



WIOA services in Puerto Rico

A look from the ground up

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Summary

Puerto Rico has received between \$90 and \$134 million per year in the last five years from the federal government to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. This funding is allocated to 15 Local Workforce Development Areas (Local Areas) via the pass-through Program of Labor Development (PDL for its acronym in Spanish) of the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DDEC). Local Areas report outcomes such as employment and earnings of participants to PDL, who in turn reports these to the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (DOLETA). The report, *Radiografía del Sistema de Desarrollo Laboral de Puerto Rico* (A Radiography of the Workforce Development System of Puerto Rico, 2025 by the Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud), presents an overview of the performance outcomes reported to DOLETA.

As with any program, success is achieved via the good implementation of program practices. In this report we take a deep dive into how WIOA programs are implemented in practice, with the goal of going beyond the reported numbers, and gaining a greater understanding of how the program work and how it can be improved.

A qualitative analysis based on interviews carried out with 16 case managers and 22 participants in eight (8) Local Areas revealed the following:

1. A solid and positive relationship between participants and case managers is key to success.
2. Although Local Areas offer a variety of training courses there are several limitations in course availability and offerings of interest to clients.
3. Some Local Areas are incorporated as non-profit organization such as AMSI facilitating fund raising through competitive proposals and other grant opportunities.
4. Services offered by Local Areas are not widely known by the public.
5. Office operations in Local Areas are characterized by a top-down bureaucratic public administration model.
6. The demographic shift toward older workers presents challenges to Local Area funding and services.
7. The most pressing and necessary investments in Local Areas are in staff, infrastructure, and technology.
8. The interviews also uncovered promising and effective practices for improving outcomes that could be adopted across all Local Areas. Some of these are:
 - Cultivating a quality relationship between case manager and client.
 - Intentional and deliberate integration of services across agencies and within Local Areas.

- Guaranteeing that every visitor, whether a potential client or not, leaves the office with useful information.
- Ensuring receptionists and other front-line staff are well trained and offer information to potential clients and Local Area visitors.
- Carrying out comprehensive interviews with every potential client.
- Relaxing laws regarding required client documentation to speed up the delivery of services. WIOA already provides space to do this, but most Local Areas are not taking advantage of it.

Regarding policies for WIOA at large, 10 recommendations are provided:

1. Pay more attention to the growth rate of emerging occupations when presenting options to program participants, even if they represent a small share of all available employment. This can be achieved by monitoring the existing registry for high demand occupations or identifying local needs that are not reflected in regional indicators.
2. Leverage workshops and short courses to increase soft skills, job readiness, employment opportunities, and earnings. These courses must be aligned with employment outcomes.
3. Improve outcome reporting by linking participant records to the Department of Labor and the Human Resources database on the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages.
4. Invest in Local Area infrastructure, technology, staff development and employee compensation.
5. Promote the use of Local Area services through advertising and media outreach. Strengthen the overall Conexión Laboral brand via better signage and storytelling strategies.
6. Provide clear guidance to clients regarding document requirements.
7. Advocate for the elimination of the selective service registration requirement, arguing the need for equity.
8. Promote the incorporation of Local Areas as non-profit organizations to build the legal structure of a separate entity and provide more avenues for funding and reduce political obstructions.
9. Promote innovation using demonstration projects to generate real-world and timely research evidence around what works in Puerto Rico's context.
10. Conduct regular impact evaluations of WIOA outcomes that consider administrative and population level data.

Background

The report *Radiography of the Workforce Development System of Puerto Rico* (translated from “Radiografía del sistema de desarrollo de la fuerza laboral”) presented an overview of the objectives of the workforce development system, its main actors, and public policies sustaining workforce development in Puerto Rico.¹ The focus was on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) as the main statute with a direct mandate of workforce development, and primary source of training, capacity building, and employment opportunities for individuals with barriers to employment. This report highlighted nine recommendations to improve the current system.

Thousands of workers seek services through the different WIOA-funded offices in Puerto Rico. Thus, it is essential to gather information about how services are provided on the ground, since program success relies heavily on how well it is implemented. As Rogers and Woolcock put it “any intervention is as good as its implementation.”²

This report dives deep into the different WIOA services delivered through Local Workforce Development Areas offices (here on Local Areas) by presenting information on programs, practices and operations, straight from the field. Puerto Rico’s WIOA complies with the quarterly performance reports requested by DOLETA, its funding agency. However, these numerical reports cannot provide the full story about how and why outcomes are or are not achieved, and what best practices can be leveraged to provide better services and results. This analysis provides a broad look into service provision and begins to sort out how WIOA programs are implemented, which obstacles are faced, and what promising practices are being developed.

It is expected that this exploration from the ground up, based on interviews carried out in eight different Local Areas can inform practices that could be implemented system wide. The objective is to improve programs and achieve more successful outcomes for participants. This study can also spark policy proposals from the bottom up, using the lived experiences of participants, case managers and office supervisors as evidence for change and modifications of current practices. While not intended to be an evaluative report, this study could be considered a first step towards a comprehensive assessment agenda of WIOA outcomes in Puerto Rico.

WIOA services

WIOA Title I programs are predicated on providing employment opportunities to low-income individuals, and those with employability challenges or barriers. To achieve these goals, WIOA programs provide workshops, subsidized work experiences, apprenticeships, connections to employers, work and interview preparation, and Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) that pay for technical and university education. The study programs covered by ITA accounts must be among the list of programs that WIOA-Puerto Rico Local Areas determine are in high demand. In this way, WIOA aligns its trainings with labor

¹ Enchautegui Román, M. & García Sánchez, C. (2025) *Radiography of the Workforce Development System of Puerto Rico*. Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud, Puerto Rico.

² Rogers, Patricia J., and Woolcock, Michael. “Process and Implementation Evaluations: A Primer.” CID Faculty Working Paper Series 2023.433, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, May 2023 *Process and Implementation Evaluations: A Primer – Building State Capability* (harvard.edu)

market needs. The services may also include other economic or supportive services for studying and/or working individuals, such as transportation and childcare.

WIOA Title I has three main programs named after their intended clients: Youth, Adults, and Dislocated Workers. Puerto Rico's WIOA services are provided via 15 Local Areas spread throughout the Archipelago. The Department of Economic Development and Commerce's (DDEC) Local Workforce Development Program (PDL for its Spanish acronym), functions as the WIOA pass-through agency which distributes the assigned funds to the 15 Local Areas.

In FY 2023, Puerto Rico received \$122 million in WIOA funds. Funds to Local Areas are allocated based on population, unemployment, and poverty rates, among other parameters. In the program year 2023, WIOA Puerto Rico served close to 14,501 thousand individuals in the three programs combined.³

Research questions

The overarching question this study seek to answer is: What is the current state of Local Workforce Development Areas services and what can be done to improve them to achieve better employment and earnings outcomes.

