

# IssueBRIEF



“There shall be established in each local area of a State, and certified by the Governor of the State, a local workforce investment board, to set policy for the...local workforce investment system.”

—Workforce Investment Act of 1998  
<http://www.doleta.gov/regs/statutes/wialaw.txt>  
Section 117

## Governing the Public Workforce System: The Structure and Priorities of Local Workforce Investment Boards

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### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS BRIEF

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and its replacement, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), require that Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs) oversee the implementation of America’s public workforce system in local communities. As part of the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation, we examined the structure and priorities of 28 randomly selected LWIBs and learned that:

- Boards had, on average, 33 members. Staff from only a small minority of the study LWIBs reported that the large size of the board was challenging.
- Business representatives on the boards included senior executives and midlevel managers with hiring authority as well as professionals that brought specific skills needed by the board.
- Many of the study LWIBs’ strategic priorities were also emphasized by WIOA: employer engagement, regional collaboration, and developing career pathways.

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**M**ore than 560 Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs) nationwide are responsible for overseeing the implementation of America’s public workforce investment system in their local communities. The structure and key functions of LWIBs were established by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and have been largely maintained by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which superseded WIA. Both WIA and WIOA give LWIBs considerable flexibility to adapt the broad national vision for the workforce system to the needs of their diverse local communities. WIA required LWIBs to play eight roles, as described in the text box on the next page.

WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs | Gold Standard Evaluation

## EIGHT MANDATED FUNCTIONS OF LWIBS UNDER WIA

1. Develop a plan in partnership with the chief elected official for the Local Workforce Investment Area (local area) and submit to the state governor
2. Select the operators of the American Job Centers (AJCs, formerly known as One-Stop Career Centers) and the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs' service providers
3. Develop a budget for the administration of the local area
4. Provide oversight of the AJC system, local youth programs (under WIA Section 129), and local employment and training activities (under WIA Section 134)
5. Negotiate the local performance measures with the chief elected official and the state governor
6. Assist in the development of a statewide employment statistics system
7. Coordinate employer and economic development linkages
8. Promote engagement of the private sector through connecting, brokering, and coaching

Source: Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

This brief describes the structure and priorities of LWIBs in the 28 Local Workforce Investment Areas (local areas) randomly selected to participate in the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation. It first describes the LWIBs' size and membership composition and how paid staff supported the LWIBs. It then outlines the study LWIBs' strategic workforce development priorities. Finally, the brief summarizes how the structure and

priorities of these LWIBs may change with the passage of WIOA. The brief draws on in-person interviews with LWIB staff conducted in 2012 and 2013 and telephone interviews with LWIB staff in 2014, before the passage of WIOA.

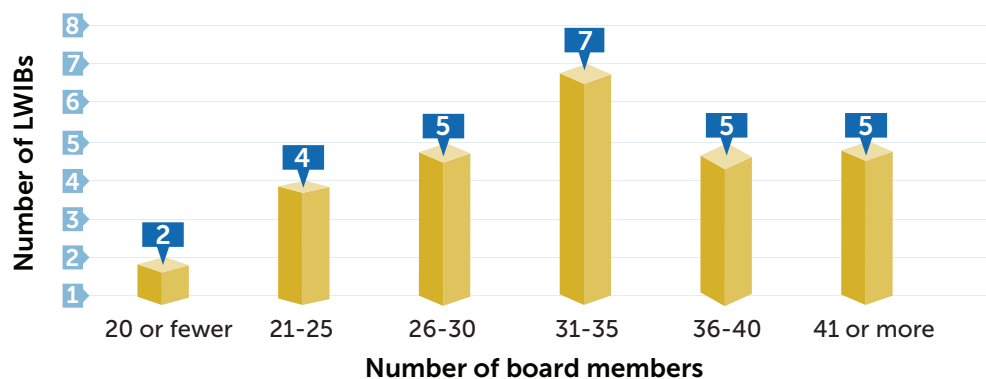
## LWIB STRUCTURE: SIZE, MEMBERSHIP, AND STAFFING

To ensure that the boards reflect the key workforce stakeholders, WIA and WIOA provide specific guidance about who should be represented on the boards. Chief elected officials in local areas—typically mayors or county executives—are responsible for establishing the LWIBs and ensuring they meet the mandated requirements. Reflecting the importance that WIA and WIOA place on the role of employers in the workforce investment system, both laws mandate that the majority of LWIB members and the LWIB chairperson be representatives from the local business community. WIA also required that the boards include representatives from each American Job Center (formerly known as a One-Stop Career Center) partner, as well as from education, labor, economic development, and community-based organizations. WIOA relaxes the requirement that each AJC partner be represented on the board. All boards in the study were supported by professional staff.

### Board Size

Some workforce stakeholders have raised a concern that WIA's requirements for broad representation on the board resulted in boards that were excessively large.<sup>1</sup> The boards in the study had between 17 and 49 members, with an average board size of 33 members. The majority of boards in the study had between 26 and 40 members (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Number of LWIBs, by number of board members**



Source: WIA Gold Standard Evaluation qualitative data collection, 2012.

