Workforce Investment Act: Recommendations for Implementation in Illinois

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July 1999

Convened by:
UIC Great Cities Institute Chicago Urban League

Funded by:
The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
The Chicago Workforce Development Partnership is a coalition of service providers, advocates, and researchers seeking to create pathways to living-wage employment. The partnership is convened by the UIC Great Cities Institute and the Chicago Urban League. Funding is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

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July 1999

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On August 7, 1998, President Clinton signed the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) into law. This legislation is designed to provide states and localities with greater flexibility in using federal job training monies to create market-driven workforce investment systems and to improve the responsiveness of these systems to the needs of job seekers and employers. WIA replaces the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) with block grants to states, institutes performance standards for workforce development programs, broadens the scope of One-Stop Centers for the delivery of services, and seeks to expand customer choice in the selection of services and providers.

WIA is the product of more than four years of reform of the federal role in funding job training programs. It seeks to align services, improve program coordination, streamline funds, and inject new forms of accountability in what has developed into a highly fragmented system, a patchwork of programs designed to address the varied needs of unemployed workers and others seeking vocational preparation. In many ways, WIA marks a step forward in the design of the workforce development system; it provides a structure through which longstanding issues of program quality and access may be addressed. However, significant implementation issues remain. Because WIA devolves authority over program design and grants new flexibility in program delivery to state and local governments, the actual structure and operation of job training programming will vary from place to place, reflecting differing local needs and varying interpretations of the legislation. This issue brief highlights key features of WIA, in particular features of Title I: Workforce Investment Systems. We identify issues that will affect the implementation of WIA in Illinois as well as offer recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of the new workforce investment system.

Title I: Workforce Investment Systems
Summary of Key Provisions
The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 provides the framework for organizing federal funding of workforce preparation and employment services for adults, dislocated workers,
and youth. Title I of WIA, which authorizes the new Workforce Investment System, is based on five core principles that shape the structure, operation, and goals of the legislation (US Department of Labor, 1998):

- training and employment programs should be designed and managed at the local level; job seekers and employers should be able to access employment, education, training, and information services at a single location; job seekers should have greater choice in deciding which training programs and providers best suit their needs, and job seekers should have control over their own career development;
- job seekers and employers should have access to information on how well providers prepare program participants for jobs; and the private sector should have a greater voice in the design and operation of the workforce preparation system.

In many respects, WIA marks a departure from previous federal workforce development efforts:

First, WIA is designed to overcome the fragmentation that has characterized the current workforce development system. WIA calls for the creation of a One-Stop delivery system that should integrate and simplify, as well as improve access to, employment services.

Second, WIA provides for universal access to services. Rather than relying on targeting policies to meet the needs of selected groups of job seekers, all job seekers are eligible to receive “core” employment services.

Third, the legislation formalizes the role of state and local Workforce Investment Boards in designing and monitoring the workforce investment system. Under WIA, state and local boards will be granted broad discretion in determining local policies and practices.

Fourth, WIA requires new forms of accountability on the part of states, localities, and providers. To be eligible to receive funds, education and training institutions will have to demonstrate, through performance indicators, that they are effective service providers. States and localities, as the architects and monitors of the workforce investment system, will be held responsible for the performance of the system as a whole, and will be both subject to sanctions for under-performance and eligible for incentive funds for exceptional performance.

The following sections of this policy brief elaborate on these and other changes, presenting the details of important programmatic components and offering recommendations for the state and local Workforce Investment Boards. We begin by describing the administrative and governance structures created by WIA. This is followed by a discussion of the service-delivery system including funding mechanisms.
The Illinois Workforce Investment Board and Five-Year Strategic Plan

States are required to establish Workforce Investment Boards to develop state strategic plans, guide policy development, and oversee program implementation. State Workforce Investment Boards are to be comprised of the governor, two members of each chamber of the state legislature, and additional representatives appointed by the governor including those representing private sector employers, labor organizations, organizations (including community colleges and community-based organizations) that have experience in the delivery of workforce-preparation activities, organizations that have experience serving youth, administrators of state agencies, and local elected officials. The majority of Board members must be private sector employers.