To answer this question, the interviews centered on the following dimensions:

1. **The client experience:** What services are provided and how are provided?
2. **Training limitations:** What are the main limitations in the training alternatives offered by Local Areas? How can services to youth, adults, and displaced workers be improved?
3. **Access to services:** What obstacles do participants face in accessing services? How are the different Title I WIOA recipients being served?
4. **Office operations:** How are the Local Area offices organized? How do the processes and day-to-day office operations facilitate or hinder service provisions?
5. **Practices that lead to success:** What specific practices used by Local Areas seem to generate success— in this case measured by the completion of program activities, employment and/or educational attainment, and an active engagement within the labor force.

How was this study carried out?

We selected eight out of the fifteen Local Areas that receive WIOA funds in Puerto Rico. The selection was based on achieving geographical representation in Puerto Rico. The interviews were conducted in each Local Area's Central Office. The chosen Local Areas where interviews were conducted were:

³³ Department of Labor, DOLETA, WIOA Performance Measures, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/performance/results/states#data-books>.

- Local Area San Juan (located in San Juan)
- Local Area Ponce (located in Ponce)
- Local Area La Montaña (located in Barranquitas)
- Local Area Northcentral (located in Arecibo)
- Local Area Guaynabo-Toa Baja (located in Guaynabo)
- Local Area Caguas-Guayama administered by the Administración Municipal de Servicios Integrados (AMSI), oficina de Caguas
- Local Area Southwest (located in San Germán)
- Local Area Northeast (located in Fajardo)

Two case managers and three participants were interviewed in each office. Local Areas are referred to by numbers 1 through 8 (not by the order listed above), to protect the confidentiality of participants. Interviews were conducted during May 2024.

The interview protocol for case managers addressed the following:

- Background and history with the office, description of her/his job
- Initial intake and service process
- Services offered
- Adequacy of the training alternatives offered to clients
- Trainings and occupations in most demand by clients
- Follow-up protocol with clients
- Documents required
- Outreach activities
- Obstacles faced by clients
- Assessment of success
- Stories of successes and non-success
- Suggestions on how to improve services and office operations

The interview protocol for WIOA clients (participants) included the following:

- Participant labor/work history
- How the person learned about the services
- Services received up to that moment
- Engagement with staff and case managers
- Number of times and reasons the participant has visited the Local office

- Satisfaction with service provided
- Things participants like the most
- Things participants disliked or felt could be improved about the services

The case managers and WIOA client-participants that were interviewed were selected by the Local office, likely the office supervisor. They were not selected by the research team. Naturally, this could lead to some bias, since the Local office would likely want to present its most successful stories. However, we found the information provided by the interviewees to paint a sufficiently complete picture of how services are provided. Sometimes, participants were scheduled to come to the interview. In other cases, they happened to have an appointment that day and were notified of the interview. The latter is in part because there were no appointments scheduled for the time of the visit. As such, to provide the research team with a WIOA participant, office staff had to plan ahead of time. Two of the interviews with WIOA participants were conducted via telephone from the Local Area office.

The term case manager is used broadly, as it encompasses the staff that interact with clients. The term is used in most Local Areas, but some go by other titles. The interviewed staff also included case manager supervisors, most of whom have had case manager experience and filled in for case managers as needed.

Table 1a and 1b show information about the title and average work experience of case managers. **Table 2** shows some sociodemographic characteristics of the WIOA participants.

As mentioned above, the interviewed staff had different titles and at times included supervisors, depending on the Local Area. Some of these titles were: Interviewer, Social Worker, Counselor, Case Manager, Career Planner, Career Coach, Occupational Counselor, and Case Manager Supervisor.

The overwhelming majority of case managers interviewed were women: only 2 out of 16 were men. The average years of experience with the workforce development office was 20. Seven of the staff participants interviewed had between 24 and 36 years of experience. Only six had less than 10 years of experience.

Of the 23 WIOA client participants, 78% identified as female. The age range was between 19 and 64 years old, for an average of 38 years of age. The majority of WIOA participants, 52%, had a high school diploma as their highest earned degree, 35% had an associated or technical degree and 13% had a bachelor's degree.

Table 1^a*Job titles of interviewed Local Area staff*

Job titles of interviewed staff	Number of staff
Case Manager	5
Career Planner	2
Occupational Counselor	2
Job Career Coach	1
Assistant of Technical Resources	1
Supervisor of Youth Program	1
Supervisor of Adult and Dislocated Worker Program	1
Supervisor of Case Managers	1
Supervisor of Career Planners	1
Employer Liaison	1
Number of staff interviewed	16

Table 1b*Years of experience of interviewed case managers*

Years of experience	Number of staff
Average years of experience	20
Number of interviewees with 24 or more years of experience	8
Number of interviews with 11 to 23 years of experience	3
Number of interviewees with 10 or less years of experience	5
Total number of staff interviewed	16

Table 2

Characteristics of interviewed Local Area WIOA participants

Female	78%
Highest academic degree completed	
High school diploma	52%
Associate or technical degree	35%
Bachelor's degree	13%
Average age	38
Number of interviewees	23
Number of Local Areas	8

All information and conclusions presented are based on the analysis of the content of the in-depth semi-structured interviews and observations gained from visiting the Local Areas. After transcriptions of all interviews, the text was coded and tagged using about 20 different themes. The most common themes were extracted with quotes to support them.

Main findings

The interviews and observations from the field uncovered seven main themes:

1. The quality of the relationship between client and case manager is important for outcomes.
2. The training offers are perceived as limited and in need of update, especially for young participants.
3. The legal structure of the Local Area affects resources.
4. There is a lack of knowledge by the public about the services offered by Local Areas
5. A top-down bureaucratic model dominates operations limiting agility and innovation.
6. Local Areas are being affected by the demographic change taking place in Puerto Rico.
7. Local areas need investments in staff, technology and infrastructure.

The relationship between client and case manager is key to success

Case manager after case manager emphasized the importance of the quality of the relationship between client and case worker as essential for success. Words such as *el trato* (how clients are treated), *la confianza* (trust); *entender al cliente* (understanding the client) were common among interviewees, demonstrating that empathy and care are a priority to case managers for the success of their participants. WIOA client-participants need to feel that somebody cares and believes in their abilities. The case managers interviewed were visibly invested in the wellbeing of their clients, tearing up and becoming emotional while speaking about them on multiple occasions.

In more than one occasion, case managers referred to the transformational experience of witnessing WIOA participants go from their first interview with little motivation and, at times, unkempt appearance, to the ultimate pride felt on their graduation day as they dressed for success. Case managers keep in touch with their participants from the time services begin, and up to one year after the service stops. Although referred to as career planners, career coaches, case managers, or occupational counselors, it seems staff always act as a type of motivational coach, guiding their participants during each step of their journey. The close relationship between case manager and WIOA participant is critical for the completion of the latter's program activities.

