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# Youth Employment and Training Programs Authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, P.L. 113-128) is the primary federal statute centrally focused on workforce development. It authorizes a group of programs to assist workers and employers in the labor market, with an emphasis on individuals with barriers to employment. This In Focus describes the three programs authorized in WIOA that target youth and are administered by the Department of Labor (DOL).

Most of the youth-targeted programs in WIOA define eligible youth as persons ages 16 to 24 who demonstrate specified barriers to employment. Some individuals served by these programs could be eligible for both the youth programs in WIOA as well as other WIOA programs that serve the general adult population (ages 18+).

**Table 1. Funding for Youth-Targeted Programs in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act**  
(dollars in thousands)

Fiscal Year	Youth Activities	Job Corps	Youth-Build
2018	\$903,416	\$1,749,555	\$89,534
2019	903,416	1,718,655	89,534
2020	913,130	1,743,655	94,534
2021	921,130	1,748,655	96,534
2022	933,130	1,748,655	99,034

**Source:** DOL FY2023 Budget Summary Tables and CRS analysis of P.L. 117-103; funding levels include any supplemental appropriations.

The design and funding levels of the youth-targeted programs in WIOA vary:

- *WIOA Youth Activities* are formula grants to states that are incorporated into a coordinated planning process with other workforce funding. Like other WIOA-authorized formula funds, the allowable uses for these funds are somewhat broad and include both employment activities (such as occupational skills training and work experience) as well as educational activities. Specific programming decisions are made by state and local grantees and subgrantees.
- *Job Corps* supports a network of residential centers that provide intensive services for participants. Centers provide occupational training in a trade as well as appropriate academic and social supports. Jobs Corps has the highest funding of the three youth-targeted programs in WIOA.

- *YouthBuild* is a competitive grant program that provides work experience, skills training, and educational services to eligible youth, with a focus on the construction trades.

## WIOA Formula Grants and Youth Activities

WIOA Youth Activities is one of six core formula grant programs in WIOA. States are required to develop a unified plan that describes how each of the core funding streams will be coordinated to meet local workforce needs.

Youth Activities funds may be used for out-of-school or in-school youth, though statute specifies that at least 75% of funds must be used for out-of-school youth. Out-of-school youth are ages 16 to 24, are not attending any school, and meet additional criteria such as being a high school dropout or low-income. In-school youth are ages 14 to 21; attending school; low-income; and meet additional criteria, such as being deficient in basic skills, pregnant or parenting, homeless, or currently or formerly in foster care.

DOL allots funds to state workforce agencies based on a formula that accounts for a state's relative share of specified unemployment indicators and counts of economically disadvantaged youth. States may reserve up to 15% of the funding for specified statewide activities. The remaining funds are allocated to local workforce development boards (WDBs) that administer the services, typically through a local partner such as a nonprofit organization or community college.

Each local WDB must use Youth Activities funds to offer 14 program elements that include tutoring, study skills training, and other academic activities; alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services; paid and unpaid work experiences (including summer employment opportunities, pre-apprenticeship programs, internships and job shadowing, and on-the-job training opportunities); supportive services; adult mentoring; follow-up services; and other specified activities. At least 20% of the funds allocated to the local WDB must be used to provide participating youth (whether they are in school or not) with paid and unpaid work experiences that have academic and occupational education as a component.

WIOA Youth grantees and subgrantees are subject to a performance accountability system that considers participants' subsequent outcomes, including employment, enrollment in education, and earnings.

In program year (PY) 2020 (July 2020-June 2021), about 123,000 participants received services under the program.

In PY2019, about 137,000 participants received services under the program.

## Job Corps

The Job Corps program supports a network of residential centers throughout the country that, per statute, provide eligible youth with “intensive social, academic, career and technical education, and service learning opportunities.” Most youth participants reside at the centers.

Job Corps participants must be ages 16 through 24, low-income, and facing one or more of the following barriers to education and employment: (1) basic skills deficient; (2) a school dropout; (3) homeless, a runaway, a foster child, or aged out of foster care; (4) a parent; or (5) an individual who requires additional education, career and technical education or training, or workforce preparation skills to be able to obtain and retain employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency.

While at a Job Corps center, students receive comprehensive career development services, including academic instruction, career and technical training, and work readiness preparation. The program also provides housing, meals, health care services, and other support services.

The career and technical training component of Job Corps includes training in a specific trade. Nationwide, Job Corps supports training in approximately 100 trades, though each center only provides training in a subset of these trades. Commonly offered trades include office administration, carpentry (pre-apprentice), culinary arts, certified nursing assistant, and welding.

Job Corps has an open-entry, open-exit design and instruction is individualized and self-paced. Participants enter programs when there are openings and graduate throughout the year. Data on program exiters show that the average length of stay was between seven and eight months. In most cases, program participation may not exceed two years.

There are more than 100 Job Corps centers, and at least one in every state. About 23 of the centers are known as Civilian Conservation Centers (CCCs), which are operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service. DOL transfers funding for these centers to USDA under an interagency agreement. The other centers are operated by private organizations, most of which are for-profit, through contracts with DOL (which are governed by federal procurement laws).

Each center is subject to a performance accountability system that establishes expected levels of performance related to participants’ credential attainment, employment, and earnings. In most cases, DOL may not renew a contract if the center ranks among the lowest 10% of centers nationwide for two years and fails to achieve an average of 50% or higher in the expected levels of performance.

Job Corps is not one of the six WIOA core programs and is not required to be included in the state unified planning

process. States have the option to develop a combined state plan that includes Job Corps.

Job Corps enrollment declined during the COVID-19 pandemic and has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. In PY2021, Job Corps enrolled about 10,000 new participants. In PY2018, the most recent year that was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the program enrolled about 50,000 new participants. For PY2022, the program has established a goal of 48,000 new participants.

Job Corps was initially established by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-452) and was most recently reauthorized and amended by WIOA.

## YouthBuild

YouthBuild is a competitive grant program with the primary focus of enabling disadvantaged youth to obtain education, employment, and leadership skills. It focuses on the construction trades, which supports the program’s additional purpose of expanding the supply of permanent affordable housing for the homeless and improving the quality of nonprofit and public facilities. DOL may also approve requests from YouthBuild grantees to support workforce development related to other in-demand industry sectors or occupations in addition to construction.

Individuals ages 16 through 24 are eligible for YouthBuild. The program’s primary eligibility criteria target participants who have dropped out of school and demonstrate other specified barriers to employment, including being low-income. Up to 25% of participants may qualify under alternative criteria.

YouthBuild programs must be structured so that (1) at least 40% of participants’ time in the program is spent on work experience and skill development activities and (2) at least 50% of participants’ time is spent on education and related services, including counseling and leadership development. Statute specifies that work experience and skill training activities under YouthBuild shall be, to the maximum extent practicable, coordinated with pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship activities.

A variety of public and nonprofit entities are eligible for YouthBuild grants. Program grantees must offer participants full-time participation in the program for not less than 6 months and not more than 24 months.

Per the FY2023 DOL budget, there are approximately 175 DOL-funded YouthBuild programs active in 41 states, serving about 6,000 youth annually.

YouthBuild was established by the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act (P.L. 101-625) and was most recently reauthorized and amended by WIOA.

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