The Act charges the Illinois Workforce Investment Board with developing a comprehensive, five-year strategic plan. The plans are to include the following components:

- a description of the Illinois Workforce Investment Board and its activities;
- a description of the state requirements for the Workforce Investment System;
- a description of the state performance accountability system, including performance measures;
- labor market information on current and projected employment opportunities, the vocational skills necessary to obtain employment in the identified occupations, and the skills and economic development needs of the state; and
- a listing of the local investment areas (see below)

Local Workforce Investment Boards and Local Plans

Local program implementation is to be carried out in designated local investment areas (labor market areas), and planned and monitored by local Workforce Investment Boards, the membership of which is appointed by local elected officials. Local Boards are to be comprised of business representatives, education providers, community-based organizations, labor organizations, economic development agencies, and One-Stop Centers. The majority of representatives on the local Board must be private-sector employers. Local Workforce Investment Boards are responsible for overall policy-setting in their workforce investment areas. This includes certifying One-Stop providers, negotiating local performance measures, assisting in the development of a statewide labor market information system, and involving local employers in the state workforce investment system.

Like the state Workforce Investment Board, local Boards are responsible for developing plans. Local plans must include:

- an assessment of the workforce investment needs of employers, job seekers and workers in the area, of current and projected employment opportunities, and of the vocational skill requirements of these opportunities;
- a description of the One-Stop delivery system, including how continuous improvement will be achieved and measured;
- a description and assessment of the type and availability of adult, dislocated worker, and youth employment and training activities; and
a description of the processes through which public comment can be made on the plan (prior to the submission of the plan).

One-Stop Delivery System

Each local Board is to establish a One-Stop delivery system through which “core” services (see below) are provided, and through which access to other employment and training services funded under Title I and other federal programs is provided. The One-Stop delivery system is to offer job seekers a continuum of services ranging from self-service activities such as accessing jobs databases, to intensive staff-assisted services such as job counseling (US Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman, 1998).

The centerpiece of the delivery system is the One-Stop Center, a single point of contact where job-seekers will:

- receive assistance in assessing skill levels and aptitudes;
- access core services (described below);
- obtain information regarding education and training services;
  access Individual Training Accounts;
- receive assistance in filing unemployment insurance claims, applying for student financial aid, and determining eligibility for job training programs;
- receive job search and placement assistance; and
- access labor market information.

Additional One-Stop partners, a network of affiliated sites, may be authorized by the local Workforce Investment Board to aid in service delivery.

Employers will be able to turn to One-Stop Centers as well to list job openings and to record anticipated skill-development needs. One-Stop Centers could perform the role of repositories for current and future job-vacancy information. However, the effectiveness of job-listing services will depend on the capacity of One-Stop operators to design and operate a functioning job-matching system that is up-to-date and accurately reflects both the needs of employers and the experiences of workers.

Employment Services

As described below, WIA identifies three categories of services: core services, intensive services, and training services. The sequencing of these services can be interpreted as following the “work first” methodology popularized by a number of welfare-to-work programs (US Department of Labor, 1998; for a description of the work-first approach see, Brown, 1997). In its “textbook” form, work first is an immediate labor force attachment model that calls for providing the shortest and least expensive servicing first, “using the labor market itself as a test of employability” (Brown, 1997: 4). The overriding focus of work first is securing employment, and the goals traditionally associated with training such as career and earnings mobility are often overlooked. Job search assistance, labor market information services, and job-readiness seminars are the types of servicing most often associated with work-first systems. Under work first, job seekers who are unable to secure employment following short-term, quick-employment assistance, are typically eligible for additional, more intensive services.
In describing the applicability of the work-first model to the provision of training and other employment services, US Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman (1998: 8) explains that, under WIA, “levels of services are to be accessed sequentially – that is more extensive levels of services are provided when the individual is unable to obtain employment with the more basic services.” While the guidelines for service provision contained in WIA certainly emphasize a work-first orientation, the framing of this section of the legislation is vague. Local Workforce Investment Boards will have considerable latitude in determining how the sequential eligibility system will operate. This section describes the employment services and their sequencing, discusses potential drawbacks of a work-first training system, and offers recommendations for how sequencing might be used to improve service delivery.

**Core Services**

At the heart of the service-delivery system under WIA are the core services, which must include:

- orientation to the One-Stop delivery system and determination of eligibility for services;
- career counseling, including initial assessment of skills and vocational preparation needs;
- job search and placement assistance;
- information on available programs including provider performance reports and program costs;
- provision of labor market information (e.g., job vacancies, skill requirements of occupations, and national, state and local job trends); and
- information regarding follow-up services to aid in job retention.

