EMPOWERING THE US WORKFORCE THROUGH STATE-SPECIFIC INITIATIVES

By David Holthaus

The U.S. workforce has experienced a dynamic shift in recent years as skepticism toward 4-year college degrees increases. This changing market requires workforce skills and training adaptation to ensure U.S. workers remain competitive.

Passed in 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, or WIOA, aims to modernize the nation’s workforce system by increasing eligible participants’ employment, retention, and salary nationwide. Learn more about WIOA at https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa.

While WIOA provides the policy foundation to create programs encouraging a highly skilled and competitive workforce, it also recognizes the necessity for state-specific solutions and strategies that align with industry standards. Discover each of the 50 state-specific workforce development programs below.

STATE-SPECIFIC WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Alabama
The AlabamaWorks initiative partners with businesses, education providers, and local workforce development boards to support job training and employment opportunities. Specific initiatives can include on-the-job training, and employers may receive up to 75% reimbursement. Learn more: https://wioa-alabama.org/on-the-job-training-2

Alaska
Alaska’s Department of Labor and Workforce Development has a State Training and Employment Program (STEP). Some benefits of participating in this program are increased earning potential and a competitive edge for employers. Learn more: https://awib.alaska.gov/training-programs/step.htm

Arizona
Arizona’s workforce development initiatives, which are administered through Arizona@Work, include the Incumbent Workforce Training Program, On-the-Job Training, and the Customized Training Program. Learn more: https://arizonaatwork.com/recruit-talent/training-programs

Arkansas
Arkansas Future Fit creates training programs intended to address critical roles within the manufacturing industry, in collaboration with community colleges. The program is aimed at high school graduates, military veterans, and underrepresented populations. Learn more: https://www.arkansasedc.com/business-resources/existing-business/programs-training/future-fit-arkansas-workforce-training-aedc

California
California’s Employment Training Panel (ETP) is an employer-driven program that provides funding to help enhance workforce skills through
training, targeting high-wage and long-term employment in sectors such as technology, manufacturing, and health care. Learn more: https://etp.ca.gov/planning-your-training/training-opportunities

Colorado
The Colorado First and Existing Industry (CFEI) grants provide customized job training for companies relocating to or expanding in Colorado. These grants support designing and implementing training programs that help workers acquire new skills for a better future. Learn more: https://cccs.edu/cf eius-customized-job-training-grants

Connecticut
Connecticut’s Incumbent Worker Training Program grants primarily focus on the manufacturing sector. This program provides financial assistance from $5,000 to $50,000 per calendar year to Connecticut manufacturers for employee training and aims to improve productivity, innovation, and competitiveness. Learn more: https://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Content/Business-Development/07_Identify_Develop_Talent/Train-Talent/Incumbent-Worker-Training-Program

Delaware
The Delaware Pathways is a collaborative workforce development program that prepares students, employees, and organizations for in-demand careers. The program’s website can be searched for specialized training opportunities based on location. Learn more: https://delawarepathways.org

Florida
The Florida Job Growth Grant Fund supports public infrastructure and workforce training. The fund aims to encourage more businesses to choose Florida as a site for expansion and improve the workforce’s skills to meet employers’ needs. Learn more: https://www.floridajobs.org/jobgrowth

Georgia
Georgia’s Quick Start program has operated for more than 40 years and is free for any qualified company. Quick Start offers customized training in a variety of sectors including automotive, manufacturing, and biotechnology, using advanced strategies and equipment. Learn more: https://www.georgiaquickstart.org/who-we-are

Hawaii
Hawaii’s Employment & Training Fund (ETF) supports businesses in upgrading their existing employees’ skills. There are two types of ETF funding sources:
1. ETF Macro: ETF Macro provides specific training in high-growth occupational or industry areas.
2. ETF Micro: For individuals and businesses looking to upgrade the job skills of their employees in areas like management, health, medical training, soft skills training, and more.
Learn more: https://labor.hawaii.gov/wdd/employers/etf

Idaho
The Idaho Workforce Development Training Fund aims to help businesses offset the costs of training new or current employees. The combination of private and public funds promotes innovation, economic growth, and ROI for this state by increasing wages, major capital investments in its main industries, and job creation. Learn more: https://wdc.idaho.gov/grants

Illinois
The Illinois WorkNet initiative connects job seekers with training programs, including those at community colleges and programs approved by WIOA, tailored to industries such as information technology and commercial driving. Learn more: https://www.illinoisworknet.com/Training/Pages/WIOATrainingProgramSearch.aspx

Indiana
Next Level Jobs Indiana trains state residents for high-demand positions in advanced manufacturing, construction, health, life sciences, information technology, business services, transportation, and logistics industries with the prospect of increased earnings following certification. Learn more: https://nextleveljobs.org

