



December 21, 2015

SNAPS In Focus: CoC Collaboration with Workforce Boards Under WIOA

People experience homelessness primarily because they don't have enough money to pay for a place to live. Although a lot of factors may contribute, in the end, if people have enough money to pay for housing, they don't usually become homeless.

We know that education and sustainable employment can make an enormous difference in people's ability to pay for housing. [*Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to End Homelessness*](#) emphasizes that people who are facing homelessness need jobs that pay enough to afford a place to live and support to get and keep those jobs.

Most people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness want to work. In fact, many are employed but earn too little to meet their basic needs. Unfortunately, it is not always clear how best to help people experiencing homelessness to improve their incomes.

Opportunities for Collaboration with Workforce Boards

Continuums of Care (CoCs) now have the opportunity to help participants of homeless assistance programs enhance their economic security by teaming up with the state and local organizations that administer programs covered by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of July 2014. These Workforce Boards (also known as Workforce Development Boards or Workforce Investment Boards) direct federal, state, and local funding to workforce development programs.

WIOA opens two ways for CoCs and Workforce Boards to collaborate. First, under WIOA, Workforce Boards will increase their focus on vulnerable youth and adults with significant barriers to employment, such as lack of work experience, lack of education, lack of occupational skills, low levels of literacy, disability, or ex-offender status. They also will expand education and training options and help disadvantaged and unemployed adults and youth earn while they learn through support services and employment-based activities. With expanded WIOA programming in areas that disproportionately affect people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, the American Job Centers (AJCs) operated by Workforce Boards become great resources for CoC referrals when program participants face barriers to employment.

Second, under WIOA, Workforce Boards must do extensive planning and coordination with social service providers in their communities. This gives CoCs an opportunity to share ideas about how Workforce Boards can most effectively locate and serve the kinds of clients that CoCs work with every day. For example, WIOA requires that at least 75 percent of local and statewide WIOA funding for youth be invested in workforce services for out-of-school youth who are between the ages of 16 and 24 and who meet specified criteria – one of which is being homeless. This presents a clear opportunity for CoC programs working with youth and young adults to help Workforce Boards make informed choices about the best ways to meet the needs of homeless youth in the community.



Activities to Further Enhance Collaboration

CoCs can start by reaching out to their local or state Workforce Boards and the AJCs for an introduction. (Find your local Workforce Board using the [Workforce Development Board Service Locator](#).) But what to do next? Consider the following strategies to improve employment outcomes for jobseekers, who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

1. **Share Basic Program Information.** Organize a basic information exchange between the CoC and the Workforce Board. Focus on information about how the workforce and homeless assistance systems work. Understanding one another's rules, language, and operational procedures is the first step to real collaboration.
2. **Provide a Tour.** Offer workforce system staff a tour of local homeless services. Help them visualize your programs and highlight the supportive services that could help program participants secure and maintain competitive employment.
3. **Share Board Members.** Discuss the merits of including the local CoC Director and the Workforce Board Director on one another's boards. Integrating leadership can promote comprehensive planning for services to the vulnerable populations served by both entities.
4. **Offer Insights.** Help state workforce planners identify concrete ways to address the needs of jobseekers experiencing homelessness. Keep in mind the flexibility WIOA offers for transitional jobs, on-the-job training, or use of governors' discretionary statewide activities funds and think creatively about how these opportunities might mesh with your CoC programs.
5. **Collaborate on Goals.** As you set the CoC's employment goals for the homeless assistance system, collaborate with the Workforce Board. Get their input, and explore the potential for garnering support from the workforce system.



[America's Service Locator - Workforce Development Boards](#)

www.servicelocator.org

Locate Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) by city, state, or ZIP code. WDBs direct federal, state, and local funding to workforce development programs and oversee local American Job Centers.

Want to Know More?

Become educated on the opportunities available through WIOA. These articles and web sites offer good places to start.

- This 9 page document from CLASP provides context that will help CoCs and other providers envision how they can interact with the Workforce Boards to support employment opportunities for people who are homeless: [WIOA: What Human Service Agencies and Advocates Need to Know: *Advancing economic opportunities for low-income adults and youth.*](#)



- This 30+ page document reviews research on [Employment and Income Supports for Homeless People](#) from the 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research.
- This 2-page fact sheet from the National Skills Coalition dispels some myths about [WIOA and Serving the Hard to Serve](#).
- The [U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration \(ETA\) WIOA Resource page](#) provides information on implementation, links to guidance, technical assistance, and tools.
- The [U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education page on WIOA](#) offers links to a range of recorded presentations, fact sheets, and technical assistance.
- The [Innovation & Opportunity Network: Implementing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act website](#) provides a wealth of resources for implementation.

We know that people experiencing homelessness and those with multiple vulnerabilities can succeed with the right opportunities, training, and supports. We also know that employment leads to improved quality of life, better health, increased self-confidence, and reduced chances of recidivism to the streets. You can give the Workforce Boards implementing WIOA in your communities insights about ways to structure their programs to best serve your program participants, and can strengthen the ties between programs to provide the strongest possible support for the households we serve.

WIOA and collaboration with your Workforce Board offer exciting opportunities to help more program participants find pathways to economic security. I hope you'll take advantage of them.

As always, thank you for your tremendous work.

Norm Suchar
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