In addition to the WIA requirement for broad representation, the desire for representation from each political jurisdiction within local areas sometimes led to larger boards. When local areas encompassed multiple political jurisdictions and thus had multiple local chief elected officials, these officials were together responsible for LWIB appointments. Often, the chief elected officials would ensure that each jurisdiction was equally represented, which typically added to the number of members. Among the 28 study local areas, 26 had more than one local elected official involved in LWIB membership. Three of the four local areas that had 15 or more elected officials involved in determining LWIB membership had LWIBs of more than 40 members.

Despite the large size of many of the boards, staff from only four LWIBs cited board size as a challenge, and staff from only two of these LWIBs cited this challenge as significant. Interestingly, only one of these four LWIBs had more than 35 members. The chairperson of one of the larger LWIBs—the Central Region Workforce Investment Board—led efforts to reconstitute the board, in part, to reduce its size (see text box below).

### **RESTRUCTURED AND SMALLER BOARD REPORTED TO IMPROVE BOARD EFFECTIVENESS**

Before restructuring in May 2013, the Central Region Workforce Investment Board included at least two representatives—one from the private sector and one from the public sector—from each of the local area's 19 counties. This configuration led to a large board with 41 members and difficulties identifying two board members from some of the smaller counties. The LWIB then shifted to a model that included a business representative from each county but allowed the other mandated members to be from any county within the local area. This approach reduced the size of the board by 10 members. According to LWIB staff, the smaller board size improved member engagement and the effectiveness of the board.

Source: WIA Gold Standard Evaluation qualitative data collection, 2012 and 2013.

Following the generally considered best practice for boards, all the LWIBs in the study created committees that conducted a significant amount of board work outside of the full board meetings. These committees typically met more frequently than the full board, which often met only four to six times a year. According to study respondents, the committees expedited decision making, improved the efficiency of the board, and helped engage LWIB members by asking them to address topics related to their areas of interest or expertise.

All but one LWIB in the study used standing committees. Most study LWIBs employed executive committees to make recommendations before LWIB action. Others had standing committees dedicated to specific functions (such as finance) or strategic priorities (such as promoting key sectors). Three study LWIBs also maintained committees on specific issues of interest to their members, organizations, or local area—for example, lifelong learning, childcare, customers with disabilities, adult literacy, and talent pipelines. In addition to these standing committees, one-quarter of study LWIBs also had ad hoc committees, work groups, task forces, or other temporary groups to advance specific events, such as conferences and industry summits.

### **Membership**

To meet WIA's requirements for the majority business representation on the board, LWIB staff members reported that they worked with their chief local elected officials and current board members to recruit new business members. These business members included:

- **Senior executives and midlevel managers with hiring authority.** Most LWIBs contained both senior executives (such as chief executive officers or chief operating officers) and midlevel executives. Staff from one-quarter of study LWIBs reported that they sought senior executives, often from large firms in the local area. They noted that such professionals could influence city councils, state legislatures, and congressional representatives, and they could help workforce leaders secure private sector and philanthropic resources to help expand programming. However, LWIB staff cautioned that senior executives were sometimes difficult to engage and retain. Hence, most study LWIBs also targeted professionals who were knowledgeable about firm and industry hiring, training, and retention issues. These professionals typically included managers with hiring authority.

- **Representatives from businesses in growth and demand sectors.** To meet WIA's requirement that the business members on the board "represent businesses with employment opportunities that represent the employment opportunities of the local areas," business members on the study LWIBs reflected the local areas' major regional growth and demand sectors. These sectors often included health care, social assistance, manufacturing, construction, information technology, and logistics. Board members also included representatives from small businesses that were important in the local area, especially in rural communities.

- **Professionals with skills, knowledge, and experience required to conduct LWIB functions.** Professionals from the accounting, legal, or finance sectors were recruited to help LWIBs comply with WIA and other federal and state requirements and to manage the procurement and contracting processes. At least eight LWIBs counted among their members one or more attorneys.

In meeting WIA's requirements for its nonbusiness representatives, the chief elected officials often chose members that could both meet the WIA mandate and also offer services or jobs to American Job Center customers. All of the study LWIBs included representatives from local community colleges, and nearly half also had representatives from four-year colleges or universities. These education institutions were often important employers as well as service providers in the local areas. Other nonbusiness partners represented on study LWIBs included representatives of nonprofit organizations, youth and adult service providers, libraries, community action agencies, and private foundations.

Some national organizations were represented on multiple study boards. Representatives from four large firms—General Electric, Microsoft, Kaiser Permanente, and Macy's—and three large national service providers—Goodwill Industries International, United Way, and Local Initiatives Support Corporation—were represented on multiple LWIBs in the study.

### Staffing

All LWIBs in the study were supported by staff who were knowledgeable about the workforce programs and systems and the laws and regulations that shape them; unlike the volunteer LWIB members, these staff were paid. They played critical roles in supporting the work of the LWIBs and conducted much of the day-to-day management of the workforce system.

