

Driving Improved Workforce Outcomes Through Data Access, Alignment, and Integration

Recommendations From the Workforce Transformation Policy Council

Acknowledgments

About the Authors

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About JFF

Jobs for the Future (JFF) drives transformation of the U.S. education and workforce systems to achieve equitable economic advancement for all.

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About the Workforce Transformation Policy Council

The Workforce Transformation Policy Council (WTPC) is a select group of over 20 workforce development leaders convened by Jobs for the Future (JFF) and the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB). Its aim is to identify policy changes that are needed to transform the U.S. workforce development system so it is better able to meet the complex needs of the labor market of both today and tomorrow. Together, WTPC participants draw on their expertise and experiences to provide practical insights on what good policy looks like, what challenges U.S. workers and employers face, and what changes are needed to have a more effective, resilient, and equitable workforce development system. This is the third in a series of policy papers created by WTPC members to inform workforce transformation.

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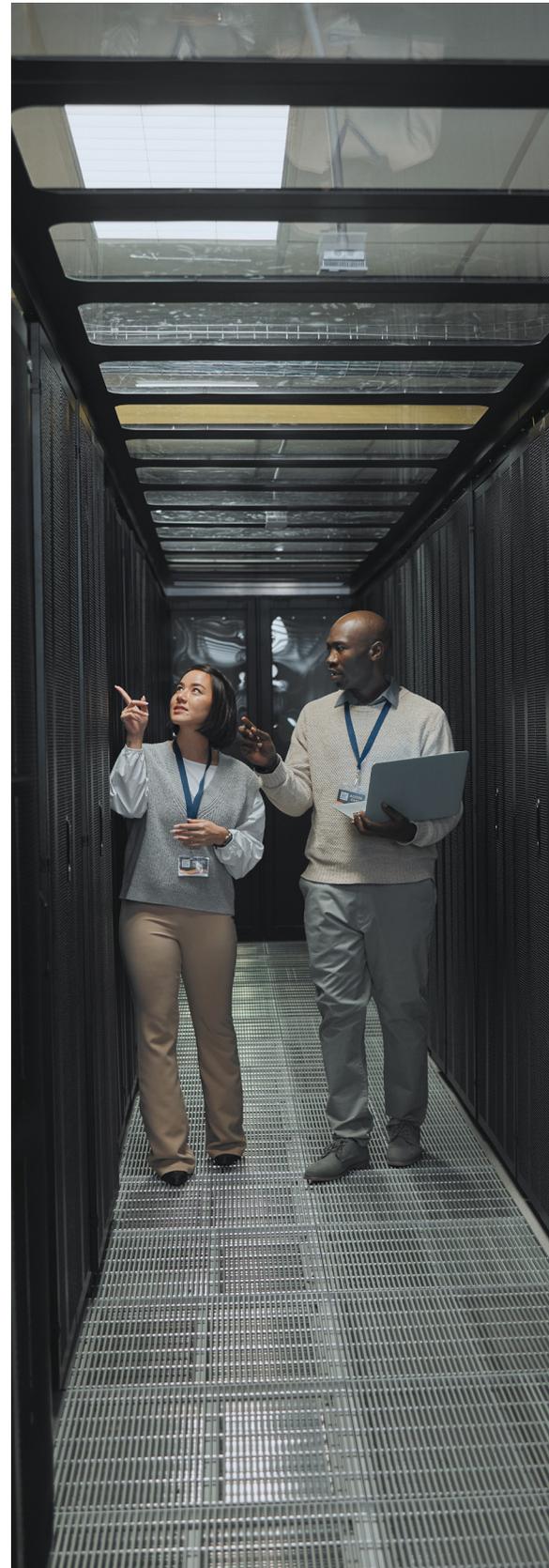
01.

Task Force on Data Access, Alignment, and Integration for Improved Workforce Outcomes

In 2023, JFF and NAWB formed the Task Force on Data Access, Alignment and Integration for Improved Workforce Outcomes, an offshoot of the WTPC, facilitated by former workforce executive Brooke Valle.

The task force was composed of executives from workforce development boards from across the country with special interest and expertise in this topic. Together, through a series of three meetings and subsequent interviews, the task force explored how federal policies can better use existing workforce systems to deliver people-first, equity-centered results for all. The resulting principles and recommendations outlined in this report lean into the power of the nation's workforce development system while remaining locally responsive and data driven.

The recommendations in this brief are those of the WTPC Task Force on Data Access, Alignment and Integration for Improved Workforce Outcomes and not necessarily those of JFF or NAWB. We thank the task force members for their time and expertise in providing the following insights.



