



Adult Education and the Workforce Development System: Partnering to Improve Services

by Jessie Stadd, RTI International; Jamie Harris, World Education; and Blaire Willson Toso, WestEd

Immigrants are essential contributors to the nation's labor market and a driving force in the U.S. economy. In 2022, foreign-born individuals represented 18.1% of the U.S. civilian labor force, up from 17.4% in 2021.¹ Immigrants are also expected to offset a decline in the working-age population by adding about 18 million workers over the next decade, underscoring the need to build pathways for immigrants to enter the workforce.^{2,3} Furthermore, immigrants can help meet the identified need for a multilingual and racially and ethnically diverse workforce.^{4,5}

The value of immigrants to the U.S. workforce and economy is clear, demonstrating why services that promote immigrants' economic integration are so critical. Such services are often delivered through the workforce development system—the network of providers delivering the core programs authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), workforce development boards, American Job Centers,

The **Enhancing Access for Refugees and New Americans** project aims to support adult educators in developing and delivering high-quality IELCE/IET programming in alignment with an immigrant integration approach.

Enhancing Access Spotlights describe and provide examples of specific aspects of IELCE/IET implementation.

and other partner programs. WIOA Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), is the primary service provider for immigrant adults who are in need of language, literacy, and workforce skills to support economic and civic integration. This system offers programs that provide employment and training services, including adult education and literacy programs. The workforce development system can strategically meet the needs of in-demand industries and job seekers by preparing workers with the skills needed to advance state, local, and regional economies.

¹ "Foreign-Born Workers: Labor Force Characteristics – 2022" (News Release), Bureau of Labor and Statistics, May 18, 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/forbrn.pdf>.

² Abby Budiman, "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants," Pew Research Center, August 20, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/08/20/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

³ Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "Immigration Projected to Drive Growth in U.S. Working-Age Population Through at Least 2035," Pew Research Center, March 8, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/03/08/immigration-projected-to-drive-growth-in-u-s-working-age-population-through-at-least-2035/>.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, "Raise the Bar Policy Brief: Eliminating Educator Shortages through Increasing Educator Diversity and Addressing High-need Shortage Areas," November, 2023, <https://www.ed.gov/raisethebar/Eliminating-Educator-Shortages-through-Increasing-Educator-Diversity>.

⁵ Jeanne Batalova, "Immigrant Health-Care Workers in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, April 7, 2023, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/immigrant-health-care-workers-united-states>.

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The federal AEFLA program along with its core partner programs in the workforce development system are crucial points of access for immigrants, refugees, and New Americans seeking to achieve their highest potential in the U.S. economy. AEFLA-funded adult education programs often provide the following services to help immigrants and multilingual learners gain the language skills, education, and/or workforce training that they need in order to enter good jobs, earn family-sustaining wages, and participate effectively in their communities and local economies. Adult education programs may provide the following services:

- English language acquisition (ELA) classes to improve English language proficiency.
- Workplace literacy classes, often delivered in partnership with employers, to improve the English or literacy skills of employees, often in ways that make them more effective in their positions.
- Navigation or advising services to help multilingual learners and immigrants access supports and navigate U.S. systems, including employer job applications.
- Services specific to helping Internationally Trained Professionals (ITPs) gain English

language skills both generally and in their career fields, as well as services to assist them in leveraging their foreign credentials and work experience to find meaningful employment in the U.S.

