

Advance CTE Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

As of 2020 the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is up for reauthorization. WIOA was last signed into law in 2014 to support workforce development activities and fund job training programs for displaced adult workers and youth. Reauthorization will be informed by the current realities facing our nation's workforce and the urgent need to attend to equity, specifically racial equity, as we upskill and reskill millions of Americans in the post-COVID-19 economy. To attend to these priorities, reauthorization must focus on modernizing the country's workforce development system so that it equitably meets the needs of every worker; seamlessly connects to the education system, including Career Technical Education (CTE); proactively responds to the needs of the economy and leverages and aligns with other federal programs such as the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V).

Advance CTE, representing the state leadership for secondary, postsecondary and adult CTE in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories, offers the following recommendations for the reauthorization of WIOA:

Connect Education and the Workforce

- **Align WIOA with Perkins V:** Perkins V has many ties to WIOA, including: a requirement that CTE programs are responsive to the local, regional or state labor market; inclusion of an aligned vision in both state plans; workforce partners as required stakeholders and common performance indicators. In order to further strengthen the relationship between the two laws and thus the services offered to participants, Advance CTE recommends that WIOA reciprocates by more intentionally connecting to and aligning with Perkins V and CTE. Specifically, the WIOA state plans should be constructed in a manner that is parallel to the state Perkins V plan- even if the state does not submit a combined plan. This means requiring:
 - A shared vision for preparing an education and skilled workforce that ensures coherence in order to achieve improved and equitable learner supports and outcomes;
 - A shared commitment to transparency and efficiency;
 - A prioritization of funding to be dedicated to underserved communities and populations;
 - Robust stakeholder engagement; and
 - The use of participant, program and labor market information to guide state and local decisions.

Further, to accomplish systems alignment, CTE should be better integrated into the governance of WIOA, with State CTE Directors as a required partner on state workforce boards and local CTE leaders being a required partner on local workforce boards.

- **Build cross-system collaboration throughout WIOA:** To maximize the programs in states that are supported by education and workforce legislation, each title of WIOA must act as the agent for

coordination across systems. For example, Title IV of WIOA amends the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and authorizes funding to be used for employment-related vocational rehabilitation services for those with disabilities, as well as includes these programs in the one-stop systems described above. The nature of Title IV makes it challenging to coordinate with other similar programs that are overseen by the U.S. Department of Education. In particular, there is often overlap with CTE and career readiness programs offered in the state. However, State CTE Directors are not often brought to this table.

Some states have already found success in coordinating WIOA Title II (Adult Education and Literacy) with CTE and adult education through the Integrated Basic and Skills Training (I-BEST) model. I-BEST delivers a combination of technical, academic and workplace skills typically through a statewide partnership led by a state's community and technical college system. The success of I-BEST can be used as an example for how to collaborate across systems.

Advance CTE recommends that WIOA require cross-system alignment for the federal laws implicated throughout all of WIOA and the related state programs. This should include, but is not limited to, common data collection and reporting, cross-system planning and regular consultation.

Align Federal Policy to the 21st Century Workforce

- **Coordinate federal funding for programs and worker supports:** WIOA funding must be coordinated with the other federal funding streams that have aligned or parallel purposes in order to best serve workers, especially those most vulnerable, through cohesive worker supports and programs. State CTE leaders shared that an inability to coordinate or braid funding sources can lead to challenges in most effectively using WIOA money. Advance CTE recommends a requirement in the state plan for how WIOA programs will be aligned with, and not duplicative of, related programs funded by other federal laws. Further, subsequent reporting should require ongoing updates of programmatic alignment to ensure efficacy of implementation.
- **Update the infrastructure requirements:** WIOA supports a one-stop system of workforce development services. 12 federal programs, including postsecondary CTE programs supported by Perkins V, are required to be partners of this one-stop system. As the legislation currently stands, the implication of this required partnership is for each of the 12 partner programs to contribute to infrastructure costs of the one-stops. WIOA statute dictates that these partnerships must exist, and the parameters are outlined in guidance from the U.S. Department of Labor. State CTE leaders have consistently reported that the current structure does not actually support collaboration, and in fact often results in the bare minimum of just sharing of funding, not the aspired systems alignment.

Advance CTE recommends a complete revision of the infrastructure language and related guidance, instead recommending a set-aside funding stream for infrastructure costs. This allows partners to focus efforts on aligning programs and services rather than negotiating cost sharing agreements. Additionally, the statute should more directly invest in and acknowledge the digital infrastructure – virtualization of one-stop services, online program delivery, etc. – that has grown due to natural technologic progression and the investments made to continue to deliver services during the pandemic.

- **Align basic skills with current workplace needs:** The definition of basic skills deficient in current legislation is limited to English reading, writing and computing skills. Advance CTE recommends that this definition be expanded to reflect the skills that are necessary to be successful in the 21st century workforce, including but not limited to: digital literacy; interpersonal communication; time management; critical thinking; career navigation; cultural competency and financial literacy.