Iowa
Iowa’s 260F (Iowa Industrial New Jobs Training Program) provides job training services for employees of eligible businesses. These eligible businesses will work with community colleges to assess training needs and provide the appropriate funding to complete an approved course at little to no cost. Learn more: https://workforce.iowa.gov/employers/build-your-workforce/training-programs-and-tax-credits/260f

Kansas
The Workforce AID (Aligned with Industry Demand) initiative, launched by the Kansas Department of Commerce and the Kansas Board of Regents, aims to create a workforce with high-demand skills. Approved organizations can get reimbursement of up to 50% of training costs. Learn more: https://www.kansascommerce.gov/program/workforce-services/ktrain

Kentucky
The Bluegrass State Skills Corporation (BSSC) Grant Reimbursement Program offers grants to businesses for training new, highly skilled workers. Businesses in manufacturing, agribusiness, nonretail service or technology, headquarters operations, hospital operations, and more can apply for training reimbursements. Learn more: https://ced.ky.gov/Workforce/BSSC

Louisiana
The Louisiana Incumbent Worker Training Program (IWTP) is an employer-driven program that trains workers to upgrade their skills with customized training solutions. While some requirements exist, the program is available for most companies in this state. Learn more: https://www.laworks.net/workforcedev/iwtp/iwtp_mainmenu.asp

Maine
The Maine Quality Centers (MQC) program provides customized workforce training for new and expanding businesses throughout the state. From safety training to comprehensive programs that teach workers how to operate heavy machinery or develop management skills, this program covers on-demand courses for Maine residents. Learn more: https://www.mqcs.me.edu/workforce-training/mainecareercenter.gov/cssp.shtml
**Maryland**
The Partnership for Workforce Quality (PWQ) in Maryland provides matching training grants to small and mid sized businesses in manufacturing and technology. This partnership reimburses up to 50% of the costs of eligible projects. Learn more: https://commerce.maryland.gov/grow/partnership-for-workforce-quality-pwq

**Massachusetts**
The Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund Program (WTFP) offers training resources to improve job skills and organizational competitiveness. Learn more: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/workforce-training-fund-programs-wtfp

**Michigan**
Michigan’s Going PRO Talent Fund supports employee training to foster the development of new and in-demand skills. Training funded by this program can include upskilling current workers, offering apprenticeships, and creating customized training. Learn more: https://www.michigan.gov/leo/bureaus-agencies/wd/programs-services/going-pro-talent-fund

**Minnesota**
The Minnesota Job Skills Partnership (MJSP) awards grants to educational institutions for the development and delivery of training programs in collaboration with businesses. The grants can be up to $400,000 and help educational institutions create and deliver custom training courses. Learn more: https://mn.gov/deed/business/financing-business/training-grant/partnership

**Mississippi**
The Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund (WETF), administered by the Mississippi Community College Board, is designed to support the training needs of businesses and help create and retain high-quality jobs. The program offers customizable training services to new and existing businesses and industries across the state. Learn more: https://acceleratemns.org/employer-resources

**Missouri**
The Missouri One Start program is designed to help businesses with tailored workforce strategies, including customizable recruitment and training solutions. The program serves new and existing businesses needing training for workers in technical skills and competencies. Learn more: https://missourionestart.com

**Montana**
The Incumbent Worker Training Program (IWT) offers funding assistance to small Montana-based businesses wanting to train or upskill their current employees. It supports specialized skill development to keep businesses and workers competitive. Learn more: https://prosperamt.org/incumbent-worker-training-iwt-grants

**Nebraska**
The Nebraska Worker Training Program provides competitive grants to businesses to train employees. The program aims to enhance the workforce’s skills, increase productivity, and maintain the competitiveness of Nebraska businesses in national and global markets. Learn more: https://www.dltgrants.info/Grant-Details/gid/59181

**Nevada**
Nevada’s Train Employees Now (TEN) initiative funds workforce training for employers expanding or relocating to the state. It may fund up to 75% of eligible costs to help businesses improve their worker’s skills. Learn more: http://www.employmentincentives.com/state_incentives/documents/Nevada/SummTrainEmployeesNow.pdf

**New Hampshire**
The New Hampshire Job Training Fund offers grants to businesses looking to train or retrain employees. This includes funding for projects that upgrade employee skills, increase productivity, and help companies in New Hampshire stay competitive in their industry. Learn more: https://www.nh.gov/services/employers/work-invest-nh.htm

**New Jersey**
The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development offers training grants to enhance worker skills, with a focus on underrepresented populations, such as women, minorities, and veterans. Learn more: https://www.nj.gov/labor/research-info/grants.shtml