Success was described by case managers as: clients meeting their personal goals, completing the program, and being on track to sustainable employment. Many case managers mentioned their pride and happiness when bumping into a former WIOA participant on the street who completed the program. They mentioned it is in these interactions that former clients usually express their immense gratitude to them. Clients, on their part, report a high level of satisfaction with the services provided to them. Importantly, the most cited reason for their satisfaction with the program was due to the relationship with their case manager and WIOA staff.

The following quotes illustrate the quality of the relationship between client and case manager.

Participant 1, Local Area 4:

"Es la primera vez que yo me siento hablando con una persona que de verdad me entiende, que no era un mandato. Ni era tampoco como que cambia esto cambia lo otro. No. Todo fue en pacífico. Todo fue sumamente cómodo. Me dio mi tiempo para poder pensar antes de hablar. Hablamos un rato. Le dije lo que yo quería—el trabajo que yo quería. Yo lo había hablado con ella y buscó exactamente lo que yo quería. Aunque yo se lo dije: Sabes, este trabajo es más bien como el comienzo de algo bueno."

[It is the first time I sit down with a person that really understands me, that it was not an obligation. There was no 'change this or change that'. No. Everything ran peacefully. We talked for a while. I told her what I wanted—the type of work I wanted. I talked to her, and she found exactly what I wanted. Although I told her: You know, this job is the beginning of something good]

Case Manager 1, Local Area 3:

"Lo importante es que uno esté enfocado y que tenga las herramientas para ayudar a esa persona. Y ese es mi fin. Siempre ayudar. Y el día que no pueda, alguna alternativa le tengo que dar."

[The important thing is to always keep focused, and to have the tools necessary to help that person. That's my goal. To always be of help. The day I can't do that, I will have to come up with some other alternative.]

Case Manager 1, Local Area 2:

"Sí, yo vía telefónica le estoy dando seguimiento: 'Estás trabajando? ¿Cómo te fue la entrevista? Pues, si no te gustó, ven a la oficina y yo te doy otro referido para otra área. Tal vez no era en lo que tú estabas enfocado'. Pero sí, siempre le doy mucho seguimiento para que puedan incorporarse al mundo laboral."

[Yes, through phone calls I follow up with them. Are you working? How did the interview go? If you didn't like it, stop by the office and I'll give you another referral. Maybe that's not what you wanted to focus on. But I always provide a lot of follow up, so they can enter the workforce.]

Case Manager 1, Local Area 1:

"...mostrar [al participante] que sí, que yo tengo el interés genuino de ayudarlo y llevarlo hasta el final, buscarle las alternativas habidas y por haber para que esa persona salga de aquí— por lo menos contento de que se atendió bien y con el fin de emplearlo. Que esa persona que se vaya por ahí y salga por esa puerta no diga que NOMBRE COMPLETO DEL MC no le dio alternativas y no la atendió bien. Y hasta ahora, gracias a Dios, mis números siempre están ahí."

[To show [the client] that, yes, I do have genuine interest in helping him and taking him all the way to the finish line, searching for alternatives wherever they are, so that person leaves this office happy because he was served well to the end of getting him a job. So that person that comes here and leaves this door, can't say that FULL NAME OF CM did not give him an alternative, that he was not treated well.]

Participant, Local Area 5:

"Sabes, ellos le buscan la solución a cualquiera. Si no puedes en uno, pues te dicen 'mira, tenemos esto'."

[You know, they search for a solution for everyone. If you can't do one thing, they'll let you know, 'we have this other one'.]

Participant 3, Local Area 4:

"Cuando tuve la entrevista anterior con el horario [que no me funcionaba] me buscaron una solución, que no fue que me dejaron."

[When I had this prior interview [but the hours did not work] I let them know, and they looked for another solution. it wasn't like they left me with nothing.]

Case Manager 2, Local Area 4:

"Siempre tratamos de que ese participante se vaya con algo en la mano."

[We always try our hardest, so the participant leaves the office with something.]

Participant 3, Local Area 3:

"El señor XX [En referencia al Case Manager], estuvo mano a mano conmigo todos los días. Súper chévere."

[Mr. X [referencing the CM] worked hand in hand with me every day. It was super nice.]

Case Manager 2, Local Area 3:

"A veces digo, hay que soltar la computadora y la libreta y escuchar, porque aquí el que entró quiere que se le escuche y después vamos a todo lo demás porque sí, esto es estadístico y hay que hacer unos números, sí, eso sí, pero, tienes que escuchar."

[Sometimes I say, you just must put the computer down and place your notebook aside, and listen, because the people that come here want to be listened to. Then we move on to the other things, because, yes, there are statistics and numbers, but you must listen.]

Key Insight

From a best practices perspective, supervisors must seek to ensure that this intensive, quality relationship based on caring, and empathy becomes a standard component of the regular case management process. It should not come down to the case manager's personality or disposition. Processes and guidance should be developed so that quality relationships are adopted among case managers.

Limited training offers

WIOA offers two types of training: (1) workshops or short courses with a duration of one to a few days, or several weeks, offered in the Local Area facility or other facilities made available by the office or provider and, (2) formal training that results in a certificate or degree credentials in a post-secondary institution. This last one could be in a technical program with a duration of about one year, or an associate degree in a higher education institution. Both programs and the providers of post-secondary institutions must be on the Eligibility Training Providers List (ETPL) approved by the local board. These trainings are meant to reflect current jobs in high demand, as determined by the occupational statistics of the Department of Labor and Human Resources. The most recent projections are for 2020-2030. Participants may be eligible for an Individual Training Account (ITA) to pay for postsecondary education. Some workshops or courses of short duration are sometimes limited to participants of the Youth Program. Local Areas see many walk-ins looking for workshops.

There are a good number of training courses offered by the Local Areas and in postsecondary institutions. Examples of workshops mentioned in interviews were: (1) the fabrication of screens for doors and windows; (2) sublimation (the transfer of art images to objects like cups and t-shirts), (3) CPR, (4) food safety, (5) sign language, (6) social media, (7) leadership, (8) financial literacy, (9) candle and soap making, (10) computer skills and Microsoft Office, (11) decoration with globes, (12) caregiving for elderly, and (13) conversational English. Examples of certificates and associate degrees with post-secondary institutions mentioned in the interviews were (1) tourist guiding, (2) personal training, (3) massaging, (4) estheticism, (5) pet grooming, (6) nails technician, (7) cosmetology, (8) barbering, (9) nursing, (10) office administration, (11) medical billing, (12) microblading, (13) international cuisine; and (14) gypsum board construction.

However, even with this large range of training alternatives, several case managers pointed to an issue of limited offerings, and a need to revamp programs to make them more attractive to young participants.