Clearly, information dissemination lies at the heart of core-service provision, the belief being that better information will lead to better labor market outcomes. But while more information can, in certain cases, improve job-placement outcomes, it certainly is not the most important factor influencing employment, particularly for disadvantaged job seekers. To be effective, labor market intermediaries, such as the One-Stop Centers, must provide more than information; the types of services provided by intermediaries must be centered on working relationships between service providers and employers. It is through such relationships, not just information, that disadvantaged job seekers “get their foot in the door,” accessing employment opportunities that otherwise would not be available to them.

Effective labor market intermediaries build solid reputations with employers over time, as they get to know the needs of individual employers and are able to provide suitable workers to satisfy the hiring needs of businesses. The reliance on information as the centerpiece of core-service provision under WIA is a weakness that will need to be overcome by One-Stop Centers if they are to successfully assist disadvantaged workers. Fortunately, provisions in WIA make possible the contracting out of service delivery to community-based service providers which have established track records in meeting the needs of disadvantaged workers and the local business community. Through contracting out, One-Stop Centers will

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1 Core services available through the Adult Services funding stream will be provided on a universal basis with no eligibility requirements. Funds for dislocated workers are available solely to assist such workers.
be able to access a network of providers that can provide the relationships with businesses that will be necessary for a fully functioning workforce investment system.

**Recommendation:** WIA provides a funding structure through which relationship-building among job seekers, service providers, One-Stop Centers, and employers can occur. The One-Stop Centers will be the lead organizations involved in building relationships between the other parties, but they cannot cultivate and manage these relationships by themselves – they will need to involve other providers with expertise in serving various populations and working with segments of the business community. One way to strengthen such an alliance would be for One-Stop Centers to enter into contracts with community-based job training providers to deliver services to “hard-to-serve” job seekers. Providers with established track records, experience working with hard-to-serve populations, and solid relationships with local employers will be needed to improve the overall effectiveness of the workforce investment system.

**Intensive Services**

Persons who are unemployed and unable to secure employment through core services will be eligible for intensive services, “if the One-Stop operator determines that the individual is in need of more intensive services in order to obtain employment” (US Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman, 1998: 9). In addition, adults and dislocated workers who are currently employed may be eligible for intensive services if the One-Stop operator determines that services are needed in order to secure or retain jobs that “allow for self-sufficiency” (US Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman, 1998: 9). In cases where the number of job seekers applying for intensive services exceeds the funds available to provide services, the governor and local Workforce Investment Boards may identify TANF recipients and other special populations as priority groups to receive assistance (see following section).

Intensive services may include:

- in-depth vocational preparation assessments;
- development of an individual employment plan;
- group counseling;
- individual counseling and career planning;
- case management; and
- short-term prevocational (job-readiness) services.

Intensive services may be provided by the One-Stop operator or through contracts with public, private, and nonprofit service providers, subject to the approval of the local Workforce Investment Board.

**Training Services**

Persons who are unable to secure employment following receipt of intensive services “may receive training services which are directly linked to job opportunities in their local area” (US Department of Labor, 1998: 6), or in another area to which the job seeker would like to relocate. Through the One-Stop assessment process, job seekers will receive an evaluation to determine “whether or not they are in need of training and if they possess the skills and
express an interest” (US Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman, 1998: 10). As is the case with intensive services, if the number of job seekers eligible for training services exceeds the funds available to provide services, the governor and local Workforce Investment Boards may identify TANF recipients and other special populations as priority groups to receive assistance.

Training services may include:
• occupational skills training;
• on-the-job training;
• customized training in which employer commitments to hire trainees have been given;
• entrepreneurial training;
• skill upgrading and re-training;
• job readiness training; and
• adult education and literacy services provided in conjunction with other training.

An additional weakness of WIA, beyond the targeting of training services toward the “hardest-to-employ” job seekers, is that no provisions are in place to provide case-management follow-up to workers who have completed training programs. Evidence from welfare-to-work evaluations and other studies of job-placement services indicates the importance of post-training tracking of participants to identify problems on the job before these problems lead to unemployment. Without follow-up support, the long-run effectiveness of training programs for disadvantaged job seekers will be compromised.

Recommendation: Case-management services should be provided in conjunction with intensive services and training for hard-to-serve job seekers to improve employment-retention rates.

Work First
WIA establishes a hierarchy of service provision whereby all job seekers are eligible for basic, core services, while a subset of these job seekers may be eligible for additional, more intensive services if core services fail to result in employment for those workers. However, the wisdom of structuring a workforce investment system around the work-first model should be questioned, especially if a strict interpretation of work first is followed. The philosophy, inherent in most welfare-to-work programs, that “any job is a good job” runs contrary to the training-for-employment strategy.