- Career pathways that can include Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) and Integrated Education and Training (IET) activities to provide accelerated opportunities for multilingual learners and immigrants to gain English and civic skills that help them succeed in education and training programs. One of the goals of IELCE activities, according to WIOA, is to “integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program.”⁶

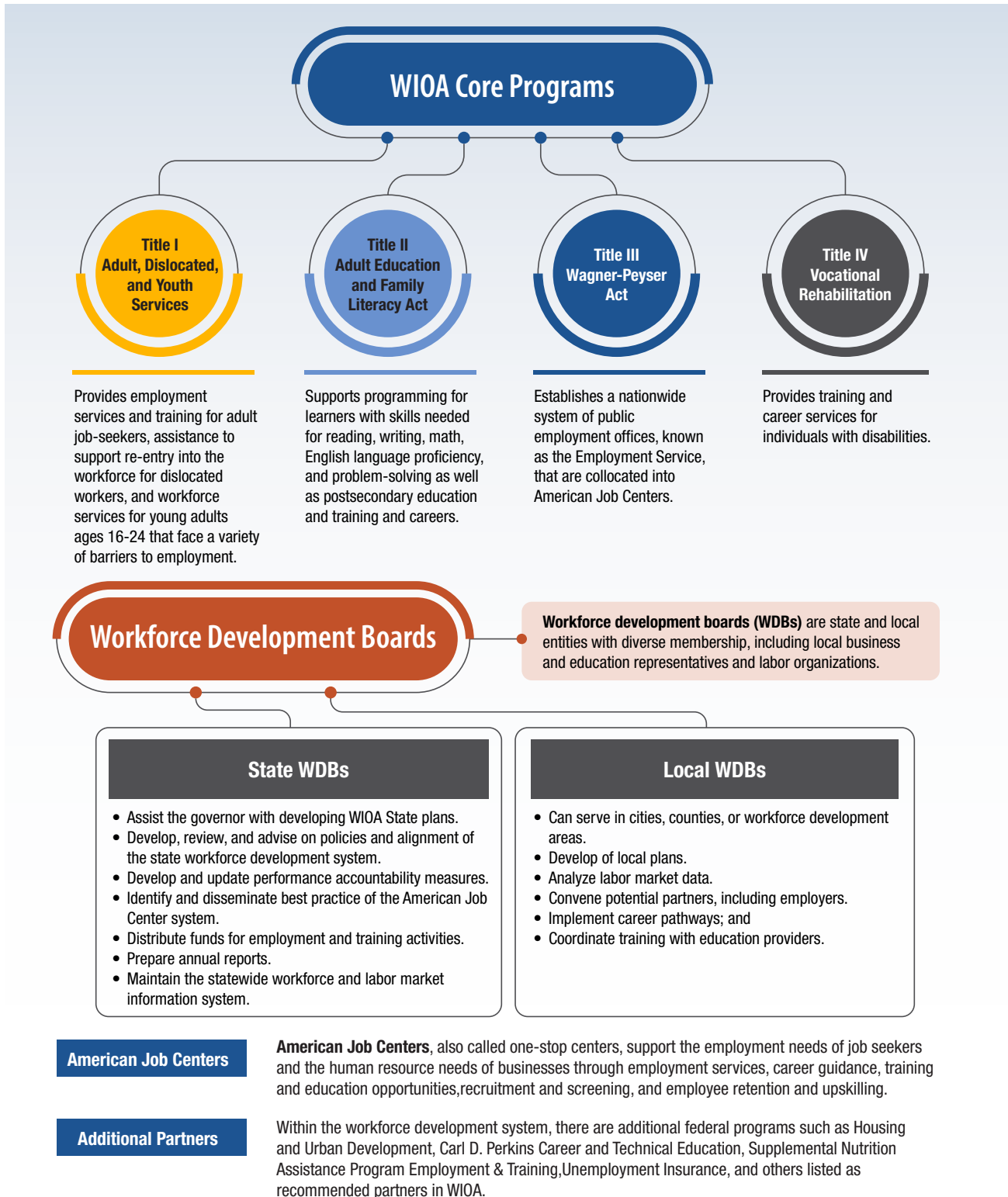
Through these programs, adult education helps to build key skills needed for a well-trained workforce that can fill local labor market needs. Adult education providers have demonstrated success serving immigrants and multilingual learners who may have multiple barriers to education and employment. Adult education services can further immigrants’ and multilingual learners’ economic integration when those services are amplified through strategic coordination with other workforce system providers.