Training offers need update, revamping

A common feeling expressed by case managers is that training alternatives were “always the same”, that “they need to be renovated.” Even though they recognize the providers and consequently the training alternatives are approved by the local board, some case managers stated that Local Areas need to be quicker and more agile in adapting to new, modern demands. Local Boards could be more proactive on listening to suggestions from case managers and participants and on requiring innovative training alternatives from providers in their request for proposals.

Case Manager 2, Local Area 3:

“Ahora están buscando [entrenamientos en] placas solares, que aquí todavía no está llegando eso.”

[Now they come looking for training on solar panels, but we don't have [those types of training] yet.]

Case Manager 1, Local Area 7:

“Nos hemos quedado en los adiestramientos tradicionales, y según hemos visto y vamos avanzando, ahora hay un cambio más a lo tecnológico.”

[We are stuck with [the same] traditional trainings, and as we can see and we advance, now there is a change more toward technology.]

Case Manager 2, Local Area 7:

De los adiestramientos yo te diría que básicamente siempre son los mismos. A veces yo pienso que se deben de renovar. Todo va cambiando, [con] la tecnología. Todos los días hay algo nuevo y aquí como que casi siempre son lo mismo [los adiestramientos], como por ejemplo repostería. ***[Regarding the training courses I would say that they are basically always the same. Sometimes I think they need to be updated. Everything is changing, [with] technology. Everyday there's something new, and here it seems like they [the trainings] are always the same, for example bakery.]***

Case Manager 1, Local Area 3:

“Yo siempre entiendo que ese registro tiene que expandirse, pero el problema que tenemos es que las instituciones académicas no tienen muchos programas actualizados.”

[I've always understood that that register must be expanded, but the problem is that academic institutions don't have many updated programs.]

Youth trainings need innovation and technology to attract clientele

Some case managers felt that the training offers available are too “traditional”, or not modern enough for young participants. Young workers are looking for creative occupations and technological training, some of which are not in the registry. It was also expressed that some of the workshops should be tweaked to make them more relevant to our youth. For instance, one case manager suggested that a leadership workshop could address issues of self-esteem and violence which are issues many Puerto Rican youth face. Teachers could also implement more modern, technologically driven strategies to impart training courses. The following quotes illustrate the training needs of young workers as communicated by case managers.

Case Manager 2, Local Area 3:

“Todo lo que es con tecnología, todo lo que es música, todo lo que tenga que ver con internet...cosas de diseño de música y video juegos. O sea, lo que es académico a ellos no les va a gustar... Muchas cosas en el registro a los jóvenes no les interesa. Lo más básico que cogen del registro es enfermería, barbería y estilismo.”

[Anything related to technology, to music, to the internet... things related to music design and video games. Whatever is too academic, they are not going to like it. The most basic occupations they take from the registry are barbering, nursing, and hair styling].

Case Manager 1, Local Area 3:

“A los jóvenes lo que les mueve ahora es todo lo tecnológico”.

[Nowadays, what moves young people is all related to technology].

Case Manager 1, Local Area 4:

“Sí, [adiestramientos] que sean innovadores y que les llame la atención, que la persona que le da adiestramiento sea una persona moderna. Los maestros tienen que ser innovadores. No puede ser una maestra de cosmetología de los tiempos de antaño.”

[Yes, [trainings] that are innovative, that capture their attention, that the person that offers the training is modern. Teachers must be innovative. You cannot have a cosmetology teacher stuck in the past.]

Case Manager 2, Local Area 6:

“...porque lo que te digo, el joven ahora es muy visual... y es como que ‘yo tengo que enamorarme de eso para yo poder seguir’.

[because I'll tell you, young people now are very visual, and they're like 'I have to fall in love with that so that I can continue [working in it].']

Long waiting time for workshops and short courses

Many participants visit Local Areas in search of workshops or short courses. At times, participants come looking for a specific course, which may not be available at that point in time. That client is sometimes left without further assistance or alternatives. However, we found that in many instances, case managers take note of prospective participants' names with the promise of calling back when the training (or some other related workshop) becomes available. Additionally, some Local Areas reach out to other centers or neighboring Local Areas to see if the course is being offered and proceed to refer the participant. Despite this, a big obstacle is that Local Areas do not possess a programmatic calendar of workshops/trainings for the year. Also, it is not immediately clear how some of these workshops connect clients to employment in the Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs.

Workshops need a minimum quota of participants to be cost effectiveness. Sometimes, a course or workshop lacking the quota is filled by office staff registering clients who are not necessarily interested in the topic. Participants may also be motivated by the monetary incentives offered by the program and consequently willing to take courses that are not of much use or interest to them.

The following quotes illustrate this point.

Case Manager 1, Local Area 8:

"De cierta forma, encajonamos a ese participante en lo que hay al momento y tal vez eso no es lo que le interesa.... Porque muchas veces llega un participante con interés, tal vez en tener un mayor conocimiento en tecnología, pero lo que tengo tal vez es inglés conversacional. Dicen: 'pues está bien, yo lo cojo.'"

[In a certain way, we box in participants to whatever is available at the moment, but perhaps that isn't what the participant is interested in.... many times a participant arrives with an interest in obtaining more knowledge, say, in technology, but all I have [at the moment] is conversational English. And so, they say "it's OK, I'll take it"]

Case Manager 2, Local Area 7:

"[Si yo le digo] 'yo ahora mismo lo único que yo tengo es técnica de uña.' [ellos responden] 'Ah, pues sí, está bien, está bien, con tal de tener unos chavitos'... Los proveedores no van a perder [su tiempo] en dar un taller a [solamente] dos personas. ¿Qué hacen los coordinadores? Tampoco es su culpa. Pues 'vente, vente, vente. Yo necesito los 20.' Y verdaderamente, pienso que a veces eso es dinero perdido en una persona que verdaderamente no le interesa, que lo hace por el incentivo.

[If I were to tell the participant] "right now the only thing available is the nail technician course." They'll tell me "It's alright, if I can make a little money". Providers are not going to waste [time] on offering a workshop to just two people. So, what do coordinators do? It's not their fault, they say 'come, come. I need 20.' And truly I think that sometimes that money is wasted in a person who is not really interested. They are merely doing it for the cash incentive.]

Participant 1, Local Area 8

"Lo menos que me ha gustado es en cuestión de la distribución [de cursos]. No sé si eso está en control de ellos, en la distribución de cómo se reparten los talleres, porque hay muchos talleres que a nosotros nos llama la atención, pero son [solamente] para jóvenes."

[What I've disliked the most is the matter of [course] distribution. I don't know if that's under their control—how they distribute the workshops—because there are many workshops that call our attention, but they are only available for the youth [program].]