If the One-Stop delivery system is designed to move job seekers into employment through the shortest possible route, the system will operate in ways similar to most welfare-to-work programs: job seekers will be directed into jobs with the most modest vocational-preparation requirements. The reason for this is that most job seekers will be able to access only less-intensive servicing which will leave their vocational skill sets unchanged. For most, this will be job counseling and labor market information. While these services are important, and for many workers is an appropriate type of service provision, the jobs that can be secured under such a system will tend to be at the lower end of the occupational ladder. In addition, even those job seekers who are deemed to be eligible for intensive services and training will receive services that will enable them to begin job search as quickly as possible. For most of these job seekers, jobs secured will be in low-paying, entry-level occupations.
It should be clear that a workforce investment system organized according to a strict work-first model would not address the types of skill shortages in high-wage occupations that businesses in Illinois have indicated are a limit on their competitiveness and growth. Unfortunately, neither will such a system meet the growing needs of employers seeking to fill mid-level technical positions, even at the advanced entry level (see Jenkins, 1999). Moreover, such a system of service provision would undermine the skills-development infrastructure in the state, leading to further erosion of opportunities through which the overall skill levels of workers may be raised. In short, the effectiveness of the new workforce investment system would be compromised should local Workforce Investment Boards instruct One-Stop operators to rigidly follow the work-first model.

Concerns with the work-first model of service provision that have been raised by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) bear repeating here. CLASP (Savner, 1998b: 2, emphasis added) warns that in exercising discretion in determining eligibility for intensive services and training, One-Stop operators will be confronted with three possible interpretations of the work-first approach.

A Local [Workforce Investment] Board might choose to authorize a one stop operator to determine through a preliminary assessment that an individual will be unable to obtain employment consistent with the individual's skills, prior earnings, and future earnings needs, and proceed to offer intensive services. Alternatively, job search and placement assistance might be provided to determine if the individual could obtain suitable employment, based on prior earnings, income needs, etc., with referral for intensive services only if such employment is not obtained. Finally, an individual might be required to engage in job search and take any available job, allowing access to intensive services only if the individual can obtain no employment of any sort.

To operate the workforce investment system according to strict work-first principles so that it merely directs job seekers toward the lower reaches of the labor market would be a disservice to both workers and employers. The local flexibility in WIA implementation provided for in the legislation allows local Workforce Investment Boards the scope to interpret program sequencing in a more effective manner. Obviously, if suitable employment can be found for job seekers, quick placements should be made. But the goal of the workforce investment system must be to make appropriate placements that build on workers' experience, expertise, and previous earnings. Furthermore, training should not be reserved for only those who cannot secure employment in the short run. Many other workers could benefit from participation in training programs that would allow them to access better paying jobs. In addition, creating a training system that prepares workers for higher-level employment would better meet the needs of employers for whom upper-level skill shortages are a problem.

**Recommendation:** The Illinois and local Workforce Investment Boards should not follow a strict work-first model to determine the eligibility of job seekers for intensive services and training. Such an approach would not address the skills needs of businesses or the vocational-preparation needs of many job seekers and would undermine the effectiveness of the training-for-employment strategy.
Creating a Priority System for Workforce Investment Funds

Among the differences between WIA and JTPA is the absence of targeting measures in the new legislation, save those contained in the broad funding categories (see Savner, 1998). Under JTPA, substantial portions of funds were made available to low-income persons or persons encountering various employment barriers. WIA provisions governing adult programs contain no targeting requirements. Instead, the legislation includes the following limited guidelines for Workforce Investment Boards to follow in allocating resources:

In the event that funds allocated to a local area for adult employment and training activities ... are limited, priority should be given to recipients of public assistance and other low-income individuals for intensive services and training services (Section 134(d)(4)(E)).

In many areas of Illinois it is likely that the number of eligible persons seeking assistance under WIA will exceed the resources available to provide assistance. Therefore, it is likely that in many areas of the state, a priority system will need to be used by local Workforce Investment Boards to ration workforce development funds.

**Recommendation:** The Illinois and local Workforce Investment Boards should include in their strategic plans descriptions of the priority system to be used in the event that funds available through WIA are inadequate to serve all persons seeking to access services.