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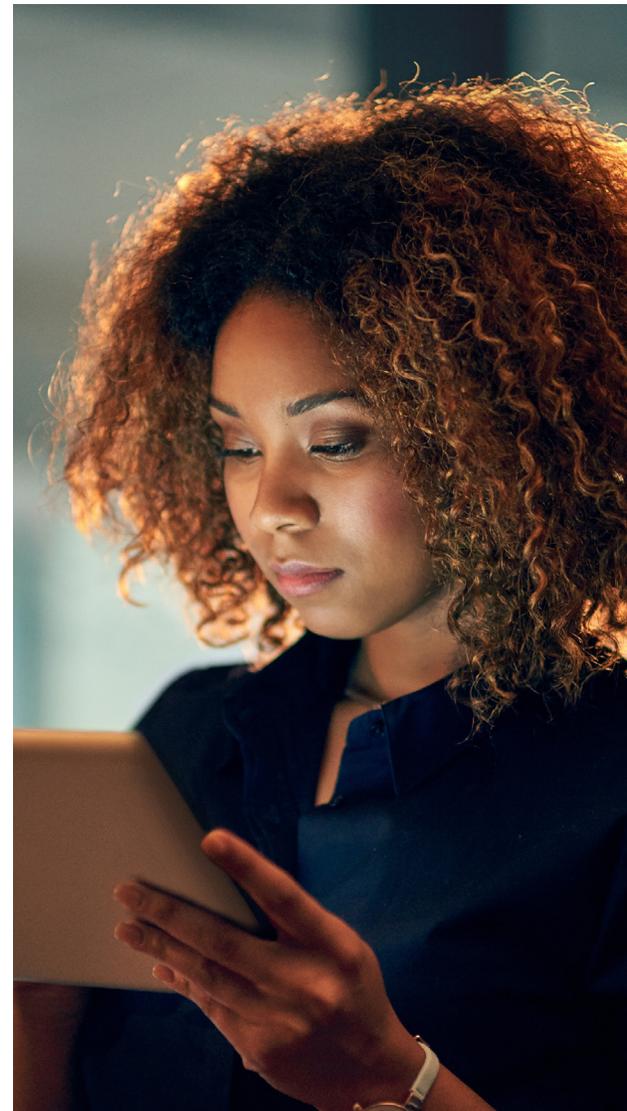
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02.

Improving Outcomes Through Data Access, Alignment, and Integration

Data is central to understanding the impact of the workforce development system on the lives of individuals, employers, and the larger community. Data helps practitioners better understand performance, improve service delivery, and design pathways to quality jobs. It enables participants to make informed choices about their programs of study or desired sectors of employment. It guides employers as they explore new attraction, retention, and advancement approaches.

However, to achieve maximum impact, data must be accessible to practitioners in timely, efficient ways. It must also be aligned, taking advantage of opportunities to connect the dots between social service, higher education, adult education, and workforce programs to serve individuals and employers seamlessly. Finally, it must be integrated, using data lakes or related regionalized approaches to support a fuller understanding of outcomes, enable longitudinal and predictive analytics, and accelerate innovative approaches to anticipating and meeting workforce needs.



03.

Design Principles for Improving Workforce Outcomes Through Data

These principles outline the core strategies for transforming training delivered through the workforce development system. Specific recommendations follow for each principle.



Shift the data-collection focus from achieving compliance to delivering value for all stakeholders; this includes participants, employers, partners, and communities.



Create conditions for data sharing, interagency collaboration, public-private partnership, and the use of innovative technology to align performance incentives, anticipate needs, fill gaps and seamlessly serve the customer.



Invest in necessary infrastructure, human capital, and cybersecurity to position the workforce system to meet the data needs of both today and tomorrow.



Use the system to inform and advance pathways to quality jobs and help individuals and communities thrive.





Shift the data-collection focus from achieving compliance to delivering value.

Existing workforce data systems were primarily developed to support case management and meet the federal and state requirements associated with managing workforce funding streams. While compliance is necessary, it does not alone impart whether or not the workforce system has a positive impact on the lives of those it serves. Existing performance metrics prescribed by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provide point-in-time outcome data, but local areas want a more specific, timely, individualized understanding of what is happening to those they serve in order to better adapt their programming to address any gaps. At the same time, the data collected must provide participants with informed choice for the selection of services and providers while consistently telling a story and demonstrating a value add for workforce investments. Though data can be incredibly powerful, understanding the system's true impact on individuals will require not only a shift in the way data is collected and analyzed, but also a change to the time frame for tracking an individual's trajectory.

- Workforce data collection is primarily centered around reporting on required demographic and performance measures, and many systems lack robust analytics capabilities.¹ While WIOA performance measures are part of the story, this data alone does not convey the system's value, either to the participant, the employer, or the community at large. Additionally, practical limitations such as lagged timelines, lack of disaggregated data, and limited impact analysis of what works can all impact the usefulness of the existing data systems.

