



WIOA: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Provider Guide for Nonprofit Education,
Employment and Training Organizations

SPRING 2026

Executive Summary

What is WIOA?

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is a federal workforce development law designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market. WIOA funding in Denver is administered locally through the Denver Workforce Region by Eckerd Connects.

Who is this for?

This guide is designed specifically for nonprofit education and training providers in Denver who want to understand how to partner with the WIOA program to serve their participants. Whether you work with young adults aged 16–24, working-age adults, or employers, this workbook explains eligibility requirements, the referral process, what funding can cover, and how to navigate the partnership process effectively.

Similar processes are in place across the state in local workforce centers if you are outside of the City and County of Denver and WIOA uses and eligibility largely remains the same. Find information for your local workforce center [here](#).

Key Facts at a Glance

ADMINISTERING AGENCY	Eckerd Connects
SERVICE REGION	Denver Workforce Region
GEOGRAPHIC ELIGIBILITY	Any Colorado resident. Denver is one of the only workforce regions in Colorado with no residency restriction
PROGRAM TYPES	Out-of-School Youth (Next Gen), Adult & Dislocated Worker & other discretionary grants
CONTACT	nextgenden@eckerd.org

ELIGIBLE USES OF WIOA Funding

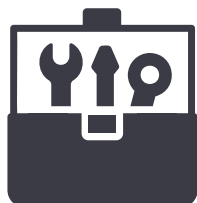


GED and Basic Skills support

Youth program only



Education & Occupational Skills Training



Supportive Services

Including transportation/bus passes, tools, clothing, boots, testing fees, etc. while in training



On-the-Job Training (OJT)

Up to 50% of participant wages (reimbursement)
Registered apprenticeships - 1 year of tuition costs, depending on funding available

Workforce Center Services

Once enrolled in a WIOA program, participants are eligible to access workforce center services such as career exploration, resume development, and interview coaching. The workforce program also helps to make connections with other organizations that provide resources and supportive services the participant may benefit from.

Note: Funding is never guaranteed. WIOA awards are determined on a case-by-case basis. Caps change each program year. The average amount is \$3,000, but awards can go up to \$6,000 per participant.

OVERVIEW OF Programs



Out of School Youth (ages 16-24)

Career readiness, training, and education support for young adults not enrolled in credit-bearing programs who face specific barriers.



Adults (18+)

Occupational training and supportive services for working-age adults who are legally authorized to work in the U.S.



Dislocated Workers

Specialized support for individuals who have lost their job through no fault of their own and are unlikely to return to the previous industry or occupation usually due to outdated skills, job loss, mass layoff, military move, or other economic conditions.

Note:

WIOA is a career readiness program. Participants should be able to successfully engage with training before training dollars are pursued. Case managers work to address the most significant barriers first.

Participants should demonstrate sufficient stability in both personal and professional circumstances to be able to fully engage in training. This includes showing the ability to attend appointments consistently, arriving on time, accountability to program expectations, etc.

NextGen Program

OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

The Out-of-School Youth program (known locally as “NextGen”) serves young adults aged 16–24 who are not currently enrolled in a credit-bearing educational program and who face one or more qualifying barriers. This is WIOA’s most comprehensive individual support program, offering career coaching, barrier navigation, and potential training and education funding.

WIOA Out-of-School Youth Eligibility Questions

Note: Pre-qualifying questions are asked during an initial screening conversation. A participant who does not meet any barrier does not qualify for youth WIOA funding.

Youth Eligibility:

AGE & ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENTS

Participants must be:

- Between 16 and 24 years of age
- Out of school (not currently enrolled in any credit-bearing program) (Can be self-attested)

BARRIER CRITERIA

Participants must meet at least one of the following barrier criteria. These are self-attested by the participant, no documentation or third-party verification is required for most barriers:

Qualifying Barriers (at least one required):

- Currently pregnant or parenting (Can be self-attested)
- Current and/or previous involvement with the justice system (Can be self-attested)
- Experiencing homelessness without a stable address (Can be self-attested)
- Currently or previously involved in the foster care system
- Has a disability (Can be self-attested)
- Left high school without graduating (Can be self-attested)
- Lives in a high-poverty or high-crime zip code

ADDITIONAL NOTE FOR MALES / ASSIGNED MALE AT BIRTH

Males or individuals assigned male at birth aged 18–26 must be registered with Selective Service (or have a valid exemption) to be eligible for WIOA youth funding.