Key Insight

Local Areas can't always provide at the moment the training or workshops people are looking for. To address this, developing a yearly calendar of workshops and short courses available to clients can help to better plan training activities and keep clients engaged. The DTRH makes long-term projections of which occupations are in most demand by Local Area region. The most recent available projection is for 2020-2030. Local Areas lack information to guide short-term decisions regarding training—information which is essential to respond to changes taking place in their labor market. Local Areas could also stress innovative training and demonstration projects in their Request for Proposals of training providers. Listening to the voices of case managers who have the ear on client's needs is crucial.

Incorporation as NGO can bring benefits to Local Areas

The institutional organization of the Local Area matters for accessing resources. Although all local areas are under de control of the majors of the municipalities through the Majors Board, and the Local Boards, both setting the policies for the local areas, there is variety on their legal structure. Of all 15 local areas, 3 directly operate under only one municipality: San Juan, Carolina and Ponce. Four of the Local Area Boards are incorporated as nonprofits (Local Area Southeast, Local Area Southwest, Local Area North Central and Local Area Caguas-Guayama/AMSI). The others are operating as local areas of workforce development but are not incorporated nor are directly under one municipality, since it is a partnership of different municipalities. For many people who seek services they continue to call them

Consortium. Their legal entity is confusing even for the very employees who were not able to tell us whether they are a municipal, state or NGO. It is important to know that no local area is under the state or directly under PDL- the pass-through state agency. There are no state employees in the local areas.

Being incorporated as an NGO allows local areas to submit proposals to access additional resources. However, in practice only one local area (AMSI) was active in generating proposal funds.⁴ For instance, with funding obtained through competitive proposals AMSI was providing services to special populations like veterans and workers receiving Social Security Disability Income.

It was also noticed that the two local areas interviewed that are under the municipalities are accessing municipal resources such as job opportunities with the municipality and direct connection to municipal activities that can turn out clients like recreational or health fairs. However, being a municipal entity also brings bureaucracy. For instance, municipal local areas told us that the process for contracting providers, and even posting social media, must go through the municipality, reducing agility.

Key Insight

The incorporation of Local Areas as NGOs can bring more funding and expanded services. More education to Local Areas about the benefit of becoming an NGO is needed.

Lack of awareness about Local Area services

The interviews revealed a need to improve the promotion of services offered by Local Areas. Many people in need do not seem to know about the services offered by Local areas. In some cases, it's a physical issue—signs advertising Local Areas are not clearly visible and WIOA offices are often located inside buildings that offer other services and programs. We did not witness much client traffic in most offices we visited.

Former clients themselves are the best WIOA service ambassadors. Most of the participants interviewed have recommended the program to other people they know—often on multiple occasions—and/or were referred to the office themselves by a friend, acquaintance, or family member that has used their services.

Local Areas promote services through social media, by going to local high schools, visiting churches and public housing projects or participating in job fairs and other public service events. Reaching out-of-school youth is particularly difficult. This has led the state office to request waivers that modify youth

⁴ This information was provided by PDL staff through an interview with IDJ research team to clarify aspects from the local area interviews.

program funding, making it so that funds are distributed 50/50 between in and out school youths, instead of the usual 75/25 funding distribution required.

The underutilization of services by the population is surprising since participants are highly satisfied with the services once they've received them. They mention that they don't have to wait long to be enrolled in some training or course, that case managers show genuine interest in their wellbeing and communicate available opportunities, that follow-up and administrative interactions can conveniently occur via phone or email, and that the workshops and trainings are useful.

Case Manager 2, Local Area 1:

"Los jóvenes fuera de la escuela no nos llegan. Es una población que siempre ha sido bien compleja identificar. Los de 16 a 24 los tenemos que buscar por debajo de las piedras."

[Out of school youth are not coming to our offices. It's a population that has always been very difficult to identify. 16- to 24-year-old youths—those we have to look for under the rocks.]

Case Manager 1, Local Area 3:

"Fíjate ahora mismo en el área de jóvenes se está trabajando y ya están casi todos, pero hay que enamorarlos con los incentivos y captarlos en la escuela."

[Right now, we're working on the Youth Program, and we almost have all of them [the spaces filled], but we need to enamor them with cash incentives and make sure to catch them at school.]

Case Manager 1, Local Area 4:

"Hace falta más educación de los programas de Conexión Laboral."

[We need more education about the Labor Connection Program.]

Case Manager 1, Local Area 7:

"No. No llega suficiente gente. Hay que comunicarles que existimos, por qué existimos y para qué existimos."

[No. Not enough people come to our office. We have to communicate to them that we exist, why we exist, and for what purpose we exist.]

Case Manager 1, Local Area 5:

"Yo mejoraría lo que es la promoción del programa...Inclusive, he dado muchas ideas de ir a diferentes medios de comunicación para promocionar el programa."

[I would improve the program's outreach...I've even put out many ideas about going to different media outlets to promote the program.]

Participant 2, Local Area 3, when asked if he would recommend the services to other people, whilst stating that he knew nothing about the services prior to coming to this office:

"Inmediatamente. Inmediatamente. Es más, no sabía [sobre estos servicios], yo creo que yo estoy estrenando algo nuevo aquí. En la vida... ¿dónde estaba esta gente que podía [ayudarme]? Son herramientas."

[Immediately, immediately. What's more, I did not know [about these services], I feel like I am the first person using them. In my life... where were all these people that could [help me]? These are tools]

Case Manager 2, Local Area 7:

"...viene gente que todavía no sabe lo que es esto"

[...we still have people that come here that don't know what this is.]

A top-down bureaucratic model of operations hinders innovation and results in cumbersome processes

A top-down model of government administration emphasizes hierarchies, laws and regulations, funding rules, and program standards.⁵ In Latin America, top-down bureaucratic models emphasize external control of services and reflects a disconnect between those who develop public policy and those who implement them— with a pronounced emphasis on maintaining control of resources.⁶ In Puerto Rico, Santana Rabell (2004) has referred to these practices as the bureaucratic model.⁷

The bureaucratic or top down model was observed in Local Areas. Employees were cautious of not deviating from prescribed orders and guidelines, citing funding matters and the watchful control exerted by the federal government. This phenomenon is something our research team has observed in other agencies as well, often expressed as a feeling that the federal government is always watching and office procedures must comply strictly with federal rules. The common expression "these are federal rules, I can't do anything about it" or "these are federal funds" reflects these attitudes. Oftentimes this can place

5 Agranoff, R., & McGuire, M. "American federalism and the search for models of management." Public Administration Review 61.6 (2001): 671-681.

6 Waissbluth, M., & Larrain, F. (2009). Modelos de gestión pública: implicancias para la planificación, evaluación y control de gestión del Estado. Un mejor Estado para Chile. Propuestas de Modernización y Reforma, 541-559.

