

Unpacking the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)



Note: This publication summarizes content from a 60-minute webinar. For access to recordings and slides, visit www.imprintproject.org/webinars

On July 22, 2014 President Barack Obama signed the **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)** into law, with overwhelming bipartisan support.

WIOA is the primary way in which the federal government invests in adult education and workforce development. It is designed to help jobseekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market, and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy.

Immigrant professionals can be eligible for WIOA-funded services, provided that they meet standard eligibility criteria.



Title I – Workforce Development

Title I of WIOA provides approximately \$2.62 billion in funding to serve **8 million individuals**, including work-authorized immigrants, each year. Services include:

- **Resume writing**
- **Soft skills training**
- **Online job search**
- **Occupational training**

Under Title I, states are mandated to have at least one Workforce Development Board (WDB), as well as American Job Centers (“one-stop centers”), through which services are provided. WDBs may also subcontract with education and training providers, such as nonprofit community-based organizations, to provide services.

Getting Funded Under WIOA

Immigrant-serving organizations may seek funding under WIOA:

- Through state discretionary funds (often nicknamed the “15% set-aside”)
- By applying for Title I funds through a direct-services contract from a state or local Workforce Board
- By applying for Title II adult education funds from the State Eligible Agency

In addition, there are some federal discretionary funds for workforce programs. Specific funding opportunities can be found at Grants.gov. Current opportunities focus on the principles outlined in [Vice President Biden's Job-Driven Training Report](#).

Title II – Adult Education

Title II of WIOA serves nearly **1.6 million people annually** with a budget of approximately \$700 million. Unlike Title I, Title II does not require that immigrant participants be work-authorized.

Title II **programs address adults' basic skill needs** in reading, math, and spoken English. The mechanisms for funding and providing Title II services vary significantly by state, and may include state departments of labor or education, community colleges, community-based organizations, and/or school districts.

Immigrants with degrees from abroad are *specifically identified* in the WIOA legislation as eligible for English language classes, provided they meet standard eligibility criteria.



Key Deadline

Interested agencies are encouraged to participate in their state's WIOA planning process to ensure that immigrant skill needs are reflected in state and local plans.

These plans will form the basis for future funding opportunities. State plans are due to the federal government on **March 3, 2016**.

Opportunities for Innovation Under WIOA

Integrated Education and Training (IET)

WIOA places new emphasis on Integrated Education and Training (IET) models. In IET models such as Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST), participants are no longer required to complete basic skills education before entering job training. Rather, such programs use a blended approach in which **participants learn basic skills** such as English or math **while also acquiring occupational expertise**.

Immigrant-serving organizations should consider whether their expertise in serving immigrant professionals allows them to effectively provide (or partner in providing) integrated education and training services. Regardless of whether organizations are able to provide such services themselves, they can advocate to ensure that programs are accessible to immigrant professionals who qualify as having a “basic skills” need due to limited English proficiency.

Career Pathways

While the concept of career pathways is not new, WIOA for the first time codifies a definition of the term in federal law. Career pathways are a required activity for states under WIOA. Immigrant-serving organizations may wish to explore the extent to which their state's career pathways are accessible to immigrant professionals, and consider whether further advocacy is needed.

Sector Partnerships

Sector partnerships bring together multiple employers in a given industry, along with representatives from local education and training providers and the public workforce system. Although sector partnerships are a required activity under WIOA, there is broad discretion with regard to how states and localities can implement them.

Immigrant-serving organizations should consider whether they have the capacity and interest to engage in a sector partnership. If so, they should approach their Local Workforce Board to learn more about such partnerships in their community.

A Note About Credentialing

The concept of credentials as used in the public workforce system is distinct from the idea of “re-credentialing” or relicensing of immigrant professionals. Rather, credentialing in this context generally refers to the attainment of an industry-recognized postsecondary certificate, certification, degree, or other credential in the United States. While immigrant professionals may choose to attain such a US-based credential to boost their employability, it should be understood that credentialing under WIOA does not include the evaluation or transfer of foreign credentials.

WIOA Resources

- National Skills Coalition | www.nationalskillscoalition.org/state-policy/workforce-innovation-opportunity-act-implementation
- US Department of Labor | www.doleta.gov/wioa
- US Department of Education | www2.ed.gov/AEFLA



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- Organizing broad-based coalitions to raise the skills of America's workers across a range of industries
- Advocating for public policies that invest in what works, as informed by our members' real-world expertise
- Communicating these goals to an American public with a vision for an inclusive U.S. economy.