



Fact Sheet on Serving Special Populations

Prioritizing Services for those Most in Need – the Why

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), as with the former Workforce Investment Act (WIA), has a focus on helping low-income and disadvantaged populations.

Workforce development professionals operate within a highly integrated one-stop career system, complete with co-located partners, procured service providers, and shared resource leveraging.

However, funding and available public resources are still finite and limited, so populations with significant or multiple barriers to employment should receive priority for services.

Sometimes these populations will be referred to as “hard-to-serve” or “hard-to-employ” clients.

Special Populations to Target – the Who

Some special populations the workforce system serves include, but are not limited to:

- Veterans and eligible spouses
- Individuals with disabilities, both youth and adults
- English language learners (limited English proficient)
- Migrant and seasonal farmworkers
- Out-of-school youth
- Adult and youth ex-offenders (justice-involved)
- Public assistance recipients (TANF, SNAP, SSI, Medicaid, etc.)
- Youth in, or previously in, foster care
- Homeless individuals, both youth and adults
- Runaway youth
- Pregnant and parenting youth
- The long-term unemployed
- Low-income workers earning wages below self-sufficiency
- Basic skills deficient individuals
- The over 55 age group

Priority of Service Policies – the What

Federal statutes and regulations focus on a high priority of services to veterans, individuals with disabilities, out-of-school youth, and English language learners. Many states also have laws or regulations that place a priority on serving other vulnerable populations, such as foster youth, public assistance recipients, the long-term unemployed, the homeless, or ex-offenders.

The vision of the one-stop system is that service providers leverage all available assets, ensure universal access, and allocate funding for low income and special populations.

Many local areas have established more inclusive priority of service policies to ensure that their hard-to-serve and disadvantaged populations receive a focus in their service delivery.



Increasing Service Levels to Special Populations – the How

Ways to increase service levels to special or at-risk populations are:

- A guiding priority of services policy (see [Prioritizing Services for those Most in Need](#))
- Targeted populations outreach and communication responsive to the demographics of the unemployed and low-income workers in your region
- Detailed referral agreements and referral processes with additional partners, public agencies, shelters, youth organizations, justice officials, etc.
- Increased recruitment and intake of participants with characteristic barriers
- Comprehensive needs-based assessments
- Adjustments to the worker profiling system through its characteristics model to identify potential long-term unemployed individuals
- Extensive record-keeping of all participant characteristics to increase tracking and accountability, including full data entry into the case management system.

Service Delivery Design Responsive to Your Customer Base – the Where to Start

The demographics identified in your labor market analysis (or environmental scan), as well as enhancing an integrated referral network of services and community resources, are the starting points to help you assess and locate the vulnerable populations in your region.

Demographic data can serve as a roadmap for achieving the labor market outcomes desired for your customers. To attract customers, implement data-driven outreach and recruitment strategies.

Multiple strategies and service delivery techniques are available to local areas to help them provide a comprehensive palette of services to remove barriers individuals face to entering and thriving in the labor market.

Disadvantaged and vulnerable populations may need supportive services, multiple service strategies, coenrollment in additional programs, referrals to community service providers, and/or a team approach on your part to succeed in the labor market.

Maximizing Impact and Labor Market Success – the What For

The ultimate goal is to find and help disadvantaged individuals, which in turn leads to greater overall economic prosperity for your community.

Persistent, incremental accommodations or assistance can often result in a safety net that can eventually lead to huge gains for the individuals seeking your help.....raising the overall level of economic prosperity for the community, when they achieve positive labor market outcomes.

Thus, proactive intake of special populations helps the local area attain a larger return on investment for the funding, assets and staff resources employed.

This requires leadership and vision in labor market-relevant planning, including evaluation, assessments, data-driven decision-making, and collaboration to best meet the needs of special populations, jobseekers, workers and businesses alike.



Region IV, Employment and Training Administration