Recommended actions: Task force members called for expanded funding for data analysis and changes in evaluation, planning, and reporting guidance. That would enable state and local workforce systems to better assess the combinations of strategies, including career services, training services, and supportive services, that can be delivered. Such assessment would help them determine which interventions result in differentiated outcomes, taking into consideration the characteristics of participants included in the statistical adjustment model such as homelessness, disability, and low levels of literacy.² With additional funding, changes could include the following in planning processes or reporting:

- » An assessment of how the intervention enabled individuals to complete education or training as shown by the number or percentage (by race and gender) that persisted with or without the type, duration, and blend of supportive services provided
- » To what degree the intervention shortened an individual's path to self-sufficiency as shown by the average time in months from education completion to placement and from placement to living wage (disaggregated by race and gender), as compared to the average time to employment or reemployment of participants without the intervention
- » To what degree the intervention helped reduce the draw on public subsidies as shown by the average aid (in dollars per person) before and after completion of education and before and after placement, and the number or percentage of individuals who experienced a benefits cliff—their benefits precipitously dropped—upon entering their first job in their pathway
- » Return on investment for individual program participants as shown by the cost of education versus the earnings differential
- » Estimate of business savings realized through the intervention as shown by the average cost savings in recruitment/retainment (if receiving recruiting or placement services) or the average training savings (if receiving incumbent worker training, on-the-job training, or customized training services) based on survey, interview, or focus group input
- » Trends in customer feedback on the value of the services received, like a net promoter score, gleaned through surveys and focus group interviews with both participants and business representatives

- Current WIOA performance metrics track the period of service and 12 months of follow-up. However, this time frame is often insufficient to understand the true impact of a training or workforce program on the trajectory of the individuals, including future earnings, health and wealth building, and the educational access of their children. Workforce agencies would be better served with a longer period of time, of up to three years, allowing them to better inform their programmatic development, evaluation processes, and funder engagement. This would build on longitudinal efforts of the [Workforce Data Quality Initiative](#) (WDQI), from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), and the [Statewide Longitudinal Data System \(SLDS\) grants](#), from the U.S. Department of Education, which are well underway in many states.

Recommended actions: State policymakers should implement longitudinal data tracking approaches for workforce data that extend at least three years. Task force members said this would require additional federal funding, to support both workforce and education entities and build on the WDQI and SLDS investments made by the respective agencies. Such collection and reporting would not only provide a better understanding of the impact of training through increases in wages over time but would also facilitate the inclusion of programs such as entrepreneurship, where a longer time horizon is needed to track any changes. Additionally, states should ensure that longitudinal systems can disaggregate data so they can break out the results for populations who experience barriers to training. Information on whether and when individuals achieve self-sufficiency should be standardized across social services, education, and workforce programs, informed by local area, age, race, gender, disability, and lived experiences such as homelessness. Longitudinal analysis should take existing system's benefits cliffs into consideration to understand the impact that current or future benefits policy and programmatic restrictions may have on the trajectory of individuals.

WTPC members provided examples of how the design principle of “Shift the data collection mentality from achieving compliance to delivering value” is already being put into practice in their communities:

- **An expanded view of performance in Alabama:** Alabama looks at a variety of metrics beyond WIOA performance to understand the success of its programs. The metrics include labor-force participation, population performance (the number of people in population groups defined by the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act and the WIOA versus the number of people served by them), overhead versus direct services expenditures, and worker and employer voice, as collected through survey data.
- **Quality as a component of success in New Jersey:** New Jersey passed a law in 2015 requiring the annual publication of a consumer report card assessing the quality of every publicly funded training provider. The state recently updated its approach and developed a five-factor quality framework with multiple indicators falling into the following categories: employment and wage outcomes, demand level for the occupation, financial impact educational completion and equity. Overall scores are regression-adjusted to reflect the composition of enrollment composition, with special attention to age, gender and race, and to the extent data are available, criminal justice history and TANF status. To calculate employment and wage outcomes, New Jersey matches education and wage records using Social Security numbers reported by providers as required under State law.
- **Training and education report cards in Minnesota:** Minnesota produces yearly report cards for all WIOA and federal- or state-funded training programs. This includes community colleges, four-year universities, the K-12 system, and private, WIOA-funded providers. The report card data is available publicly, and the underlying data is available via secure login to any participating training provider. The system uses state identifier, first name, last name, Social Security number, and driver’s license records to perform matching on the back end.
- **Using human-centered design in Colorado:** Having found that the best way to understand the root cause behind individuals’ situations and outcomes is to connect with the people themselves, Arapahoe/Douglas Works! is using personas to better understand the why behind what people need. It then looks closely at the experience participants have with the outreach approach, considers whom Arapahoe/Douglas Works! is sharing data and information with, and evaluates what level of intentionality is needed when communicating opportunities, services, and results to potential participants. This work informs the way the workforce agency thinks about data collection, service delivery, and reporting.



Create conditions for data sharing, interagency collaboration, and the use of innovative technology.

With workforce development and skills training, aligning data-collection standards and establishing shared objectives, accountability structures, and governance models across approaches is crucial to understanding the interventions that produce results for populations in need. Also helpful are streamlining and interconnecting systems access to reduce the administrative burden and maximize the time that workforce staff can spend serving the public. Besides increasing administrative overhead, siloed systems require individuals to retell their stories, creating inefficiencies in delivering services and fostering overlapping technology investments.

