

MAKING THE CASE:

Why the Public Workforce System Should Prioritize Jobseekers Facing Barriers to Employment

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While the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) places a priority on serving adults and youth who are low-income and receiving public benefits, **local and state public workforce systems will need to make deliberate decisions with regard to resource allocation and prioritization of adults and youth facing barriers to employment.** Making these deliberate decisions may not be popular or easy within communities, especially given finite resources available through the public workforce system and the reality that serving jobseekers facing barriers may be more costly to the public workforce system upfront.

This resource equips stakeholders with six reasons they can use to help make the case for why the public workforce system should prioritize and serve adults and youth facing barriers to employment.

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#1: Every person deserves the opportunity to succeed in work and support themselves and their families.

Employment fulfills individuals, strengthens families, builds communities, and is fundamental to a prosperous America. Earned income is the most effective and consistent means by which low-income individuals and families meet their basic needs and climb out of poverty. When given the opportunity to work, the vast majority of people who face chronic unemployment do so and many more consistently articulate that employment is a primary need and goal.^{1,2}



#2: Increasing employment for jobseekers facing barriers to employment makes good economic sense.

The number of adults and youth who are chronically unemployed represents a tremendous loss of productivity, economic growth, and human potential. Youth who are disconnected from work and school represent an estimated cost to society of upwards of \$250 billion per year—or a loss of \$4.7 trillion over the lifetime of an opportunity youth cohort.³ Being out of work for six months or more is associated with lower well-being among the long-term unemployed, their families, and communities and can lead to chronic unemployment.⁴ Unemployment leads to higher expenditures for unemployment benefits, food assistance, and health care, among other public benefits.⁵ When individuals are chronically unemployed, local, state, and federal governments forgo significant tax revenue in the form of income, property, and goods and services taxes.



#3: Workers Facing Barriers to Employment Can Be Assets to Business Owners.

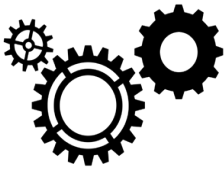
Surveys of employers participating in employment interventions designed to support low-income workers facing barriers to employment—specifically low-income parents, youth, and people with a criminal record—consistently indicate that hiring these jobseekers can increase their business' productivity, work quality, number of customers or clients they were able to serve, as well as customer or client satisfaction.⁶ Moreover, almost half of employers surveyed have indicated that they would hire low-income parents or youth again.⁷

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#4: Increasing employment and economic opportunity for jobseekers facing barriers to employment has multiple positive ripple effects.

Employment reduces reliance on public benefits and decreases poverty. Employment has been shown to make communities safer and to decrease criminal justice recidivism, especially among individuals who are most at risk of returning to incarceration.⁸ Youth employment has a number of positive ripple effects, including helping to prevent youth most at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system from entering in the first place.^{9,10} Access to work leads to greater parental engagement in the form of higher and more consistent child support payments and informal support among noncustodial parents.¹¹ Children whose parents are engaged with the labor market have been shown to be more successful in school as well as to exhibit more pro-social behavior and attitudes towards work.¹²



#5: Serving Individuals Facing Barriers to Employment Can Help Make the Best Use of Local Public Resources.

Increasing employment and economic opportunity is a primary or secondary goal of most public systems. Indeed, there is growing accountability among public systems to ensure that adults and youth are engaged and successful in work. No single public system can increase employment and economic opportunity for jobseekers facing barriers to employment on its own. Because public systems are better at solving big problems when they work together, it is in the best interest of the public workforce system to leverage its resources and strengths and partner with other systems to achieve complementary goals of increasing employment and economic opportunity for jobseekers facing barriers. By working together to achieve these goals, systems will make the best use of available resources.



#6: Prioritizing employment services for adult and youth jobseekers facing barriers to employment is required by WIOA statute.

WIOA specifically says that one of the goals of the public workforce system is to prepare individuals—especially individuals with barriers to employment—to succeed in the labor market through increased access to employment opportunities, education, training, and support services.¹³ The statute further clarifies that adults receiving public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient will be given priority for adult employment and training activities regardless of available resources in communities. Finally, WIOA requires that not less than 75 percent of youth funds be spent on out-of-school youth.

Increasing employment and economic opportunity for jobseekers facing barriers has a number of positive ripple effects, including reducing reliance on public benefits, decreasing criminal justice recidivism, and decreasing poverty.

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