WIA identifies two groups – public aid recipients and low-income individuals – that should be given priority in accessing services in the event of resource shortages. Low-income individuals include any person who:

- receives, or is a member of a family that receives, cash payments under a Federal, State, or local income-based public assistance program;
- received an income, or is a member of a family that received a total family income, for the 6-month period prior to application for the program involved (exclusive of unemployment compensation, child support payments, Social Security benefits) that, in relation to family size, does not exceed the higher of (i) the poverty line ... or (ii) 70 percent of the lower living standard income level ...; is a member of a household that receives (or has been eligible to receive within the six-month period prior to application for the program) food stamps ...;
- qualifies as a homeless individual ...;
- is a foster child on behalf of whom State or local government payments are made; or
- in cases permitted by regulations promulgated by the Secretary of Labor, is an individual with a disability whose own income meets the requirements [above] ... but who is a member of a family whose income does not meet such requirements.

Eligible Providers of Training Services

WIA establishes a framework through which the eligibility of training providers is determined. In order to receive funds, providers will be required to apply for initial eligibility. The exceptions to this requirement are programs operated by post-secondary
educational institutions that are certified under the Higher Education Act and that lead to an associate degree, baccalaureate degree or certificate, as well as apprenticeship programs authorized under the National Apprenticeship Act. Such programs are automatically granted initial eligibility to receive funds once they file an application with the local Workforce Investment Board. Those programs that do not satisfy either of these conditions must comply with performance criteria set forth by the governor and the Illinois Workforce Investment Board in order to be granted initial eligibility.

**Recommendation:** The goal of increased accountability throughout the workforce investment system requires that post-secondary education providers not automatically receive a pass on meeting performance standards for initial eligibility. Local Workforce Investment Boards should hold these providers to the same standards and requirements as other providers.

Performance criteria for *all* participants in a program (including those not receiving assistance under WIA) are to include:

- completion rate for program participants;
- percentage of program graduates/completers who have secured unsubsidized employment; and
- the wages at placement of program graduates.

In addition, performance criteria for *participants in a program* who are receiving assistance under WIA are to include:

- percentage of program graduates/completers who have secured unsubsidized employment;
- the retention rate after six months in employment;
- the wage rate after six months in employment; and
- the rates of licensure or certification (where applicable), attainment of academic degrees, or attainment of other skills of program graduates.

Finally, providers will be required to submit program-cost information (such as tuition and fees). Additional program completion and/or cost criteria may be added by the Illinois and local Workforce Investment Boards. The above performance criteria must be satisfied *annually*. This requirement also pertains to programs, such as post-secondary institutions and apprenticeship programs, that may have been granted automatic eligibility.

Most providers will need to redesign their reporting practices and client-tracking methods in order to comply with the annual performance-measure requirements. In particular, the six-month retention and wage data requirements will mean that most providers will have to staff expanded follow-up tracking functions within their organizations. For community-based providers operating within tight margins, these new performance requirements will likely present a strain on scarce financial resources.
Recommendation: Performance measures should reflect both the outcome of services (e.g., wage and retention rates) as well as the “depth of service” provided to hard-to-serve populations (Chicago Jobs Council, 1998). For example, performance criteria could evaluate progress made toward overcoming barriers to employment among special populations (e.g., completion of substance abuse treatment).

Recommendation: As called for by WIA, should the costs of data collection necessary to satisfy performance criteria prove to be burdensome to community-based service providers, the State of Illinois should assist providers in defraying these costs.

Recommendation: The Illinois Workforce Investment Board should identify key components of effective assessment methods for implementation at the local level to ensure uniform standards of service provision and to aid in the evaluation of statewide skills competencies.

Eligible training providers in an area are to be placed on a list maintained by the state Workforce Investment Board in cooperation with local Boards. Local lists are to be compiled by the state and distributed to One-Stop Centers. Potential program participants will be able to access the statewide list and apply for enrollment in any eligible program.

Recommendation: Information on provider performance should be collected and made available to the public for each employment program if this information is to be useful to consumers choosing between various service providers. Moreover, to reaffirm the principle of greater accountability, the continuing eligibility of providers under WIA should be judged for each program offered by the provider.