- Programmatic alignment across Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) WIOA, and the Department of Veterans Affairs is highly encouraged, and yet data collection approaches and definitions of shared variables are not standardized, and performance metrics are not aligned. As a result, task force members said, local workforce development boards often feel they miss opportunities to anticipate needs, provide integrated services, and tell powerful stories because the data is not connected and incentives are misaligned. Lack of alignment makes collaboration more difficult and creates time-consuming processes of negotiation and collaboration to connect the dots. Many clients simultaneously participate in multiple systems—for example, they might be working with a WIOA case manager to retrain for a job while receiving food assistance—and siloed systems create multiple points of contact, have varied reporting requirements, and can drive mixed messaging. As workforce boards lean in on pathways to quality jobs, WIOA-funded efforts to assist an individual in moving along a pathway may conflict with TANF goals to move individuals off assistance as quickly as possible, despite the type of job.

Recommended actions: Task force members called upon policymakers to apply and align common performance metrics across related programs—WIOA, TANF, SNAP, refugee resettlement, and education programs such as career and technical education and adult education—to help incentivize data sharing and make integration of data systems easier. Policymakers should also update TANF and SNAP regulations and charge the Department of Health and Human Services with issuing guidance that includes reciprocal requirements on interaction and reporting and that would align with

the requirements that exist in the WIOA. The DOL should also partner with HHS and the Department of Education to standardize data definitions and data-collection processes of shared demographic, barrier, education, and work experience data to facilitate data sharing (e.g., aligning the age definitions for youth and young adults and standardizing the use of middle names and Social Security numbers). Finally, as highlighted in the paper “Reimagining Job Quality Measurement” by the Families and Workers Fund, DOL and HHS can use “funding and reporting processes, including more flexible timelines, access to performance-based funds and high performing board recognition as incentives to award expanded reporting.”³

- Although longitudinal data-sharing efforts are currently being pursued, data sharing during a program period remains nascent or simply absent, inhibiting robust program delivery and driving duplicative data collection. The DOL’s [Workforce Data Quality Initiative](#) (WDQI), which is focused on the development of, or enhancements to, longitudinal administrative databases that integrate workforce data and education data, is one important effort. The Education Department’s [Statewide Longitudinal Data System \(SLDS\) grants](#), which is focused on the design, development, implementation, and expansion of longitudinal data systems used by educational institutions serving everyone from preschool through workforce entry, is another. Both of these should provide important insight into long-term outcomes for individuals, but neither one can address the failure to share data during program operation.

Recommended actions: Policymakers should require the sharing of participant-level data, gathered from the point of enrollment and shared with appropriate access protection, between state agencies. Programs that would particularly benefit from such sharing include those from across the education spectrum (K-12, adult education, community college, and four-year institutions), as well as those run by the departments of Labor, HHS (touching on matters such as homelessness and childcare), and Justice.⁴ Federal policymakers should also require the alignment of existing data investments, including WDQI and SLDS. The DOL, in coordination with the other agencies, should provide guidance (e.g. a minimum set of standards/format requirements) and technical assistance to help local workforce development boards easily share data. The DOL should explore launching a public-private competition for data sharing and integration solutions that can be tested and adopted by the workforce systems using WIOA set-aside funds.

WTPC members provided examples of how the design principle of “create conditions for data sharing, inter-agency collaboration, and the use of innovative technology” is already being put into practice in their communities:

- **Aligning identifiers to support integration in Alabama:** Alabama is implementing security identifiers (SIDs) in its new Alabama Terminal on Linking and Analyzing Statistics (ATLAS) to facilitate data matching and linking across disparate data sets. The state has also embarked on a rigorous data cleaning effort, including working with agencies to address fuzzy matching and introduce standardized fields and formats (e.g., date format, use of middle names).
- **Using big data to support pathways and skills acquisition in New Jersey:** New Jersey partnered with [RIPL](#), a nonprofit data science organization that works with the public sector, to harness the power of data and artificial intelligence to provide online workforce services. Together, they built an online software application, called the NJ Career Navigator, that provides data-driven job, training, and career transition recommendations. New Jersey residents who have completed a profile then upload a resume. Recommendations take into account the users’ skills and education, level of demand, and likelihood for a wage increase, based on the experiences of other state residents in the labor market. The data underlying the technology include O*NET data, NLx job ads, millions of wage records, years of training program outcomes, and more than 400,000 resumes of New Jersey residents that have been matched to wage records to provide insight into the common advancement pathways of individuals and make recommendations to users. In its first month since its launch as part of New Jersey’s new digital suite of tools, the site drew 54,000 users.
- **Multistate data collaboratives through public-private partnerships:** Efforts such as the [Coleridge Initiative](#) are bringing innovative ways to help governments use data for effective public decision-making. Coleridge trains state agency staff in data literacy and applied data analysis methods, and its Administrative Data Research Facility is a “secure, FedRAMP-authorized cloud-based environment that enables government agencies to link their longitudinal data with other states and agencies.” More than 25 states are currently participating in at least one multistate data collaboratives using the Coleridge resources. Such collaboratives, says Coleridge, “include state workforce, education, human services, and other agencies working in partnership with each other and university partners to develop data products that policymakers, practitioners, and citizens can use to answer questions critical to society.”⁵ These collaboratives allow individual agencies to maintain approval of data access while sharing information to inform collective research and use.