⁶ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act,” U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2014, accessed July 17, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa>.

About the Workforce Development System

As noted, the workforce development system refers to the network of providers delivering the core programs authorized by WIOA, workforce development boards, American Job Centers, and other partner programs (see figure).



Innovations in Partnership Within the Workforce Development System

Many adult education providers have established productive partnerships with workforce programs and stakeholders. One common type of partnership is a referring relationship, in which adult education programs and other WIOA partners refer adult learners to the other organization for services. Additionally, many adult education programs partner with local training providers, community and technical colleges, and employers to develop and operate IET programs.

This spotlight highlights innovations in partnerships within the workforce development system to improve holistic services for adult learners, including multilingual learners and immigrants. The following examples, identified through a landscape scan conducted by the Enhancing Access for Refugees and New Americans (EARN) project, showcase ways in which adult education providers are deepening partnerships to coordinate services and engage more fully with workforce development boards and employers.

Coordinating Across the Workforce Development System

Workforce entities, including adult education providers, can partner to develop coordinated services that offer improved or streamlined services for participants, expand access or ease of use for participants, and improve communication and reporting between organizations and entities. Adult education providers often partner with each other, as organizations form collaboratives or consortia, which can help streamline or maximize

services.⁷ Partnerships with Title I-funded training providers are critical in serving multilingual learners and immigrants to help them access programs that can support and foster their economic integration. In addition, adult education programs can work closely with partner organizations to support mutually beneficial strategies such as co-enrollment and co-location.

Coordinated services are supported by practices such as:

- **Co-development of programming.** Adult education and workforce partners can collaboratively develop curriculum and programming that is responsive to the needs of local industries and that prepares multilingual learners for next steps along a longer career pathway. Collaboration may begin with information sharing that supports program development. For example, workforce partners may share labor market data to help inform decision-making. Adult education partners may help workforce partners understand the needs of multilingual learners, immigrants, and New Americans to help them develop programming that supports the success of these populations. Adult education can increase partners' understanding of the strengths and assets of multilingual learners so that those assets can be leveraged through program design. For example, ITPs have a wealth of experience and education that can help them move quickly through the system and into meaningful careers, but they may need support with licensure and credential evaluation to accelerate their progress.

⁷ Partnership among adult education programs is explored in detail in EARN's Expanding Boundaries: Taking a Regional Approach to IELCE/IET spotlight: <https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/EARNRegionIETsSpotlight.pdf>.

- **Co-enrollment in both Title I and Title II programs.** Adult learners, including multilingual learners, may be able to be enrolled in both Title I workforce training and Title II adult education programs. Co-enrollment can benefit both programs as learners make progress toward program outcomes, including WIOA performance indicators.⁸ Because adult education programs are often the first step in accessing education and training for many immigrants, Title II adult education programs can be effective partners or leaders for co-enrollment initiatives. Monitoring the performance of co-enrollment programs can help identify areas for improvement, ensure program effectiveness, enhance accountability, and develop success stories to drive employment engagement and student enrollment.



Practice in Action: Co-funding, Co-enrollment, and Collaborative Delivery of Training Programs

Five adult education programs in Eastern New Mexico (New Mexico Junior College, Clovis Adult Education, Eastern New Mexico University – Ruidoso, New Mexico State University Alamogordo, and Eastern New Mexico University – Roswell), in collaboration with the Eastern Area Work Development Board (WDB), are in the fifth year of delivering the Start Up Generational Entrepreneurial Program to adult learners in the region who are interested in entrepreneurship. Students are recruited from their adult education programs to participate in the program, which can be delivered virtually with in-person supports, when available. Students are co-enrolled in adult education classes and the Start Up Program. When students complete the program, which has been delivered in both 12- and 16-week models, they earn a measurable skills gain (MSG) for completing a training program and are prepared to launch their own small businesses. This program was originally piloted and fully funded for the first 2 years using WIOA Title I funds. Over the last 3 years, WIOA Title I Youth funds have supported participants aged 16 to 24, and WIOA Title II funds have supported interested adult learners aged 25 or older. This collaboration provided tangible benefits to immigrants and the local community.