Support Successful Outcomes for In-and Out- of School Youth

- **States determine the split of funds for in school youth and out of school youth:** Currently, WIOA requires that 25% of funds are allocated for in school youth and 75% for out of school youth. This sometimes has the unintended consequence of incentivizing dropping out, since at times only out-of-school youth qualify for a particular program. Rather than this split being dictated at the federal level, Advance CTE believes states are best positioned to determine what is the right allocation between in-school and out-of-school. States have other assets and resources that they bring to the table to support these populations and those assets and resources vary significantly from state to state. In order to ensure that states are adequately addressing both in and out of school youth, Advance CTE recommends that this formula should be determined by each state, with the ability to be re-examined on an annual basis.

Improve Data and Accountability

- **Expand data system capacity, transparency and utilization:** The state data infrastructure for predicting the labor market needs to be expanded so that state and local workforce systems can proactively pivot in response to rapidly changing conditions. This is also essential so that workers can have access to better and more transparent, and real-time, information on career opportunities, earnings, and how decisions will interact with access to support services (e.g. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Child Care Development Fund Subsidies, etc.). Advance CTE recommends an investment to modernize the publicly funded labor market information services and offices. In order for the education and workforce systems to be responsive to state, regional and local labor market demand, there must be an investment in real-time labor market information systems, that aggregate, collaborate with and integrate information and data from other federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Education and agencies that provide benefits such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services into a transparent, accessible and forward looking talent and labor market information system. These efforts will enable our systems to better support individuals wherever they are in their career journey, and paint a more comprehensive picture for policymakers, practitioners and workers.
- **Expand the scope of data collection:** Data collection and reporting is pivotal to identifying inequities in access, delivery and implementation of WIOA programs- and must focus on equitable outcomes. To that end, Advance CTE recommends that a model similar to the Perkins V comprehensive local needs assessment (CLNA) be included in WIOA. Requiring data-driven decision making that labor market demand, participant demographics and outcomes and program outcomes will hold programs accountable to close opportunity gaps and ensure continuous improvement. Further, data should be made transparent and easily accessible in order for learners and workers to understand the value and outcomes of specific career pathways, including how pathway outcomes might differ based on a learner's race or ethnicity, gender, educational

background or other demographics. All collected data should be disaggregated to, at a minimum, reflect gender, race, ethnicity, special population status and age. And any reporting of gender data should offer, at minimum, a “prefer not to disclose” option so that learners who identify outside of the exclusively male and female categories can be represented. Disaggregated short- and long-term program-level outcomes data for learners is critical to continuous improvement.

- **Adopt common performance metrics and terminology:** There are often shared goals between programs that are supported by federal legislation. In these cases, such programs should be coordinated to efficiently use resources, reduce duplication and better serve those utilizing these programs. Advance CTE recommends using common performance metrics and definitions across these federal programs that have a shared or common purpose, at a minimum aligning with the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) and the Higher Education Act (HEA), as well as the adoption of related common terminology and measurement methods. This includes but is not limited to credential attainment, postsecondary attainment and employment status.

Elevate Career Pathways

- **Reimagine career pathways:** Well-designed high-quality career pathways help learners and workers navigate both their interests, talents and work experiences, as well as their acquisition of skills, competencies and credentials of value. Most career pathways have been constructed linearly, designed to be vertically “stackable.” This presumes talent pipelines and transference of skills within an industry sector. The economy our country is facing and the future of work require reconsideration of entire industry sectors and the reimagination of how states and regions work to mitigate redundancies and maximize capacity to more efficiently and effectively support the needs of employers and workers alike. Of note, area technical centers are often left out of workforce training and while some states include them as an eligible training provider, many do not. With nearly 1,400 of them, area technical centers are a vital component of the delivery of skilled training and must be a recognized component of the WIOA delivery system.

Advance CTE recommends that WIOA supports innovation in the design and delivery of flexible and responsive career pathways – that value learning wherever and whenever it occurs - to help workers upskill, reskill or transfer and enhance skills in existing or new industries that offer opportunities and pathways to self-sufficiency. One strategy to accomplish this is by intentionally weaving social services supports with education and workforce development training, including adult basic education, and more systemically recognize learning and competency that is earned through various educational and workplace settings. Better connecting credit for prior learning practices, statewide articulation efforts, and postsecondary transfer policies with workforce development policy is necessary to break down the arcane silo that often exists between traditional postsecondary education and workforce development.

- **Prioritize high-wage, high-skill or in-demand occupations based on real-time labor market data:** Any workforce or education program should prepare participants for a job that is part of a career pathway and offers self-sufficiency. In order to achieve this, WIOA must be responsive to high-wage, high-skill or in-demand occupations- determined and updated in real-time according to

state, regional and local labor market information. Therefore, Advance CTE recommends that all WIOA funded programs be organized into and delivered through career pathways, leading to a career in in-demand fields and ensure workers achieve self-sufficiency.

Advance CTE represents state and territory leaders of CTE through leadership and advocacy that supports an innovative and rigorous CTE system that prepares learners for both college and careers. State CTE Directors lead the planning and implementation of CTE in their respective states and these recommendations reflect their priorities.

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