7 Santana Rabell, Leonardo. 2015. A reformar la administración pública: de la burocracia a la gobernanza. Escuela de Administración Pública Universidad de Puerto Rico, San Juan Puerto Rico.

government employees in a self-imposed straight jacket that limits the use of certain flexibilities that the WIOA programs allow. Staff automatically default to the status quo, rejecting opportunities for innovation, as well as creative approaches into different ways of doing things.

In addition, although case managers are in tune about what clients are looking for, they have little say on the current training and course catalog. Case managers expressed that training offers need improvement, but they are also quick to point out that they have limited input in decisions concerning training.

The following quotes illustrate the top-down model in operation in most Local Areas interviewed.

Case Manager 2 from Local Area 3 said:

"Recuerda que esto [cualquier cambio] tiene que ser aprobado por la Junta, y que yo no puedo ir más lejos."

[Remember that this [any change] has to be approved by the Board and I cannot go any further.]

Case Manager 2 in Local Area 7 commented:

"...les puedo decir la deficiencia, pero si las personas que toman la decisión...porque yo puedo decir que tengo...una idea, pero si no me dejan, hasta ahí llegó, hasta la burocracia."

[...I can point toward a deficiency, but if the people that make decisions... because I may have an idea, but if they don't allow me , there goes the idea. It only reaches up to that point, up to bureaucracy.]

In Local Areas administered by a municipality, many office decisions must go through the mayor. For instance, the hiring of providers and the naming of participants for ITA accounts or employment services must be signed off by the mayor, resulting in delays in training and work experience availability. Consequently, this may discourage clients from participating along the way, as the process for accessing some services can take weeks.

Local Areas fail to use flexibility in document requirements. One aspect where Local Areas seem to have a "by the book" approach at the expense of client access to services is in the documentation required to receive services. There is research showing that stringent documentation requirements can be a barrier to program participation.⁸ To be clear, the idea here is not to go against the law, but to use the flexibilities that the law confers as stated in the technical assistance guidance issue by DOLETA.⁹ For

⁸ Hahn, H., Pratt, E., and Knowles, S. January 2023. *Strategies for Accessing Public Benefits Access and Retention*. Washington DC: Urban Institute. [Strategies for Improving Public Benefits Access and Retention.pdf \(urban.org\)](#).

⁹ WIOA Title 1 Technical Assistance Guide Eligibility Acceptable Documentation for

instance no interviewed staff mentioned to make use of self-attestation in lieu of missing documents, which is allowed as by DOLETA guidance.¹⁰

While the staff are eager to provide services, at times they feel as if their hands are tied denying access to services because a client is missing some document. However, there is some variation in how Local Areas choose to go about these processes, and in most Local Areas, staff assist the participant in obtaining the required documents.

High school diplomas or certifications of completion are one document that stood out as difficult for older people to get.

People are given a list of required documents necessary to receive services. The mere presence of this list could be overwhelming and turn off some participants, even when there are alternative documents that could be provided to meet the requirements. For instance, various Local Areas list a birth certificate as a required document. This can turn off participants because of the perceived burden in obtaining these sorts of documents. However, WIOA regulations do not require a birth certificate. Instead, regulations require proof of age, which can easily be attested to with something like a driver's license.

Some Local Areas accept documents sent electronically, but others don't. In some Local Areas the client must show evidence of the original versions for the office to retain copies, while in others copies are enough.

Case manager 1 from Local Area 5

... said that if the individual provides a driver's license, she will not ask for a birth certificate. She stated, "I am going to do what is easiest for the client." Likewise, when asked what she liked most about the services, one participant from that same Local Area answered that she appreciated that the intake process did not require many documents.

The following quotes demonstrate how case managers deal with document requirements.

Case Manager 2, Local Area 6:

"Hemos ido minimizando la documentación—que yo creo que eso a veces es mucho lo que nos limita. Minimizar la documentación e ir directamente a la necesidad y trabajarla. Entiendo que es lo mejor."

[We have been minimizing documentation— which I believe is a big part of what is limiting us. Minimizing documentation and jumping straight into [the client's] needs and working on them. I understand that is the best way.]

Training and Employment Guidance Letter NO. 23-19, Change 2. May 12, 2023.

<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/advisories/TEGL/2019/TEGL%2023-19%2C%20Change%202/TEGL%2023-19%20Change%202%2028Complete%20PDF%29.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid.

“Realmente una cosa es lo que te dice la ley—cómo se deben trabajar los servicios—y otra cosa es cómo en la realidad, tú los estás canalizando, porque te topaste con él. Yo no me puedo dar el lujo de dejar pasar un cliente que yo conseguí porque tengo un protocolo que seguir. ...Tal vez invierta un poco el orden porque es más eficiente, no lo voy a dejar ir [el cliente].”

[In reality, there's what the law states—how we should work and carry out services—and then there's how you are actually channeling [these processes] because you are confronted with it. I can't afford to dismiss a client I found simply because I have a protocol to follow...[instead] I may be able to invert the process because it is more efficient. I am not going to let him [the client] go.]

There were incongruencies regarding how different Local Areas apply the document requirement of 1) proof of household composition and 2) selective service.

With respect to household composition, clients may present the certification from the Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP) which already provides proof of household composition. Clients who don't receive NAP can self-assert household composition. However, some Local Areas require document certification coming from a neighbor, certifying the participant's household composition. This specific requirement may be regarded as intrusive and off-putting. One Local Area stated they asked for the document because it was a WIOA requirement. After verifying the required document list, we found this not to be the case.

Proof of inscription in the United States Selective Service is another document that can sometimes prove difficult for older workers to have. This requirement affects equity in various dimensions. It has a disparate impact on gender, driving the exclusion of men into the program since women are not required to register. Moreover, the exclusionary impact is larger on men that do not pursue a college education, since men that do not assist college are unlikely to ever come across a situation where this document is needed. Those that go to college may have it simply because it is required to apply for the Pell Grant and student loans. Moreover, because Puerto Rico is not a state, local awareness of registration may be lower. In 2023, the average registration rate for men ages 18 to 25 in the whole of the United States and its territories was 84%.¹¹ In Puerto Rico, it was 74%.¹²

A lack of use of flexibilities was perceived in Local Areas regarding the selective service requirement. Two case managers explicitly stated that if a participant does not possess a selective service registration, they cannot receive WIOA services. One of those case managers expressed her sadness when services had to be denied for this reason. Another spoke of denying immigrants these services because they do not possess this document. Some mentioned consulting the pass-through agency (PDL) regarding the eligibility of immigrants with no selective service registration and yet another sent a direct consultation to the Selective Service System.