HOMELESSNESS DEFINITION

An individual experiencing homelessness qualifies under WIOA if they meet any of the following:

- Lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence
- Is sharing housing due to economic hardship, loss of housing, or similar reason
- Is living in a motel, hotel, trailer park, or campground due to lack of alternatives
- Is living in an emergency or transitional shelter
- Has a primary nighttime residence that is a non-standard sleeping location (car, park, abandoned building, station, etc.)

A participant imprisoned or detained under an Act of Congress or State law does NOT meet the homelessness definition. A participant temporarily sleeping away from their home also does not qualify on that basis alone.

PROCESS

How to Access Youth Services

Step 1: Initial Referral

Email nextgenden@eckerd.org with the participant's name and best contact information. This initiates the referral into the Next Gen program.

Step 2: Career Coach Outreach

A WIOA Career Coach sets up a call with the youth. A 10-minute call is held with the youth and workforce center staff together to begin the screening process.

Step 3: Eligibility and Interest Determination

During the call, the Career Coach determines whether the participant meets eligibility criteria and whether they are interested in moving forward.

● Eligibility

If eligibility is **YES**, continue to steps 4-6.

If eligibility is **NO**, The participant is referred to WIOA Adult services if they are interested and meet adult eligibility criteria (see Section 2 of this guide). If youth is 16 or 17, a referral can be made to the In-School-Youth program.

Step 4: Application

The participant completes a 1-hour online application covering personal information, short and long-term goals, strengths, and challenges. The participant must have a Real ID OR a birth certificate and social security card.

Step 5: Career Coach Review

The Career Coach reviews the application and assesses the participant's situation holistically, and sends it back to the youth for approval. If significant barriers exist (e.g. housing instability), the program will coordinate with other agencies to stabilize the participant before pursuing training dollars.

Step 6: Enrollment Complete

The youth is now eligible for and enrolled in WIOA services such as career exploration, resume building, interview coaching, and case management.

Once a youth is enrolled in the program, they will need to meet with the WIOA Case Manager once a month and the education and training provider will need to complete reporting requirements.

ELIGIBLE USES OF Youth Funding

After Participant is Enrolled

WIOA youth funding can support a variety of needs during the training and career readiness process. Funding is determined on a case-by-case basis. The FY 2026 funding allowance is approximately \$3,000 per participant but can go up to \$6,000.

Transportation

Bus passes may be provided for the participant while they are actively participating in a training program. Proof of need must be verified. At time of enrollment, participant would need to disclose that they do not have access to reliable transportation such as a car, bike, etc. Transportation assistance is limited to those who are participating in training, Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs), On the Job Training Experiences (OJTs), work experiences, interviewing, accepting a new job, etc.

GED & Essential Skill Development

Includes transportation/bus passes, tools, clothing, boots, testing fees, etc. while in training.

Tools & Supplies

Required tools and supplies for a training program may be covered within the voucher funding limits. Non-required or excessive supplies are not eligible.

Tuition and Training

Funding can cover tuition for occupational training programs. **Key rules include:**

- Training must be in an in-demand industry or occupation
- Programs must be 12 months or less in duration (extensions can be requested)
- Associate, bachelor's, or master's degree programs are generally not covered unless the participant is in their final semester and the remaining time is under one year

What WIOA Youth Funding CANNOT Cover:

- Self-employment or starting a business (see [SBA.gov](https://www.sba.gov) for resources)
- Jobs with non-guaranteed wages (commission-only or fee-based)
- Temporary or seasonal employment training
- Non-required school fees or supplies outside voucher limits
- Programs longer than 12 months (without an approved extension)

Cohort-Based Training Partnerships

Education and training providers may also establish cohort-based partnerships with the Youth program. This requires a direct conversation with Eckerd Connects leadership to agree on the number of participants, cost structure, and logistics. This allows education and training programs to enroll participants in batches rather than individually. This works well for programs that have common start and end dates.

To initiate a cohort partnership for the Youth program, reach out to leadership at Eckerd Connects.

JUMP TO:

 YOUTH

 ADULT

 BUSINESSES

Adults & Dislocated Workers

Adult Eligibility:

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

All applicants must meet the following minimum requirements:

- Age 18 or older
- Legally authorized to work in the United States
- Males or individuals assigned male at birth must be registered for Selective Service (or have a valid exemption)

WIOA prioritizes individuals experiencing certain barriers. Priority populations receive preference when funding is limited.

BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENCY DEFINED

A participant is considered Basic Skills Deficient if they score at or below the 8.9 grade level on a standardized test. Copies of the test scores are needed before time of enrollment. **The following tests are approved for this determination:**

- TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education)
- CASAS
- ABLE
- WorkKeys
- BEST
- Note: Prove-It is NOT an approved assessment for this determination.

Colorado's policy also recognizes a lack of digital literacy as a basis for Basic Skills Deficiency determination.

If English is not someone's first language and interpretation services are required, that can also determine Basic Skills Deficiency.

The WIOA Adult program serves working-age adults (18+) who are legally authorized to work in the United States. Eligibility is broad with the basic requirement being an adult authorized to work. The program prioritizes individuals experiencing certain barriers and provides access to training, supportive services, and career coaching.

STATUTORY PRIORITY POPULATIONS

The following groups receive priority access to adult WIOA services:

- Recipients of public assistance (SNAP, TANF, or other public benefit programs)
- Low-income individuals (determined using the LLIS income table)
- Veterans
- Individuals who are Basic Skills Deficient (as defined by WIOA)
- Individuals experiencing homelessness

HOMELESSNESS DEFINITION

An individual experiencing homelessness qualifies under WIOA if they meet any of the following:

- Lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence
- Is sharing housing due to economic hardship, loss of housing, or similar reason
- Is living in a motel, hotel, trailer park, or campground due to lack of alternatives
- Is living in an emergency or transitional shelter
- Has a primary nighttime residence that is a non-standard sleeping location (car, park, abandoned building, station, etc.)

A participant imprisoned or detained under an Act of Congress or State law does NOT meet the homelessness definition. A participant temporarily sleeping away from their home also does not qualify on that basis alone.

CONTINUED

Adults & Dislocated Workers

Adult Eligibility:

INCOME ELIGIBILITY

Adults currently employed and earning \$27.00 or more per hour are NOT eligible for training dollars but can still access basic career services through the workforce center.

Participants receiving SNAP or TANF are considered a priority population and receive preference for available funding.

DISLOCATED WORKERS

Dislocated Workers are a separate sub-population within the adult program and may have access to higher funding levels (currently \$3,000 in 2026, with potential for more depending on the program).

Who Qualifies as a Dislocated Worker?

A Dislocated Worker is an individual who has been laid off or terminated through no fault of their own. **Qualifying circumstances include:**

- Laid off from a job (involuntary termination)
- Divorced spouse who was dependent on a partner's income
- Displaced homemaker: an individual who provided unpaid family services and is now unemployed or underemployed due to loss of the supporting income
- Military spouse whose income was significantly reduced due to deployment, change of station, or a service-connected disability or death of the service member

Alimony is NOT considered a replacement for lost income under the Dislocated Worker definition. Documentation of the qualifying event is required.

Adult Eligibility Flow Chart:

Is the participant 18 years of age or older?

↓ YES

Is the participant legally authorized to work in the United States?

↓ YES

If male/assigned male at birth: Is the participant registered for Selective Service?

↓ YES

ELIGIBLE for Adult WIOA Services

Does participant meet any Priority Population criteria? (Public assistance, low-income, veteran, basic skills deficient)

↓ YES

PRIORITY STATUS:
Preferred access when funding is limited

PROCESS

How to Access Adult Services

Step 1: Referral from Training Provider

Training providers send an email with a list of individuals and their best contact information.

Step 2: WIOA Orientation

The team sends each participant a link to complete a virtual WIOA orientation. Orientations are available in person or virtually. An interpretation line is available for non-English speakers.

Step 3: Career Coach Assignment

After orientation, participants are assigned to a career coach who discusses their goals and determines pre-qualification for eligibility.

The adult enrollment process typically takes 4–5 weeks from referral to training access.

● Eligibility

If eligibility is **YES**, continue to steps 4–6.

Step 4: Documentation & Enrollment

The career coach collects the required eligibility documentation. Upon receiving documentation, they schedule the formal enrollment appointment. Two separate paperwork processes exist: one for enrollment, one for training.