⁸ All WIOA core programs, including adult education, must report on six primary indicators of performance: employment rate 2nd quarter after exit, employment rate 4th quarter after exit, median earnings 2nd quarter after exit, credential attainment, measurable skill gains, and effectiveness in serving employers. Explore resources from the U.S. Department of Labor to learn more about these indicators of performance: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/performance/performance-indicators>.

Practice in Action: Co-Enrollment

The Maryland Department of Labor aims to serve customers and provide access to all core program services regardless of the customer's entry point. Co-enrollment, the concurrent enrollment of a customer in two or more core programs, has been leveraged to support career pathways development for adult learners. These career pathways models have been created by means of partnership between WIOA Title II and Title I programs. To increase a historically low co-enrollment, the Career Pathway Connections for Adult Learners grant program was created. The goals of this program were to increase adult learners' access to Title II training, support lower-level adult learners in meeting career goals, address business needs, expand career pathways through proven interventions, create a co-enrollment and career pathways guide, and achieve sustainability beyond the grant cycle. The pilot projects of this grant were required to include

proven interventions such as registered apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, IET, IELCE, ELA, out-of-school youth pathways, distance learning, transition specialist support, and/or bridge programming.

Employer partners are also a part of the program delivery and are convened by the WDB to share skills needed for employment openings. In one career pathways project model, Title II programs provided success coaches who served as liaisons between the adult education and the workforce development programs and Title I provided career coaches, supportive and career services, and placed participants in employment. In another career pathways project model, Title II also provided contextualized occupational training and Title I covered training costs, provided case management, and placed learners in employment. The [Career Pathway Connections](#) report shares five career pathways models and lessons learned from project implementation.⁹

- **Co-funding programs, often using braided or blending funding strategies.** Braiding or blending funding approaches typically combine multiple funding sources to support a service. These approaches can help expand the reach of programs and allow more comprehensive services to be offered to adult learners who are also job seekers.¹⁰

⁹ "Career Pathways Connections for Adult Learners: Moving the Needle on Service Integration," Maryland Department of Labor, Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning, 2022. <https://www.labor.maryland.gov/employment/careerpathways/careerpathwaysreport.pdf>.

¹⁰ OCTAE Program Memo 24-3 clarified that AEFLA funds may be used by States and eligible providers to pay costs related to child and dependent care and transportation to ensure that adult learners are able to attend and participate in AEFLA-funded programs, provided these costs are reasonable, necessary, and allocable to AEFLA. For example, if a learner is not able to pay these costs other sources of funding are not available, and the learner could not otherwise regularly participate in AEFLA-funded programming, AEFLA funds may be used to pay these costs. For more information, review the document here: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/octae-program-memo-24-3.pdf>.

Practice in Action: Co-funding

Adult education providers in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) partners utilize [Perkins funds](#) to provide wrap-around services to adult learners working to transition to career and technical education (CTE) or from technical education to employment. Some of the eligible activities include:

- Specific targeted services based on student need, such as financial literacy, mentoring, job shadowing, service-learning, study skills workshops, and student support groups to help identified students to successfully complete their courses and/or programs
- Development or implementation of Open Educational Resources
- Career counseling and employment services to facilitate a student's passage from adult education/ELA to CTE programs or technical education to employment including career exploration, job seeking skills, job development, and placement activities
- Professional learning opportunities designed to inform and reflect on best practices for serving underrepresented students
- Multilingual supports, such as multilingual coaching and case management, for multilingual learners to help them transition to CTE programs and employment

By braiding Perkins and AEFLA funds, WTCS providers are able to offer more holistic and comprehensive services to adult learners, thereby helping immigrants to more easily transition to the next step of their education and training pathways which are key to obtaining good jobs.



