



WIA Reauthorization

How to Improve the Workforce Development System for Women

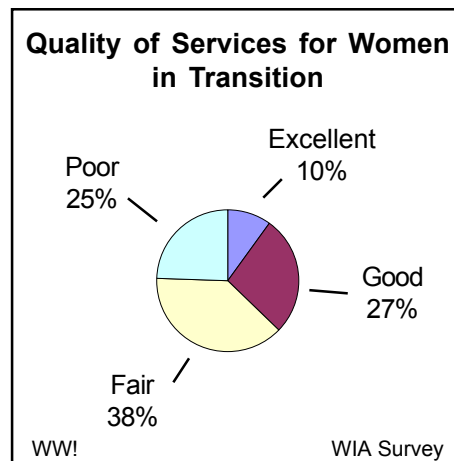
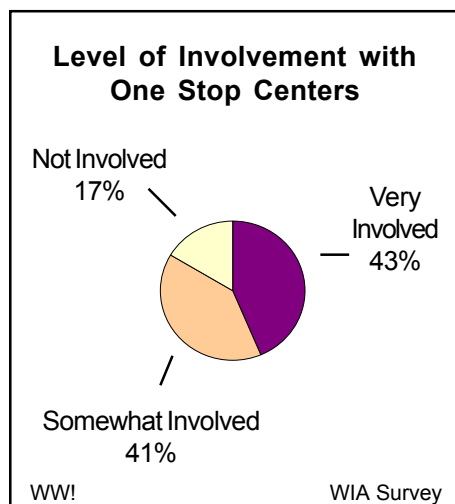
A Women Work! Resource — Winter 2003

This year the Workforce Investment Act, a critical piece of legislation for women's employment and job training programs, will be reauthorized. This guide describes Women Work!'s recommendations for the legislation based on survey responses we received from local programs across the country. Please use this guide as you speak about and advocate for increased benefits for women and families.

Survey Findings

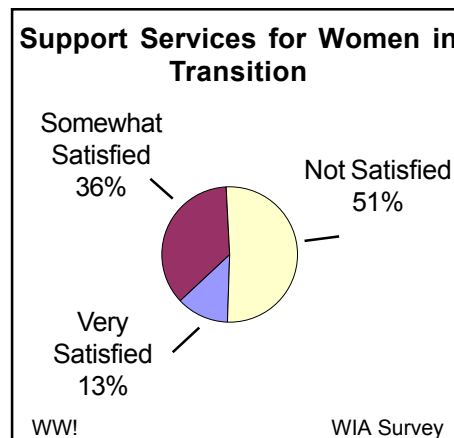
In the fall of 2002, Women Work! conducted a survey of local women's education and training programs to assess the effectiveness of the Workforce Investment Act in meeting the employment and training needs of women. The results were not good – WIA is falling far short of its potential for serving women in transition, particularly displaced homemakers, single parents and women training for nontraditional jobs.

Nearly half (43%) of the survey respondents indicated that they were very involved with their local one-stop centers, leaving 57% who said that they were somewhat involved or not involved at all.



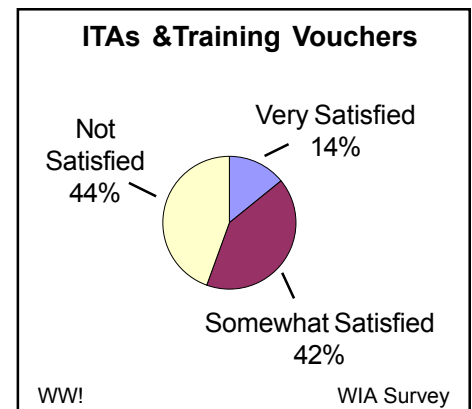
Over 60% of respondents reported that services for women in transition were fair or poor. Only 10% responded that the services were excellent. Intensive services in particular were rated poor or fair by 67% of the respondents.

There is also major dissatisfaction with the provision of support services



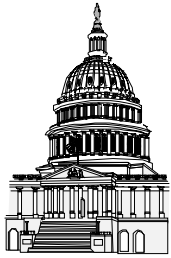
for women. Only 13% were satisfied leaving 87% who were not satisfied or only somewhat satisfied.

Respondents rated the ability of women to obtain training vouchers almost identical to support service. Fourteen per cent were very satisfied, leaving 86% dissatisfied or somewhat satisfied.



Less than one quarter of respondents indicated that they knew their state has been utilizing state discretionary funding for innovative programming for displaced homemakers and nontraditional training [WIA, Section 134 (3)(A)(vi)]. Many of those responding were not aware that their state had this option.

The Women Work! survey polled women's employment and job training programs nationwide. For more information, contact Women Work! at (202) 467-6346.



Recommendations for WIA Reauthorization

To reverse the findings of the Women Work! survey and to assure that WIA serves the needs of women, we propose the following changes:

1. Increase funding for WIA and designate a significant portion for training services.

Significant expenditures have been made on building one-stop infrastructures since the passage of WIA. This has diverted funds that could go to actual training services. Congress should designate adequate funding for training.

