

Education and Training Leads to Economic Self-Sufficiency for Women

Education and training is a proven strategy for increasing women's incomes and helping families achieve economic self-sufficiency. Yet, too many women lack the education and training necessary to get jobs that pay family-supporting wages. Instead, they remain stuck in low-paying jobs without benefits and with few prospects for advancement. At the same time, employers are often unable to find the skilled workers they need to be competitive in the new economy.

Education and training is the key to women's economic advancement.

- Completion of a four-year college degree significantly reduces a woman's chance of living in poverty, from 16.7 percent to 1.6 percent.¹
- On average, a woman with an associate's degree earns 44 percent more than a woman with only a high school education.²
- Women without high school diplomas are more likely than men without high school diplomas to remain in poverty.³
- Each year of additional schooling corresponds to a 7 percent increase in wages for women receiving welfare. Higher basic skills are linked to higher wages over time.⁴
- Average lifetime earnings for a high school graduate working full time would be \$1.2 million, compared to \$1.6 million for an associate's degree recipient and \$2.1 million for a bachelor's degree recipient.⁵

The future labor market will continue to demand workers with more education and training.

- A survey of 3,000 employers found that most entry-level jobs available to workers without college degrees require advanced skills: reading and writing, communications, mathematics and computer literacy.⁶
- Most new jobs created between 2000 and 2010 will require high-level skills that are typically acquired through postsecondary training. High school dropouts will qualify for just 10 percent of these jobs, while those with high school diplomas will qualify for only 22 percent of these new jobs.⁷
- Between 2004 and 2014, 8 out of the 10 fastest growing occupations will require a post-secondary vocational certificate or associate's degree.⁸

Certain groups of women experience greater barriers to education and training.

- Nearly 2 out of 3 *single mothers* have not completed education beyond a high school diploma or GED.⁹
- 85 percent of *displaced homemakers*—women whose primary job has been homemaking but who have lost their main source of income through divorce, separation or widowhood—do not have a bachelor's degree and 58 percent have not completed education beyond a high school diploma.¹⁰
- *Women of color* face multiple barriers to education and training. In 2005, 27 percent of white women had a college degree or more, while Latina and African American women had rates of 12 percent and 19 percent respectively, a significantly lower level of completion.¹¹

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Especially for women struggling to balance education or training with work and family responsibilities, supportive services are critical to success.

- One study of students who left college without completing a degree or program found that inadequate financial aid, lack of on-campus services, and difficulties of balancing work, family and college pressured students to leave school.¹²
- In a recent study, nearly 82 percent of student-parents credited child care availability as a key factor in decisions to enroll, while nearly 60 percent stated that without access to child care, college would not be an option.¹³
- Intensive advising and counseling increase the likelihood that students will reenroll in community colleges and register for and earn more credits.¹⁴

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Women Work! The National Network for Women's Employment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that advances economic justice and equality for women through education, advocacy and organizing. Since 1978, the Network has assisted more than 10 million women to successfully enter, re-enter and advance in the workforce. Through supporting, advocating and increasing women's economic self-sufficiency, Women Work! members strengthen families and communities.