- **Jobs and employment data exchange work at the Department of Commerce:**
The DOC has partnered with the T3 Innovation Network, a public-private collective-action initiative focused on “promoting data interoperability across the talent marketplace in ways that promote equity and opportunity,” to create a data collaborative that can advance data standards, governance, and robust reporting for employment and earnings records.⁶ The goal is to use data science techniques to make data more accessible for learners and workers, increase the quality of outcomes data for government program administrators and evaluators, and make comprehensive data analysis possible for the full universe of stakeholders. To date, the effort has created data definitions, dictionaries, schemas, and prototypes across various workforce focus areas.
- **State-led data sharing in Texas:** Data sharing across programs involving adult education, TANF, SNAP, WIOA, unemployment insurance, child care, and other matters is mandated in Texas and implemented using a data lake fed by each agency’s and program’s corresponding case management system. Results are then visualized through Tableau dashboards to enhance the management system’s reporting capabilities. Monthly reporting is provided to all agencies on their respective performance, which includes both federal and state-specific performance requirements, such as whether unemployment insurance claimants are employed within 10 weeks of losing their job. Tableau also offers a variety of self-serve visualizations, such as “look backs” at the data over a particular period, reports by NAICS, occupation codes, and other areas of interest. Texas has also established agreements with other states on interstate earnings to help bridge data gaps on those who work across state lines or relocated during the program year, though the data doesn’t always show up in the systems and may require some manual entry.





Invest in necessary infrastructure, human capital, and cybersecurity.

Public-sector investment in state and regional data infrastructure, including human resources, is critical to support the collection and analysis of equitable outcomes of workforce, education, and social services programs. Technology is central to every aspect of programmatic delivery—from outreach to eligibility to performance—and the protection of personally identifiable data from cyberattack is more crucial than ever. Additionally, a strong technology foundation positions local workforce boards to explore emerging technology to pursue improvements to service delivery, customer access, and employer engagement while minimizing opportunities for duplication, fraud, or misuse.

- Task force members noted that because existing systems are aging, flexible service delivery, data sharing, and robust analytics are difficult. However, systems transformations require dedicated budgets and expertise, and there is no clear source of funding for such efforts. While technology is an allowable expenditure under WIOA, directing WIOA funding to support such system upgrades and capacity building would significantly reduce the amount available to provide direct services, such as training, to participants in need of crucial support to enter or reenter employment. Closing gaps such as cyber-vulnerabilities or devising workarounds for antiquated systems would enable agencies to more efficiently manage their system's risk exposure and expense. As technology systems are upgraded, new models for data management and analytics can be explored to both address limited capacity and take advantage of economies of scale through shared-services models.

Recommended actions: Task force members agreed that dedicated funding, such as through a state-level data and technology transformation grant, is needed to support the following data and technology improvements for workforce development, education, and social services systems:

- » **Usability:** States need to develop user-friendly systems that are more focused on filtering people into programs than on screening them out. Much like common sales and marketing systems, the systems should attract users to engage more by clearly demonstrating how participants and employers are receiving value. These newer systems should also allow for the state to cut down on waste or fraud by improving accountability.

- » **Data infrastructure:** The establishment of data-sharing agreements, data lakes, APIs, and permissions-based access would foster connectivity and data access. Policies should encourage integrated data collection or enrollment processes such as integrated forms and shared databases financed through dedicated funding. This includes the requirement for state agencies to share data with local workforce areas.
- » **Innovation:** Mechanisms such as data competitions, challenges, and prototyping should be used to source, test, and incorporate local ideas for meeting needs through data-collection processes and systems that better match workers with the workplaces that best suit them.
- » **Capacity building:** More skills development and training should be directed to areas such as data analytics, visualization, program evaluation, and the use of automation and big data. Additionally, state agencies should be required to provide extra training on the use and protection of unemployment insurance wage data to local workforce staff.
- » **Cybersecurity:** Improvements are needed for system protections, vulnerability testing protocols, and staff data protection knowledge, as well as physical security at job center and youth provider locations.

Recommended actions: State policymakers should explore using governor's WIOA set-aside funding to establish hub-and-spoke models that can centralize and streamline data sharing and provide shared services, including analysis and reporting to the region. Such models can be a more effective use of resources, leverage public-private partnerships, and, over time, make data available for research and strategic, programmatic, and compliance purposes. Federal policymakers can incentivize such shifts through flexibility on draw down and expiration of funding being used to create or restructure data systems. Additionally, the DOL should provide more extensive, standardized technical assistance to states and local boards on data use, analysis, and protection across the various data capacity-building efforts to complement such a grant for data and technology transformation and ensure alignment of the various data-related initiatives.

- Blockchain technology, machine learning, and artificial intelligence are rapidly evolving and shifting nearly every facet of work. These technologies make it possible to process data at unprecedented speeds, unearth hidden connections, and provide predictive analytics. Social listening techniques can crawl through online resources to provide new insights, and mobile technology can bring resources into remote communities. Such emerging technologies can provide innovative service delivery solutions, make training and employment records more portable, and shed new light on the equity of outcomes. However, the development of relevant, scalable solutions requires careful testing and iteration to identify what works, and to implement necessary data protections and privacy considerations that well serve individuals while protecting their personal information.