Individual Training Accounts

The primary mechanism through which job seekers will obtain services is the Individual Training Account (ITA), a voucher to be used for purchasing services from an approved provider. ITAs are a key component of the “market-driven system” that WIA was designed to create. The portability of ITAs will allow job seekers to purchase employment services from eligible providers, with the goal of injecting greater customer choice into the system. However, from a program-delivery standpoint, this change in the funding of program slots may put a strain on the financial viability of community-based organizations who will find it difficult to plan and offer services without the more predictable funding stream provided by service contracts. There is a danger that only those providers that can finance training services through other, more stable revenue sources will be able to accept ITAs in return for services rendered (Chicago Jobs Council, 1998).

Recommendation: Local Workforce Investment Boards should provide financial support for revolving loan funds to provide “working capital” for community-based service providers who will encounter difficulty financing their operations under the new WIA funding regime. State discretionary funds along with local-level commitments could be used to capitalize these revolving loan funds, with paybacks into the funds being used to maintain the availability of working capital for service providers.
The actual structure of this system and funding limits (if any) of individual ITAs is to be determined by the Illinois and local Workforce Investment Boards. However, even with the creation of an ITA funding system, there remains some scope for providing employment and training services through contracts, as has been done under the Job Training Partnership Act. Contracts for training services may be awarded if any of the following conditions are met:

- the training provided is on-the-job training, or is customized training with an agreement by the business to employ program graduates;
- the local Board determines that there are an insufficient number of providers to allow for adequate competition or consumer choice;
- the local Board determines that a program offered by a community-based organization or other private service provider has demonstrated effectiveness in serving a special population facing multiple employment barriers including individuals with substantial language or cultural barriers, ex-offenders, homeless persons, or other hard-to-serve populations as defined by the governor.

**Recommendation:** Governor Ryan should include as eligible barriers the following barriers as defined in the Illinois Department of Human Services Self-Support Scale: victims of domestic violence, lack of work experience, receipt of TANF for three years or more, substance abuse, reading proficiency at less than a sixth-grade level, and chronic health condition (Chicago Jobs Council Workforce Development Group, 1999). These “special populations” might be best served by contracting with existing organizations with established track records of service.

**Conclusion**

The primary goal of the Workforce Investment Act is to create an incentives-driven system that is responsive to the needs of businesses and job seekers. Many aspects of this system, such as greater accountability on the part of government and providers as well as more coordinated service delivery, will bring welcome changes to the workforce development system in Illinois. At the same time, there are causes for concern. In particular, there are strong disincentives to assisting “hard-to-serve” job seekers, disincentives that are inscribed in the very structure of WIA. For example, the funding of One-Stop Centers is based on the absolute number of job seekers placed in employment. Since hard-to-serve clients require both longer assistance and a greater range of services, such provision runs counter to the logic of the funding system. In addition, One-Stop Centers are charged with determining eligibility for intensive services and training, forms of service provision that tend to be more costly, but for which many disadvantaged job seekers would be eligible. Again, because One-Stop Centers are authorized to determine eligibility for these services, there are disincentives to appropriately serving disadvantaged job seekers built into the WIA funding system.

A second concern that pertains to the provision of employment services for disadvantaged job seekers is the lack of resources for case management and follow-up in the legislation. Research on program effectiveness clearly demonstrates the value of post-program case management as a way to improve the long-run outcomes of training. Without case management activities, the returns on monies spent for training will be lower.
A third concern is that One-Stop Centers may be reluctant to contract out to established community-based providers that have solid track records in assisting disadvantaged job seekers. The structure of the WIA funding system might lead some One-Stop operators to pursue lower-cost forms of service provision, such as those that are reliant on merely passing along information on job openings, at the expense of more intensive, and more effective, services.

Ultimately, the success of the new Illinois workforce investment system in meeting the needs of job seekers and businesses will depend on strong leadership from the Governor, the Illinois Workforce Investment Board, and the local Boards. This issue brief has raised numerous concerns that will need to be resolved as the state strategic plan and local plans are developed. It will not be enough to use the planning process merely to formulate general requirements to guide the operation of local activities. Congress has left important policymaking responsibilities to states and localities, and Illinois must embrace this responsibility and the challenge to fashion meaningful policies out of what is an often vaguely worded Act. The Workforce Investment Boards are the key players in the new workforce system, charged with policymaking, governance, and oversight responsibilities. Moreover, the goal of greater accountability requires that state and local Boards be specific as to how implementation will be carried out and evaluated. Illinois has an opportunity to use the local flexibility that is a core feature of WIA to resolve longstanding problems in the workforce investment system. Whether this is done to the benefit of workers and businesses will in part depend on the resolution of issues presented here.
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