2. Eliminate the sequential system of service delivery.

The sequential system of service delivery has resulted in a loss of time by job seekers who spend time looking for jobs for which they are not qualified or jobs that pay too little for them to support their families.

3. Require specialized services to be made available to displaced homemakers under dislocated worker provision.

WIA took a great step forward by including displaced homemakers in the definition of dislocated workers without restrictions. Congress intended this to be the mechanism by which displaced homemakers would receive counseling and training. This has not been the case and must be corrected.

4. Designate a specific portion of dislocated worker funding for displaced homemaker programs.

Congress should direct states to contract with programs with expertise in providing services to displaced home-

makers. In over half the states, there is state-level displaced homemaker legislation, an easy mechanism for one-stops to contract for service.

5. Amend definition of “displaced homemaker” to include welfare recipients reaching time limits.

The term “displaced homemaker” describes an individual who has lost his or her primary source of income and therefore must enter the workforce. Welfare benefits represent the primary source of income for welfare recipients. Welfare recipients who are within two years of reaching their time limits should be eligible for services under WIA, as are other displaced homemakers.

6. Require states to use a portion of funds reserved for state-wide activities on programs to serve displaced homemakers and women seeking nontraditional jobs.

These activities are currently allowable under the “governor’s reserve.” However, less than one-fourth of respondents to the Women Work! survey indicated that their states are utilizing these provisions. These activities should be a required use of funds.

7. Strengthen commitment to increase women’s entry into high-wage jobs in state plans.

Current law requires states to include a description of how they will serve displaced homemakers, low-income individuals, individuals seeking nontraditional occupations and single parents. States should also be required to describe the proposed impact of such policies and programs and how their success will be measured.

8. Ensure that career guidance and planning include a full awareness of career options with sufficiency as the goal.

All one-stop customers should receive information on high-wage jobs that do not require four-year degrees, including those that are nontraditional for women, and should be assessed for their suitability and interest in these jobs.

A career plan should include an assessment of skills, aptitudes, abilities and supportive service needs that meet the goal of connecting jobseekers to supportive services, and the long-term goal of making them economically self-sufficient

9. Require technical assistance to state and local WIA staff in serving women who are displaced homemakers and who are training for nontraditional jobs.

Local and state one-stops should have access to technical assistance to help them fulfill their requirements for developing plans and designing services for displaced homemakers and individuals seeking nontraditional training. The Department of Labor should contract with organizations that can provide technical assistance.

10. Make supportive services available

One-stops must assure that the absence of support services do not deter women from participating in employment and training. Current law requires that all other avenues for support services be expired before WIA funds are used. One Stops should either provide supportive services or ensure that women have access to them through other providers.

Over half of the programs surveyed by Women Work! report that they were “not satisfied” with the provision of support services by the one-stops. These services include: child care, transportation, and access to public benefits.

11. Ensure accountability for moving women and all families toward economic self-sufficiency.

- States should report actual wages in relation to the goal of self-sufficiency. States should report actual earnings levels for adults rather than only earnings change. In addition, states should adopt, calculate or commission a self-sufficiency standard (a measure of how much income families need to cover their basic costs, depending on where they live and family composition), against which to measure progress. Progress should be measured in terms of closing the gap between earnings and needs over time.
- States should report who receives services. States and/or the Department of Labor should produce reports that, at a minimum, describe demographic characteristics of participants, including race, ethnicity, gender and age; occupations participants enter, including specific break-outs for nontraditional occupations; and whether participants are recipients of public benefits and/or displaced homemakers.
- States and the Department of Labor should make demographic and other information available to the public. Although WIA currently contains provisions that this information be made publicly available, it is not. This information must be made available to the public and policymakers to determine the effectiveness of WIA in serving different populations.

- States should report what kinds of services they provide. Currently, states do not have to report how funds are spent among core, intensive and training services. Without this information, we cannot know the efficacy of services.

12. Coordinate WIA with other federal programs that provide funds for education and training.

- Align the goals of WIA and Perkins to ensure that both laws set a standard of preparing students and job seekers for employment in high-wage, high-skill careers
- States should report outcomes consistently across federally-funded education and training programs including WIA, Perkins, and TANF. Reporting should be consistent in terms of treatment of earnings, job retention and demographics of participants. Outcomes should be assessed in relation to a measure like the self-sufficiency standard, which is both geographically- and family-type-specific, and calculated using a consistent methodology.

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Women Work! The National Network for Women’s Employment, a national, nonprofit organization rooted in the Displaced Homemakers Movement, is dedicated to empowering women from diverse backgrounds and helping them achieve economic self-sufficiency through job readiness, education, training and employment.

In addition to individuals throughout the country, Network members include more than 1,000 education, training and employment programs.

Recognized as experts on employment and training issues, Women Work! and its nationwide Network affect public policy by working with lawmakers, business leaders, nonprofit organizations, and labor unions to create and strengthen programs and policies for women.

Mindful of the effect federal public policy has on the lives of poor and low-income women, Women Work! has been a visible and vocal advocate for increasing minimum wage, attaining fair employment benefits, and enhancing training for women making the transition from welfare to work. Today, Women Work! is one of the leading organizations advocating for women to train and qualify for jobs in the information technology field.