Co-location of services. Co-location in this context frequently means that an adult education provider has a staff member on-site at the American Job Center to meet with learners and help them navigate the center's services, access adult education programming, and/or support American Job Center staff in serving adult learners, including multilingual learners. Adult education providers can review materials, help American Job Center staff

understand the strengths and assets that adult learners bring (e.g., work experience, multilingualism, foreign credentials, and/or U.S.-based education, training, or volunteer experience) and the benefit of those assets when entering the workforce. Co-location is an effective way to share expertise, cost share, and help adults understand and access a wider range of services to ensure literacy, language, and employment support.

Practice in Action: Co-location

In Massachusetts, "out stationing" refers to when adult education staff are located at an American Job Center, known as MassHire Career Centers. This approach facilitates referrals within the system between providers and allows adult education representatives to help adult learners, including multilingual learners, navigate MassHire career services.

MassHire Career Centers host orientations on available services for community members. The Center for New Americans, an education and resource center for immigrants and refugees in Western Massachusetts, worked with local MassHire Career Centers to adjust their processes to make them more accessible to immigrants and multilingual learners. For example, Center for New Americans staff reviewed orientation materials to recommend how those materials might be shortened and simplified to be more accessible to immigrants and multilingual learners and recommended a partnership with a local non-profit that provides translation services. Although some community members may not be able to use all the employment assistance services, they are eligible for some services offered through the American Job Center (e.g., resume building, cover letter development, and digital literacy workshops).



Coordinating to meet immediate needs.

Another benefit of creating collaborative infrastructure is that it can make it easier and faster to develop targeted services that meet emergency situations, such as can occur with

an influx of refugees. The following example shows how a strong existing partnership between workforce partners allowed for the development of new and cohesive services to meet the needs of specific populations.

Practice in Action: Strategies to Serve Surges of Refugees

The Southeast Pennsylvania Workforce Region Commission partners with adult education providers in three counties: Montgomery, Bucks, and Berks. In this region, the anticipated arrival of Ukrainian and Haitian refugees prompted targeted collaborative partnering to ensure that arriving refugees receive cohesive services that build language and literacy skills alongside career services to help them integrate into their local communities. For example, in Montgomery County, through an established referral system among the workforce partners (Employment, Advancement, and Retention Network, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, PA CareerLink®, Adult Education), refugees who need English language services are referred to the local adult education provider.

To prioritize and emphasize the importance of these educational services, refugees receive a stipend provided by Montco Works, the Montgomery County WDB, to attend and complete the program. This approach is built on the understanding that stronger English language skills support better employment and retention opportunities, defer the need to move directly to a subsistence job, and build learner confidence. Through this collaborative effort among local workforce region providers, participants also receive a host of services, such as access to a native Ukrainian or Haitian speaker to provide first language supports and translation, supportive services that include digital and technology supports, childcare, housing, food assistance, mental health services, career coaching, and WIOA Title I-funded job placement services and training.



Engaging with Workforce Development Boards

Each local WDB is required to have one WIOA Title II board member, who is appointed in collaboration with the local area chief elected official and the state adult education director. The local WDBs can direct funding, convene partners and employers, and support the development of programming to grow the local economy and meet employment demands. Adult education providers can serve on WDB committees. In this role, adult education providers can advocate for, lend their experience, bring awareness to adult

education programming, and leverage their expertise to support the economic integration of multilingual learners, immigrants, and New Americans. But partnerships with local WDBs can go beyond representation; WDBs can fund local education providers to develop or co-develop programming, which can expand or provide specialized services for adult learners that would not be possible for a variety of reasons.