Recommended actions: Policymakers should use flexible funding to encourage and incentivize public-private partnerships between workforce agencies, higher education institutions, and technology companies that could pilot the application of emerging technologies to solve workforce issues. Possibilities include the development of secure, portable digital wallets for learning and employment records, new methods for skills matching and assessing prior learning, and the digital collection of voices from diverse worker populations. The DOL should work with pilot projects and share success stories with other workforce development organizations across the country.



WTPC members provided examples of how the design principle of “invest in necessary infrastructure, human capital, and cybersecurity” is already being put into practice in their communities:

- **Building a public-private hub for data in Minnesota:** The state of Minnesota was part of a public-private partnership to establish RealTime Talent as a central source for connecting the dots between education, workforce, industry, community organizations and public sector data. The public-private partnership was born out of an earlier effort called the Workforce Alignment Committee, which engaged more than 500 partners and is now under the Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce Development Foundation. RealTime Talent supports predictive analysis by “elevating employers’ collective workforce needs that are impacting economic stability and growth for their industries” and provides “current labor market information, customized research, human-centered facilitation for the talent pipeline and encourages market-oriented data-informed decisions in recruitment, education, and training processes.”⁷⁷
- **Using technology to connect the dots on skills and employment in Alabama:** The Alabama Talent Triad (available at talentplaybook.org or alabamaworks.com) uses technology to generate skills-based job descriptions and create for individuals a digital wallet for their learning and employment records. The ATT system is being embedded in workforce development, and registering will soon be requirement when filing for unemployment insurance. The state manages an iterative process using private-sector partnerships with employers, educators, and community organizations to create sector and occupational qualification frameworks. Employers and AI algorithms incorporated into the ATT generate job descriptions based on the framework, and related skills can be populated in each jobseeker’s wallet. The system also assesses prior learning as part of intake to assess the jobseeker’s skills and knowledge gaps. The system interfaces with employer HR systems to stay current and create a fully connected cycle. The tool is used alongside a benefit cliff and self sufficiency tool, built in collaboration with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, which helps individuals understand the impact of benefits cliffs on their personal situation.
- **Badging as skills recognition in Wisconsin:** In south central Wisconsin, the community college system is developing digital badges that will be awarded for short-term, community-based training. These awards will serve as a virtual credential that individuals can attach to their online resume. The community college system is also exploring mechanisms to automatically award credentials or badges as individuals hit key milestones along a career pathway.



Use the system to inform and advance pathways to quality jobs.

Data, along with the necessary structures to support its collection, analysis, and use, is crucial to understanding and addressing the systemic barriers to advancement. To tackle racial, gender, and income disparities that impact both participants' quality of life and employers' hiring and retention, it is critical to shift how we define and measure success. For too long, success metrics have focused on job placement, attainment of credentials, and median wages upon completion of a program. While directionally useful, these metrics provide an incomplete understanding of the reality experienced by America's workers. With 44% of U.S. workers in low-paying jobs and economic mobility falling, systems must measure the quality of the jobs that workers are entering.⁹ We must reimagine a trusted mechanism and fuller range of quantifiable indicators to measure the quality of programs. This includes infusing worker voice into data collection to capture worker well-being, engagement, and representation, better enabling public-sector efforts to benefit from the incorporation of worker perspectives.

- The pandemic, the ensuing “great resignation,” and lingering hiring and retention challenges have all shed light on the importance of creating pathways to quality jobs. While a variety of tools exist in the market, lack of policy guidance creates confusion as to which tools produce acceptable results. This fosters inaction because workforce agencies cannot easily track progress against a living wage, require compliance with a self-sufficiency standard in their procurement policies, prioritize funds to employers that offer quality jobs, or celebrate companies that have met or exceed living-wage goals. A federally accepted standard, and a tool based on that, would enable states and local boards to better focus on the implementation of pathways to quality jobs.

Recommended actions: The DOL should provide guidance on a standard for determining living wage/self-sufficiency thresholds and recommend a compliant tool that can be used for determining local thresholds. The standard should define terms, lay out a calculation methodology, and outline how the selected tool should be used in conjunction with benefits-cliff calculators. The DOL does not necessarily need to create a customized tool, but it can validate, through a public-private partnership,

an existing tool or set of tools as the standard for use in workforce development. The DOL should also explore collaboration with other agencies that are deploying workforce-related funding (including new funding via the Inflation Reduction Act, the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors Act, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the American Rescue Plan Act), such as the departments of Transportation, Commerce, and HHS, to collectively advance a tool and a calculation methodology that can be used as the baseline for all job-creation and job-advancement programs. Such a standard should include guidance for local boards on how they can incorporate location-specific considerations as a complement to the tool.

- Unemployment wage data is the key source of information that workforce agencies use to understand individuals' earnings and employment status, yet records vary greatly by state and often lack key pieces of information. Currently, for example, many states' workforce agencies must calculate dollars earned as well as the type of employment and do not always have insight into whether the wages are bonus or standard pay, the number of jobs held by the individual, or which employer paid the wages.

