

# Transition Truths: Workforce Development

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The Workforce Development system focuses on ensuring that the American people have the skills needed to be employed successfully in the 21st century workforce. Vocational rehabilitation (VR) is an important part of this system that makes sure people with disabilities have access to employment-related education, training, and supports.

## How this System Works

This system consists of the people, places, policies, and programs that make up a vast network of supports that strengthen the ability of workers to gain the skills they need to fill in-demand jobs. Workers can participate in education, training, and work-based experiences to make sure they are ready for employment.

This system works by promoting individualized planning, which allows people to match their skills, interests, and goals with career options, and to then lay out a plan to achieve those goals. This process can take place in schools or out of schools, in Vocational Rehabilitation or American Job Centers, and through eligible training providers funded through these systems. In addition to individualized career planning and related training, youth can also access services like mentoring, leadership activities, training in entrepreneurship, financial literacy education, and opportunities to engage in work-based experiences like internships, job shadowing, and summer employment programs.

## People and Places

The people in this system include employers, teachers, students, employees, prospective employees, job coaches, and case managers. The work of this system takes place at community colleges, small and large businesses, technical schools, Workforce Investment Boards, Centers for Independent Living, YouthBuild and Job Corps sites, Vocational Rehabilitation offices, and American Job Centers that provide training. At the federal level, the [U.S. Department of Labor](#) leads many of these efforts by preparing jobseekers for employment and protecting the rights of workers and retirees. The U.S. Department of Education's [Rehabilitation Services Administration](#) is in charge of overseeing funding for Vocational Rehabilitation centers in states, which provide many workforce development services benefiting individuals with disabilities.

## Policies and Programs

Congress passed the [Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) to formalize funding for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), which had been in place in some form since the early 1900s, and other activities like supported employment and Independent Living Centers. Vocational Rehabilitation is a program that helps individuals with disabilities prepare for and engage in employment by connecting them to

education, training, and resources based on their strengths, interests, and informed choices. Case managers work with individuals to help define their goals and the services they will receive through an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). VR has undergone some changes with the passage of the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 \(WIOA\)](#), as discussed below.

[Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) is particularly important because it prevents federal contractors and subcontractors (people who do business with the federal government) from discriminating against individuals with disabilities in employment. It also requires affirmative action for hiring people with disabilities at a rate of 7% of the total workforce for federal contractors and subcontractors. [Section 508](#) makes sure that government-funded electronic systems and information technology are accessible, including things like telephones, copy machines, websites, and published materials.

Under WIOA, which reauthorized the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, [American Job Centers](#) across the country help manage various kinds of training, including skill-building, literacy education, career counseling, on-the-job training, and internships, which all share the goal of leading to employment. WIOA also provides funding for [Job Corps](#) (a residential program that teaches young people the skills they need to become employed, and helps them find a job), [YouthBuild](#) (a program that teaches youth who have left school the skills they need to work in high-demand industries, including but not limited to construction), and [apprenticeship](#) (an arrangement that allows people to earn money on-the-job while learning the skills they need to turn the job into their career). WIOA also shifts funding priorities for youth formula funding. Now, 75% of state and local funds go toward serving out-of-school youth, while 20% of funding goes towards work-based learning experiences like summer jobs and internships. There is also an increased emphasis on career planning and counseling in service delivery.

Under the [vocational rehabilitation provisions of WIOA](#), there is an increased emphasis on serving youth with disabilities and providing opportunities for them to explore career interests, practice and gain work skills, and participate in work experiences to maximize the likelihood they will obtain competitive integrated employment, i.e., to earn minimum wage or above in settings where people with and without disabilities work together. To encourage WIOA's goal of competitive integrated employment, State VR agencies are also now required to provide pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities. These services can include career counseling, work-based learning experiences like internships, and the development of self-advocacy and soft skills.

[Centers for independent living](#), funded through the Rehabilitation Act, are community-based agencies run by people with disabilities to assist people with disabilities in identifying and directing the supports they need to live independently in the community. People can go to these systems for help with accomplishing their independent living goals.

The [Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009](#) expands national service programs administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service by amending earlier legislation. Service learning is an important strategy that can help lead youth to competitive integrated employment.

## Eligibility

WIOA creates separate eligibility criteria for in-school and out-of-school youth to receive services.

- In-school youth ages 14-21 and who are low-income must meet one of these criteria:
  - Are basic skills deficient;
  - Are involved in the juvenile justice system;
  - Are homeless, runaway, in foster care (or aged out), or pregnant or parenting; or
  - Have a disability.
- Out-of-school youth ages 16-24 must meet one of these criteria:
  - Have dropped out of school;
  - Did not attend school in the most recent calendar quarter;
  - Are involved in the juvenile justice system;
  - Are homeless, runaway, in foster care (or aged out), or pregnant or parenting; or
  - Have a disability.
- Out-of-school youth ages 16-24 who are low-income must meet one of these criteria:
  - Are basic skills deficient,
  - Are English language learners, or
  - Need additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or secure or hold employment.

For youth to be eligible for VR services, they must apply for services and document that their disability presents a substantial barrier to employment. Youth must also demonstrate that their employment barriers would diminish with support from VR. Just because youth may be eligible for VR services does not mean that they will receive them. In many states, the demand for services is greater than the state's ability to provide VR services. In these states, under an "Order of Selection," the people with the most significant disabilities must be served first. Typically, youth who receive Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance will qualify as having a significant disability.