Nonetheless, Guidance Letter No. 11-11 Change 2 is clear in that some immigrants older than 26 may be exempted from selective service documentation, as may individuals older than 26 who were

¹¹ Selective Service System About the Agency

[https://www.sss.gov/about/#:~:text=Registration%20Compliance%20\(CY%202023\),Registration%20Rate%20is%2084%20percent](https://www.sss.gov/about/#:~:text=Registration%20Compliance%20(CY%202023),Registration%20Rate%20is%2084%20percent)

¹² Selective Service System. Registration Compliance Data by States, Territories, and the District of Columbia.

<https://www.sss.gov/registration-compliance-data/>

incarcerated during the age of inscription. It is also evident that the Local Area can decide based on documentation and self-attestation from the participant whether the person *willfully and knowingly* decided not to register, in which case services can be denied. But almost all case managers stated that the decision must be made by the Selective Service System itself, which is not the case.

The following quotes show instances of how Local Areas deal with the selective service documentation.

Case Manager 2, Local Area 8:

"Yo me tengo que amparar en lo que dice la ley y la ley me dice que es obligatorio el [documento] del servicio selectivo."

[I have to obey the law and the law says that the selective service [the document] is mandatory.]

When asked if the person is an immigrant or was incarcerated in the past, Case Manager 2 from Local Area 8 said:

"Eso resuélvelo con ellos [el Sistema de Servicio Selectivo]. Yo no puedo irme por encima [de la ley]. La ley, en ningún lado me dice que yo tengo que perdonar eso...Si la persona ya cumplió 26 años, ya pasó de la fecha de inscripción, ellos no lo van a perdonar.

[That must be dealt directly with them [the Selective Service System]. I can't go above it [the law]. Nowhere in the law does it say that I have to ignore that ... If the person is over the age of 26, they are not going to forgive him.]

Other expressions regarding the requirement of selective service registration were the following:

Case Manager 1, Local Area 8:

"Eso no puede fallar...Hay que llamar al servicio selectivo. Se hace la llamada. Se corrobora la información."

[This cannot be passed over. We have to call Selective Service. We make the call. We corroborate the information.]

Case Manager 2, Local Area 2:

"Si no está inscrito, no puede participar con nosotros."

[If he isn't registered, he cannot be our participant.]

Case Manager 1, Local Area 3:

No es eligible, pero no es porque no queremos. Es porque la ley lo establece y los Estados Unidos de América.

[He will not be eligible, but it's not because we don't want to [accept the client]. It's because this is established by law and by the United States of America.]

Key Insight

The top-down model can be seen in Local Areas in two ways. First, case managers seldom use the flexibilities afforded by the WIOA law with respect to certain procedures, such as the documents that are required. Second, case managers have very little say in training decisions and office operations. These problems can be solved through memos and training from PDL reminding of the flexibilities allowed by the law and by Local Area Boards devising ways to get inputs from case managers and participants about how to improve services.

Puerto Rico's demographic change is playing out in Local Areas

Puerto Rico is undergoing a drastic demographic change, brought primarily by outmigration. Puerto Rico's total population has declined by 12% since 2012— which represents over 400,000 people. The population comprising ages 14 to 24—the focus of WIOA's Youth Program— was estimated at 415,000 in 2022, 24% less than in 2012. This population is unlikely to grow in the near future, since the number of children ages 0 to 13 declined by 42% during the same period. However, the age group that *is* growing is that of 55 and older, with a growth of 17%.

This demographic change is being played out in the Local Areas. Several Local Areas reported challenges attracting young participants, whilst simultaneously reporting an increase in clients who are in their fifties looking for services—even retirees.

Local Areas have partially adapted to the demographic change, for example offering training in care services for the elderly, an occupation in high demand.

As communicated by case managers, older workers that come in for services have often lost their jobs after decades of working in the same place or industry. These workers are oftentimes looking for a career change or to upgrade their skills. Coming in are also women in their fifties and older who have spent years child rearing and as homemakers, and are now looking for a formal job to pay their social security. Some have separated from their husbands and are presently left with little money and assistance to live on. Finally, there are also retirees looking for workshops as a form of distraction or socializing activity but have no interest in becoming employed and case workers have to learn how to manage these cases because they are not eligible unless they are willing and able to work. Older workers may also experience greater difficulties in accessing ITA accounts than younger participants.

Serving the older population brings challenges to Local Areas. The following quotes from older dislocated workers illustrate the difficulties they face.

Participant 3, Local Area 3:

"Es mi primera vez [desempleado]. Ha sido una etapa muy interesante en mi vida y he tenido que fortalecerme mental y espiritualmente. Trabajo desde los trece años. Nunca he parado y en la generación de nosotros estamos como que, diseñados para eso, para siempre sentirnos productivos. Así que ha sido bien retante. No me he querido rendir de mi País. Tengo compromisos aquí."

[This is my first time [unemployed]. It's been a very interesting stage in my life, and I have had to make myself stronger mentally and spiritually. I've been working since I was 13 years old and I've never stopped, and our generation, we are like designed for that, for always feeling productive. So, it's been very challenging. I don't want to give up on my country. I have commitments here.]

Participant 1, Local Area 8:

"...trabajé diez días en la fábrica de cartones como operador de montacargas, porque ya yo había adquirido experiencia en el manejo de equipos pesados...Entonces empecé. A los diez días me dijeron 'empiezas el lunes de noche' y le dije, 'no mi pana, no'. Yo le dije, 'yo hice eso de joven y dije ahora no, no, no, le dije 'a mi edad yo no puedo empezar a trabajar de noche. Lo siento.'"

[... I worked 10 days in a cardboard factory operating loading machines because I have experience operating heavy equipment... So, I started and after ten days they told me 'Next Monday you start the night shift. I told them, 'No, dude, no, no. I told him I did that when I was younger, and now, no. I told him, I can't start working nights at my age. I'm sorry.]

Participant 2, Local Area 7:

"...después de tanto tiempo uno quedarse sin trabajo, cambió toda mi vida por completo. Y pues ... fue bien difícil. Tuve que entregar mi apartamento. Caí en una depresión. Pues esto [los servicios de WIOA] me ayudó a reconocer que todavía yo puedo hacer muchas cosas. Siento

que yo pensaba que no, que ya soy mayor de edad, no puedo hacer muchas cosas. Pero esto me ayudó emocionalmente a salir—que yo puedo hacer lo que yo quiera y he aprendido.”

[“...after all that time, finding yourself jobless, my life completely changed. And it was very difficult. I had to foreclose on my apartment. I fell into a depression. So, this [WIOA services] helped me realize that I can still do many things, this helped me to emotionally come out, it helped me realize that I can do whatever I want, and I’ve learned.”]

Key Insight

As the number of young people declines and that of older people increases, more services will eventually have to be dedicated and shaped to tend to older workers within the Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs. Local Areas may have to solve this challenge by increasing funding to adult and displaced workers. Older workers also arrive in Local Areas with significant trauma caused by the loss of their jobs. Case managers may have to be trained in how to better serve this population's emotional vulnerabilities. Future training will need to be needed to serve this population. Local Areas may also find themselves having to serve more spouses of older displaced workers, who are also eligible for services under WIOA.