Recommended actions: Federal policymakers, working with a set of states willing to pilot, should provide a standardized template to states for implementation of an expanded set of data collection through the unemployment insurance system and then incentivize its use nationally. As highlighted in the paper “Reimagining Job Quality Measurement,” by the Families and Workers Fund, this enhanced wage record template should include hours, occupation code or job titles, employment status, start dates, and locations.⁹ This work could also be enhanced by expanding to the WIOA programs access to data on unemployment insurance, compensation, and quarterly wage data maintained by the HHS National Directory of New Hires for federal, military, and state workers.¹⁰ Additionally, federal policymakers should require that state agencies responsible for workforce development and labor market information provide quarterly individual-level training data and unemployment insurance data, or access to the data, to local workforce boards for use in carrying out their programming. This would ensure that appropriate protections are maintained while facilitating the use of critical data in workforce development operations.

Recommended actions: Task force members emphasized the importance of the DOL expanding research and evaluation guidance, including the review of data on the quality of jobs created through the assessment of factors such as paid leave, schedule stability, learning and development, voice, and representation. Such data can be collected either through direct employer reporting, the use of an analysis tool such as the Aspen-developed tool [Working Metrics](#), or surveys (see examples of how it could be included

in the National Longitudinal Survey, the Current Population Survey, the Quick Business Response Survey, or the Employment Situation Establishment Survey from the Job Quality Measurement Initiative Report).¹¹ Workforce boards should be encouraged to use WIOA funds to provide technical assistance to employers to improve job quality within their workplaces, including making the purchase of analytics tools and platforms that provide insight into quality job criteria an allowable cost. Employers should be incentivized to provide such additional data through priority access to wage subsidies or other business services, positive marketing and recognition, and access to labor-market information that can inform the competitive talent landscape. This information would augment the changes described above to unemployment data to provide a more robust insight into the quality of the jobs in a community.

- Independent work and the gig economy are becoming increasingly prevalent, particularly for younger workers, and the share of American workers in non-W2 jobs has grown. “Thirty-nine percent of American workers in non-W2 jobs has grown. “Thirty-nine percent of American adults have a side hustle, and 28% believe they’ll always need one to make ends meet,” according to a Bankrate survey conducted by YouGov PLC.¹² Research by McKinsey also found that 58 million American adults identified as independent workers in 2022, which equals about 36% of the American workforce.¹³ Despite the growth of this segment of the workforce, wage data is not currently available through the unemployment insurance system or other centralized databases, which makes it difficult to track wage outcomes for participants choosing to pursue independent employment. While some local workforce boards use their case management systems to identify individuals without wage data and then apply supplemental approaches such as surveys and employer outreach to fill the gap, this approach is cumbersome, inaccurate, and time-consuming.

Recommended actions: Federal policymakers should either require incorporation of non-W2 employee wage data into existing unemployment insurance systems or mandate that the IRS provide access to such wage data through other means for the purposes of delivering WIOA programs. The DOL should encourage partnerships with state departments of revenue and motor vehicles to test data-sharing and data-matching approaches to increase the data on non-W2 workers available for inclusion in WIOA reporting.



- Workers are experts on their own realities, and their perceptions, interactions, and experiences are a valuable source of insight. Workers can speak to whether a training course, a set of supportive services, a program of work readiness, or some other intervention truly transformed their lives, setting them on a path to economic mobility. While human-centered design is increasingly a standard for workforce development and many workforce agencies deploy surveys to understand participant perception of a training course or host focus groups to gain insights into program design, worker perspectives are not yet infused into the performance process limiting their weight and influence.

Recommended actions: Task force members agreed that the primary indicators of performance for workforce programs should include a worker satisfaction performance metric, like a net promoter score, which measures the individual's perception as to whether their life has been positively improved because of the services received from the workforce agency. Additionally, the task force concluded that the DOL, partnering with organizations such as MIT, Cornell, and the Worker Empowerment Research Network that have been advancing such work to date, should issue guidance on conducting worker voice surveys with standardized questions to support local data collection for evaluation and employer support purposes. The Worker Empowerment Research Network has developed tools to assess workers' ability to exercise voice and create change within their workplaces through both individual and collective action.¹⁴

- Employers are key customers of the workforce system, and their needs continue to evolve as the labor market shifts. Workforce agencies must remain agile in ensuring that employer feedback is used to directly inform the development, execution, and evaluation of programming. This will be particularly important as work-based learning, pathways, and sector strategies become central delivery strategies and as the pace of technology change demands rapidly evolving skills and competencies. The current performance requirements drive the definition of success for the system and yet employer perspectives are not included in the metrics.

Recommended action: Task force members agreed that workforce programs should include an employer satisfaction performance metric, like the worker satisfaction performance metric, measuring employers' perceptions of the services received from covered workforce programs and the degree to which they provided value for the company. Such data can be collected through annual surveys, interviews or focus groups of employers and could be carried out alongside other sector strategies or labor market data collection.

- Many workforce development services, such as coaching or career navigation, are important elements of pathways to good jobs, but there is currently no standardized way to track or quantify their impact. These elements are not standard requirements in the Participant Individual Record Layout, and their tracking is often recorded as a notation or comment within workforce databases, making it difficult to measure or access their usage and impact.