Practice in Action: Representation on the Local WDB

Seneca Highlands Intermediate Unit IX's (IU9) is an adult educator provider serving five counties in north-central Pennsylvania. IU9's Adult Education Coordinator of Special Programs is an integral member of the local WDB. The inclusion of the adult education representative on the WDB reflects IU9's commitment to relationship building, their clear communication about Title II as a core partner in decision making, and their support of the local WDB's work by serving on committees or in leadership roles on the Executive Board. IU9 Adult Education also offers a host of services to its local American Job Center, known as PA CareerLink®, that informs and engages its partners. For example, just as many other adult education programs do, IU9 provides adult education services at PA CareerLink®; however, they also engage the PA CareerLink® staff by providing training for the Career Navigators and reception staff, participating in PA CareerLink® staff meetings, serving on PA CareerLink® job seeker and business services teams, supporting testing efforts, and participating as a consortium member.



Engaging with Employers

Adult education providers can engage local employers and industry representatives in education and training program design and delivery, including work-based learning (WBL) opportunities. WBL learning opportunities can include:

- Internships
- IET
- Pre-apprenticeships and Apprenticeships
- On-the-job training
- Cooperative education programs

Engaging employers in program design can help ensure that programming aligns with industry needs, evolving technologies, and

emerging industry trends. Employers often provide feedback through industry advisory panels, reviewing materials, conversations with adult education providers about their needs, or employment opportunities.

Conversely, engaging with adult education can help employers better understand and support the needs of their EL workforce which can lead to better retention and application of multilingual learners' skill set. For example, adult education providers can ensure that WBL opportunities are culturally responsive while also allowing learners to apply their knowledge and skills in employment settings, gaining practical experience that enhances their employability.

Practice in Action: Statewide Strategic Partner Coordinators

To collaborate with the Kentucky Innovation Board and employers, Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE) has strategic partner coordinators who cover the state. These coordinators connect businesses with KYAE and its adult learners, including multilingual learners. In addition, KYAE has a statewide coordinator with responsibility for connecting refugee and EL populations to workplace training opportunities and collaborating with refugee assistance partners.

Conclusion

As a core WIOA partner, the AEFLA-funded system is the component of the workforce development system that is uniquely designed to serve individuals with barriers to employment, including multilingual learners, immigrants, and refugees. Adult educators can and do leverage and expand partnerships within the workforce development system – with core partners, WDBs, and employers – to develop quality education and training opportunities for all adult learners, including

multilingual learners and immigrants, and to meet workforce demands. Adult educators' knowledge and experience in serving these populations can support WIOA partners and local employer stakeholders to be more effective in working with adults who are seeking employment or training opportunities. Ultimately, partnerships within the workforce development system support an effective network of services help adult learners succeed as job seekers.

Explore the resources below to better understand approaches and the opportunities for partnership within the workforce development system.

Learn More About the Workforce Development System

WIOA Core Programs

- [Adult and Dislocated Worker Program](#) – This webpage describes the Adult and Dislocated Worker Program and links to further resources.
- [Youth Program](#) – This webpage describes programs and services designed for youth.
- [Adult Education and Family Literacy Program](#) – This webpage describes the programs authorized under the AEFLA.
- [Wagner-Peyser Program](#) – This webpage describes the Wagner-Peyser program, which oversees the Employment Service, now more commonly known as American Job Centers. Learn more about American Job Centers and their services at this link.
- [State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program](#) – This webpage describes the program, eligibility, and requirements.

Workforce Boards

- [eCFR What is the Local Workforce Development Board?](#) – This resource provides explanations about local WDBs.
- [WIOA State Plan Portal](#) – This resource allows users to locate unified and combined state plans.
- [Workforce GPS's State and Local Workforce Development Board Resources](#) – This resource provides various materials from the Employment and Training Administration.
- [Career American Job Center State Workforce Development Boards](#) – This resource can help you find the state workforce development board in your state.

Learn More About Opportunities for Partnering within the Workforce Development System

- [Switchboard Blog – The Workforce System and American Job Centers: Valuable Resources for Refugee Resettlement](#) – This resource outlines the connections between refugees and American Job Centers.
- [Engaging Employers to Support Adult Career Pathways Programs](#) – This resource shares benefits, promising practices, challenges, and strategies for engaging employers to support adult career pathway programs.