Step 5: Financial Assistance Plan

The career coach, training provider, and participant complete a Financial Assistance Plan (FAP). This document details:

- Total training cost (tuition, fees, exam fees, etc.)
- What WIOA will contribute
- Any remaining balance
- Other funding sources being applied

Step 6: Training Approval & Payment

Upon approval, WIOA pays training providers in a single payment. The training provider invoices Eckerd Connects, and the participant can begin their training program.

Note: WIOA funding cannot be used if the participant begins the training program before the completion of these steps.

ELIGIBLE USES OF Adult Funding

Eligible Uses

- Occupational skills training (must be in an in-demand industry)
- Supportive services including transportation (bus passes while in training)
- On-the-Job Training (OJT) - up to 50% of participant wages paid to the employer
- Registered apprenticeships (must be registered with CDLE and listed on official directory [here](#))
- Final semester of associate, bachelor's, or master's degree programs (if under 1 year remaining)

What WIOA Adult Funding CANNOT Cover:

- Self-employment or starting a business (see [SBA.gov](https://www.sba.gov) for resources)
- Jobs with non-guaranteed wages (commission-only or fee-based)
- Temporary or seasonal employment training
- Non-required school fees or supplies outside voucher limits
- Programs longer than 12 months (without an approved extension)

Ongoing Reporting Requirements for Training Providers:

Once a participant begins training, education and training providers have ongoing reporting obligations to Eckerd Connects:

- Monthly Progress Reports: Due on the 5th of each month, the report must describe participant progress, class attendance, and measurable skills gains
- Certificate of Completion: Required upon successful completion of the program
- Licensure/Exam Results: If the program involves a licensing exam, documentation of the result and a copy of the active license is required

Training providers should be in regular contact with the assigned career coach throughout the training period.

Businesses & Organizations

WIOA is not just for individuals. Businesses and organizations can also access funding and services to support workforce development activities for their eligible learners. This section covers how employers and training organizations can partner with Eckerd Connects through cohort-based agreements and On-the-Job Training (OJT) contracts.

Business Eligibility:

COHORT-BASED TRAINING AGREEMENTS

Education and training providers may establish cohort-based agreements with the Denver Workforce Center/Eckerd Connects to serve groups of WIOA-eligible participants together. This is particularly useful for organizations running structured cohort training programs.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING (OJT) CONTRACTS

Employers can partner with WIOA through registered OJT contracts. Under an OJT agreement, WIOA covers up to 50% of the participant's wages for a defined period or the training costs while the employer trains the new hire in the skills needed for the job. It is the participant's decision where they would like the funding applied.

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIPS

Employers running registered apprenticeship programs may access WIOA funding. **Key requirements:**

- The apprenticeship must be registered with CDLE (Colorado Department of Labor and Employment)
- The program must appear in the official CDLE apprenticeship directory [here](#). Positions must have guaranteed wages and hours (commission or fee-based roles do not qualify)

For education and training programs to qualify as a WIOA eligible program, they must be on the Education Training and Provider List (ETPL) [here](#).

COHORT PARTNERSHIP NARRATIVE

Enrolling a Cohort in WIOA

A cohort partnership allows a training provider or employer to formalize a relationship with the WIOA program to serve a group of eligible participants together. For education and training programs to qualify as a WIOA eligible program, they must be on the Education Training and Provider List (ETPL).

HOW THE PROCESS TYPICALLY WORKS:

Step 1: Initial Leadership Meeting

The training provider or employer meets with Eckerd Connects leadership to discuss the proposal. Key items to agree on include: number of participants, cost per participant, timeline, and program structure.

Step 2: Agreement & Approval

Once terms are agreed upon at the leadership level, a formal agreement is created. WIOA funding availability for cohorts is determined at this stage — funding is never guaranteed and is dependent on the program year budget.

Step 3: Participant Referral

The training provider sends over a list of eligible participants via email, including each individual's name and best contact information. Participants must meet WIOA eligibility criteria (youth or adult, as applicable).

Step 4: Enrollment & Financial Assistance Plan

Each participant goes through the standard WIOA enrollment process. A Financial Assistance Plan is completed for each participant, documenting the cost breakdown and WIOA's contribution.

Step 5: Training Delivery & Invoicing

The training provider delivers the program. WIOA pays in a single payment per participant upon approval. The training provider invoices Eckerd Connects directly.

Note

This guide is intended as a reference document and is subject to change as WIOA policy and funding levels are updated. Always verify current funding caps and eligibility requirements with Eckerd Connects before referring participants.