Recommended actions: The DOL should provide guidance to states on how to track and quantify WIOA career services such as coaching or career navigation and encourage boards to perform routine impact assessments that analyze the efficacy and usefulness of each of these services on an individual's success.



WTPC members provided examples of how the design principle of “use the system to inform and advance pathways to quality jobs” is already being put into practice in their communities:

- **Collecting qualitative inputs in California:** Merced County carries out qualitative surveys with individuals before and after programmatic intervention to understand the level of stress they are feeling and to more accurately assess whether the program made a difference in their lives. Merced also closely tracks how long it takes individuals not only to complete the program, but also to receive their first paycheck.
- **Using polling to inform performance in Alabama:** The state leverages a polling company called Cyngal to understand employer and employee voice. Cyngal conducts a yearly survey of unemployed and underemployed individuals, a survey on barriers and needs for supportive services, and a survey measuring employers’ interest in various aspects of the talent pipeline. Questions are consistent year to year to allow for comparison, and the results directly inform programmatic design, delivery, and performance.
- **Connecting data sets to include non-W2 workers in Alabama:** Alabama recently passed a law that codified ATLAS, the state’s longitudinal data system incorporating workforce data along with data from the departments of Education and Commerce. As the system moves into new phases, the goal is to include Department of Revenue data and the state driver’s license registry will also be brought online to match records to understand wage earnings for non-W2 workers.
- **Bridging the gap on non-W2 data in Colorado:** Arapahoe/Douglas Works! has two dedicated staffers who review every customer in the WIOA program and who use the DOL’s Training and Employment Guidance Letter on supplemental wage to survey customers. The system of record allows the staff to see who will count positively or negatively against performance targets and identify the missing data elements. Staff members then pull unemployment insurance records, contact the individuals, and send out surveys to collect missing wage data. Individuals are contacted every quarter to develop a trend across all four quarters, and the staff work with an economist to develop a longitudinal report on the results.

04.

Conclusion

Data access, alignment and integration are at the heart of understanding the workforce development system's impact on individuals' lives. Disaggregating data to understand differentiated outcomes, investing in systems to create the necessary infrastructure, building the capacity of workforce professionals to drive robust analytics, and creating mechanisms to understand the quality of jobs in our communities will go a long way toward ensuring that the system is responsive to the needs of its users, both today and tomorrow. But the power of data and technology, particularly with the pace of change that automation is ushering in, does not stop there. With investment and a new focus on delivering the AI skills that will be needed tomorrow, the workforce system is also well positioned to serve as the pipeline to AI jobs for public good. Just as the workforce development system has played an important role with Americorps, the [U.S. Digital Corps](#), and other government agencies, they can now be the pipeline that ensures that pathways to good jobs are the norm and that both the public and private sectors have the talent they need to thrive in this new age of automation.



Endnotes

1. The primary measures of performance are outlined in WIOA Section 116.
2. Other characteristics are the quality of the individual's work history, level of work experience and skills attained, dislocation from high-wage and high-benefit employment, level of English-language proficiency, incarceration history, and prolonged use of public assistance.
3. The Families & Workers Fund, Digging Deeper into the 10 Big Ideas, November 2022, page 11, downloadable from <https://familiesandworkers.org/job-quality-report/>.
4. Justice Department data includes figures on formerly incarcerated persons' enrollment in pre-release and post-release services and recidivism rates.
5. Coleridge Initiative, Multi-State Data Collaboratives, <https://coleridgeinitiative.org/multi-state-data-collaboratives>.
6. U.S. Chamber of Commerce, T3 Innovation Network, https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/solutions/workforce-development-and-training/t3-innovation-network?utm_source=new.uschamberfoundation.org&utm_medium=redirect#entry:619@1.
7. RealTime Talent, <https://www.realtimetalent.org/home/>.
8. Gina Belli, "Nearly Half of US Workers Have Low-Paying Jobs," Payscale, January 15, 2020, <https://www.payscale.com/career-advice/nearly-half-of-us-workers-have-low-paying-jobs/>; Urban Institute, Economic Mobility and Inequality, <https://www.urban.org/research-area/economic-mobility-and-inequality#:~:text=Prospects%20for%20economic%20mobility%20in,work%20shape%20workers'%20upward%20mobility>.
9. Digging Deeper, page 24. <https://familiesandworkers.org/job-quality-report/>
10. Digging Deeper, page 25. <https://familiesandworkers.org/job-quality-report/>
11. Digging Deeper, page 6-8. <https://familiesandworkers.org/job-quality-report/>
12. Bankrate, Survey: 39% Have a Side Hustle, and 44% Believe They'll Always Need One, <https://www.bankrate.com/personal-finance/side-hustle-survey/>.
13. McKinsey & Co., Freelance, Side Hustles, and Gigs: Many More Americans Have Become Independent Workers, August 23, 2022, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/sustainable-inclusive-growth/future-of-america/freelance-side-hustles-and-gigs-many-more-americans-have-become-independent-workers>.
14. The Workers & Families Fund, Reimagining Job Quality Measurement (see Appendices), <https://familiesandworkers.org/job-quality-report/>.



Building a Future
That Works
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