General administrative support provided to the LWIBs by these staff included convening meetings, recruiting new board members, and reporting to LWIB members about the finance and operations of the local workforce programs. Staff at several LWIBs also noted the importance of their role in assisting board members to become more effective board members. They may, for example, provide formal orientation, training, and mentorship opportunities for new board members. Staff at one LWIB offered "learning lunches"—informational sessions focusing on a particular issue and open to all board members.

In addition to providing administrative support, LWIB staff managed the day-to-day programs for which the LWIB members were responsible. Specific duties often included:

- Procuring, contracting with, and providing technical assistance to service providers
- Budgeting
- Fund-raising
- Interfacing with the state and federal policy makers and program monitors
- Conducting research into local labor market conditions
- Executing special projects

The structure and organization of the LWIBs' staff varied considerably. In 15 of the 28 study local areas, LWIB staff worked for nonprofit organizations. (Five LWIBs in the study were themselves incorporated as 501(c)(3) organizations.) The staff members for other study LWIBs worked for a consortium of workforce system partners or for the city, county, or state government's workforce division.

### STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

LWIBs' main responsibilities were setting and advancing strategic workforce development priorities that complied with federal and state guidelines and were responsive to local area needs. The study LWIBs had many similar strategic priorities, including:

- **Improving and expanding business services.** Staff from more than half of the study LWIBs stated that providing more effective services to their employer customers, especially businesses from regional growth and demand sectors, was a strategic priority. One study

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LWIB, for example, launched a regionwide business relations unit. Another LWIB focused on expanding and enhancing a new business services center and entrepreneurship training program.

- **Improving and expanding job-seeker services.** Three-quarters of study LWIBs pursued strategic priorities aimed at improving services provided to job seekers at American Job Centers. Specific strategies included:
  - **Developing career pathways in target sectors.** Nine LWIBs focused on developing and implementing career pathways—programs that provide coordinated education, training, supportive services, and job placement for specific occupations—particularly for careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). These career pathways were concentrated in occupations in the regions’ growing industry sectors.
  - **Focusing on specific target populations.** Eight LWIBs focused on improving underserved communities or specific demographic groups’ access to workforce services. For example, several of these LWIBs focused on meeting the needs of the region’s long-term unemployed.
  - **Increasing the number of access points.** Strategic priorities in two LWIBs included increasing the number of program access points by partnering with local libraries or deploying mobile service units.
- **Executing regional initiatives.** Staff from nearly half of the study LWIBs emphasized collaboration with economic development entities. This approach was viewed

as a way of leveraging resources and implementing regional initiatives so as to improve services for job seekers and employers beyond those who use the American Job Centers.<sup>3</sup>

- **Increasing the capacity of the LWIB.** Staff from 11 of the 28 study LWIBs noted that building the capacity of the LWIB was one of their main priorities. This focus was especially important for two LWIBs that had recently restructured.

## **LOOKING AHEAD TO LWIBS UNDER WIOA**

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WIOA makes changes to both the structure and roles of the LWIB. It retains WIA’s requirement that more than half of LWIB members be from the private sector but eliminates the requirement that boards include a representative from every American Job Center partner. By reducing the number of mandated members, WIOA may lead to smaller boards. WIOA explicitly authorizes boards to use standing committees—an already common practice under WIA. In keeping with study LWIBs’ current strategic priorities, WIOA expands the boards’ functions to include employer engagement, development of career pathways, and promoting proven and promising practices. It also encourages greater leveraging of resources, more effective use of technology to facilitate connections between service providers, and reaching and providing services to customers in remote areas and those with barriers to employment. As WIOA is implemented, more LWIBs are likely to adopt the new strategic priorities and leadership roles describe in the law.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, U.S. General Accountability Office, “Workforce Investment Act: Better Guidance Needed to Address Concerns Over New Requirements,” GAO-02-72, October 2001.

<sup>2</sup> One study local area was a statewide local area; thus, it was administered by state workforce agency staff.

<sup>3</sup> Another brief in this series, “Serving the Regional Economy: Collaboration Among Local Workforce Investment Boards,” provides more discussion of the regional collaborations conducted by LWIBs in the study.

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

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Through the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), Congress allocated about \$2 billion annually for employment and training services that states and their Local Workforce Investment Areas (local areas) provided through their Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. WIA mandated that job seekers and employers have access to employment and training resources provided by more than a dozen workforce system partners through American Job Centers. At these centers, job seekers could access core services, such as information on local labor markets and job openings. In addition, eligible adults and dislocated workers could receive intensive services, such as career counseling and skills assessments, and training services. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which superseded WIA, made important changes to the public workforce systems but largely maintained the services provided through the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs.

This issue brief is one in a series of briefs that presents findings from the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation, which is being conducted for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Employment and Training Administration (ETA). The study examines the implementation, effectiveness, and benefits and costs of the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs using an experimental design. The study occurred in 28 local areas that were randomly selected to participate. For more information about the evaluation, please visit the [project web page](#).

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