.

“The one type of employer that we’ve never served well is the sole proprietor. Most of their clients are businesses that have employees, and if we served them really well, they are going to open doors for us,” he said.

Jobseekers could also benefit from participating in gig jobs while they look to advance in their careers, Robbin reasoned.

“While people are in job search, a lot of these opportunities can give people stabilization, give them a paycheck, expand their social capital and expand their skill sets,” he added.

✓ Contact Robbin and Associates at www.larryrobbin.com.

—Ryan Hess

About ETR — The *Employment & Training Reporter* is a weekly trade journal covering the field of workforce development with a special emphasis on public sector programs in the United States. Since 1969, ETR coverage of the whole range of U.S. federal, state and local programs has included the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, education for employment at the secondary and technical levels, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and work supports, as well as vocational rehabilitation and employment for the disabled.

ETR is published by MII Publications, P.O. Box 34504, Washington, D.C. 20043-4504.

service@miipublications.com ☆ www.miipublications.com