Local Areas are in need of investments

The site visits made it evident that Local Areas have considerable resource needs, although there are variations among them. Some Local Areas have a sole case manager, and some lack the staff to perform outreach to potential employers. Conversely, other Local Areas have occupational counselors, case managers, outreach coordinators, and follow-up staff, all of them ready to serve in a specific location. Staff credentials also vary. Some have graduate degrees in counseling, others are social workers or industrial psychologists. Others still started out decades ago as administrative assistants and have climbed up the professional ladder through their performance and gained experience over the years. Others have obtained professional certifications in coaching paid for by themselves or by the WIOA office.

While most Local Areas offices we visited had comfortable sitting and client interviewing areas, some lack quiet and private spaces to meet with participants. Some have the capacity and spaciousness to conduct workshops, while others must arrange for meeting spots outside the office. About Local Areas

comprising several municipalities, there is a distinct variation among them in the services available to residents outside the Local Area's central office.

Some Local Areas comprising of various towns have full-service offices in various towns while others only have satellite offices with only one service person- often in the city hall, and others only have the central office. This is in fact a problem for accessing services since public transportation from town to town is highly limited—virtually nonexistent outside the metro area of San Juan— and many participants lack transportation. Some Local Areas provide transportation for those who need it, although it was not possible to assess how effective this service is.

Several supervisors expressed difficulties in recruiting staff, an important challenge considering that a high share of staff is eligible for retirement. Low wages and a lack of professionals were cited as reasons for hiring difficulties.

As seen in **Table 1**, the average years of experience of interviewed staff was 20, and many of them have 30 or more years of experience. This means that many Local Area offices will need new staff in just a few years.

Local Areas are also in need of updated technology. This could increase case management efficiency and accuracy of program outcome data. Updated technology would also make it easier to access online tests and tools. Case managers are constantly following up with clients during their work development activities. The program requires following up on information regarding client outcomes for up to one year after completing the activity. Case managers perform follow ups via phone, and sometimes they'll even visit the client's community, as per one interviewee. Following up with young participants is especially difficult, because, as various case managers indicated, young participants change phone numbers very frequently. One alternative to reduce time spent on follow ups and increase the accuracy of the data is to link the client's record to the administrative data employers report to the Department of Labor and Human Resources. Case managers also collect hard copies of payrolls from participants by either going to their workplace and picking them up or having the participants bring them to the office. This is a process that could be made more efficient with technology. At least one office mentioned the need for a better case management software.

Key Insight

Addressing staff development, job compensation, infrastructure and space, and technological needs of Local Areas, as well as improving access to Local Area centers for participants living in rural or far off areas should be a funding priority. Also developing more accurate ways to follow clients' outcomes through matching with administrative data from Department of Labor or innovative software should also be prioritized.

Promising practices

The interviews uncovered several promising practices by Local Areas. These strategies could be useful to other localities to boost outreach, increase the number of clients, and improve employment and credential-earning outcomes. Some of these are the following:

1. Intensive coaching, follow up, feedback, and actively listening to the client are practices that appear to lead to success with regards to completion of program activities. Staff should receive training on how to hone these skills, use them across all case managers and prevent emotional burnout.
2. Use the flexibility and alternatives permitted under WIOA with respect to document requirements. Intake specialists and case managers should also accept documents via email.
3. Local Area Boards should listen to and consider ideas for innovation and process efficiency put forth by case managers and other office staff that are actively working with participants. There should also be an established internal process where staff can provide this type of input.
4. Local Areas should redistribute and rearrange their office spaces so that client and case managers have privacy during interviews and meetings are conducted as effectively as possible.
5. Make intensive use of social media to promote services, but also ask for the community's help in spreading the word, using successful clients as ambassadors and partnering with religious centers, non-profit organizations and community leaders as allies in outreach activities.
6. Receptionists and intake specialists are key to the client experience. Local Areas should make sure they are well trained and offer complete information about WIOA services as well as other system partners to potential clients.

7. Ensure that all clients make it to a second stage, or even a second visit, after the first time they come to the office. The “all clients should leave with something”.
8. Make it a point that every participant leaves with some alternative, suggestion or guidance even when the specific service the client is looking for is not immediately available. The “everybody leaves with something” approach keep clients engaged and likely to foster completion of activities.
9. Conduct confidential, comprehensive interviews with all clients.
10. Work closely with WIOA-required partners and other agencies to enhance the experience of clients through service integration.

Promising practices in youth programs

1. Treat them well. A case manager told us: “Los nenes siempre llegan a donde los tratan bien.” *[Kids always come to where they are treated well.]*
2. Guide them. Developing a one-on-one connection and ‘guiding the youth’ is essential to complete the program.
3. Expose youth to workshops before starting employment and study programs. A case worker shared that she takes youth through soft skill workshop activities before finding them a job placement or providing them with ITA accounts. This exposure better prepares them for future employment and education.
4. Use technology to communicate with young people. Communication via text messages was expressed to be as or even more effective than phone calls.
5. Be available. Many young people are dealing with a host of issues that require an empathetic ear before services are provided.

Policy changes from the ground up

The conversations carried out with case managers and client-participants, along with the main findings presented in prior sections, provided further insights into possible policy changes within WIOA and Local Areas of workforce development.

1. Carefully and strategically revise the occupations in high demand registry to make sure they include innovative occupations that are in demand but still small as to make them to the top of most in demand. Local boards have a lot of power in this regard and can shape the training offerings in their local areas.

2. Ensure there is proper alignment between employment outcomes and workshops provided; as well as between employment outcomes and the short courses offered. Center workshops around skills most likely to increase employment and earnings.
3. Link participant employment and earnings to the Quarterly Census of Wages and Employment of the Department of Labor and Human Resources to increase the accuracy of outcome reporting and reduce the time case managers have to dedicate following up with participants.
4. Invest in the Local Areas. This includes investing in technology and in office infrastructure to make services more accessible. It also includes investments in staff in areas like compensation and capacitation, and making sure all are properly certified as coaches.
5. Promote the use of Local Area services through more aggressive advertising, media outreach, community alliances, improved agency integration, former participant ambassadorships and their success stories, and strengthening the Conexión Laboral brand.
6. Provide clear guidance on document requirements, especially with respect to selective service and document substitution.
7. Advocate for the elimination of selective service requirement in WIOA Title I services since it disproportionately impacts men with no college education, reducing equity.
8. Promote and incentivize the incorporation of Local Areas so they can pursue additional funding via competitive proposals.
9. Promote innovation in workforce development training by frequently requesting proposals of innovative demonstrative projects.
10. Conduct frequent impact evaluations in Local Areas.



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