**New Mexico**
The Job Training Incentive Program (JTIP) in New Mexico funds training for newly created jobs in eligible businesses, with emphasis on technology and manufacturing sectors. The program reimburses 50–90% of employee wages and offers programs to manufacturing, retail, and certain green industries. Learn more: https://edd.newmexico.gov/business-development/edd-programs-for-business/job-training-incentive-program

**New York**
The New York State Workforce Development Initiative provides grants and incentives to businesses that commit to creating and retaining jobs, primarily through workforce development and training efforts. These programs will provide funding of up to 90% for eligible businesses. Learn more: https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Building-Operations-and-Maintenance-Workforce-Development-Training-Program

**North Carolina**
The NCWorks Customized Training Program supports education and training for new, expanding, and existing businesses in North Carolina. Learn more: https://www.commerce.nc.gov/grants-incentives/NCWorksCustomizedTrainingProgram

**North Dakota**
The TrainND program, supported by the North Dakota Department of Commerce, provides customized training services to businesses in that state, including upskilling employees in job roles in competitive industries. Learn more: https://trainnd.com

**Ohio**
The Ohio TechCred program reimburses employers who help their employees earn technology-focused credentials to keep Ohio’s workforce competitive in a tech-driven economy. This program may reimburse up to $2,000 per student per course. Learn more: https://techcred.ohio.gov

**Oklahoma**
Oklahoma Works is an initiative that brings Oklahomans into the workforce with training and education. Employers can access resources for training and retaining their workforce by an eligible provider. Learn more: https://oklahoma.gov/workforce/job-seekers/training.html

**Oregon**
The Oregon Workforce and Talent Development Board (WTDB) creates a highly skilled workforce in Oregon by including strategies and appren-
The Workforce & Economic Development Network of Pennsylvania (WEDnetPA) initiative allows Pennsylvania companies to train new and existing employees through customized skills and information technology training programs, offering direct assistance and making the Pennsylvania workforce more productive and competitive. Learn more: https://www.wednetpa.com

Rhode Island
Real Jobs Rhode Island is a workforce development program designed to ensure that Rhode Island employers have the tools to compete and grow while providing targeted education and skills training to Rhode Island workers. The program facilitates business, education, and government partnerships. Learn more: https://dlr.sd.gov/workforce-development-board

South Dakota
South Dakota UpSkill provides training opportunities for workers across the state. The program assists individuals in learning the skills required for in-demand jobs by connecting them with a job recruiting officer, training, and tools to kickstart their professional careers. Credit: https://dlt.sd.gov/workforce/services/individuals/sdupskill/default.aspx

Tennessee
Tennessee Reconnect is primarily an initiative to allow adults to earn an associate degree or technical certificate free of tuition and fees, but it also supports workforce development by improving the qualifications of the state's workforce. Learn more: https://tnreconnect.gov

Texas
Texas offers the Skills Development Fund, a program that provides customized training opportunities for Texas businesses and workers to increase their skill levels and wages. Employers can collaborate with local community colleges to create training programs to meet workforce needs and industry standards. Learn more: https://teex.org/twc-skills-development

Utah
Utah's Custom Fit program is designed to provide companies with customized employee training. The program offers significant funding to offset training costs, making it easier for businesses to prepare their workforce for industry needs. Learn more: https://business.utah.gov/articles/custom-fit-provides-tailored-training

Vermont
For more than 30 years, the Vermont Training Program (VTP) has supported employees by funding pre-employment, on-the-job, and skill upgrade training. While it caters to various sectors, technology-based businesses can especially benefit from this workforce development initiative. Learn more: https://accd.vermont.gov/economic-development/vtp

Virginia
Virginia’s FastForward program is a workforce training initiative that provides short-term training courses through community colleges. These programs help Virginians gain the credentials and skills needed for in-demand technology, health care, and skilled trades jobs. Learn more: https://fastforwardva.org/program-details

Washington
Career Connect Washington is an initiative that aims to create a system where young people and high school graduates can access education and training directly for in-demand jobs, such as through apprenticeships and hands-on learning experiences. Learn more: https://washingtonstem.org/ccw-lights-up-equitable-career-pathways

West Virginia
West Virginia Invests is a financial aid program that covers tuition and fees for those enrolled in certificate or associate degree programs in high-demand fields at West Virginia's community and technical colleges. Learn more: https://www.collegeforwv.com/programs/invest-grant

Wisconsin
The Wisconsin Fast Forward program offers grants to businesses to help train workers in key industries, including advanced manufacturing and information technology. Learn more: https://wisconsinfastforward.com

Wyoming
The Wyoming Works program provides students resources to gain skills and credentials, leading to employment in Wyoming’s top industries and encouraging community colleges to create in-demand programs. Learn more: https://communitycolleges.wy.edu/wyoming-works-program