



Chapter 1: Making the Case for Partnership

- Describe shared goals across victim services and workforce development systems;
- Define the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) and how it can support survivors of human trafficking; and,
- Illustrate how partnerships can maximize resources, address service gaps, and promote greater success for victim services agencies, workforce development programs, and survivors.

Why Collaborate?

Survivors of human trafficking often face a set of compounding obstacles that prevent them from accessing and sustaining safe employment opportunities with secure wages. The existing vulnerabilities exploited by traffickers and the harm caused by trafficking are further exacerbated for survivors from marginalized communities for whom historic oppression and economic exclusion shape and constrain the educational opportunities and career choices available to them.

While employment is key to the long-term well-being of trafficking survivors, survivors regularly face challenges in accessing education, job training, and high-quality jobs and careers.¹ Quality employment opportunities that provide the income necessary for a person to meet their basic needs, access safety, and provide stability is a critical protective factor against continued violence and exploitation.

Victim services agencies and the workforce development system are oftentimes **siloed**, relying on limited capacity, partnerships, and finite resources to help address complex barriers to education and employment. Breaking down these silos by forming partnerships and collaborations across victim service and workforce development systems is mutually beneficial. Together, both fields can better achieve similar goals efficiently, foster cross-systems expertise, and maximize resources within their respective fields.

SHARED GOALS

Both victim services providers and the workforce development system share the goal of promoting an individual's independence and security. Victim service organizations do this by promoting safety and healing, and workforce development programs do this through access to education and/or employment opportunities.

The workforce development system, funded primarily by the U.S. Department of Labor under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), was designed to create a comprehensive, accessible, and high-quality workforce development system that helps all students and job seekers gain meaningful skills and employment. For an overview of WIOA, explore [Chapter 2](#) of this collaboration guide and visit [Opportunities for Survivors of Human Trafficking through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\): A Primer](#).

Foreign National Survivors of labor and sex trafficking who have a letter of certification or letter of eligibility for Minor Victims issued by the Department of U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) are eligible for Title 1 education and job training services.³

WIOA prioritizes connecting adults and youth with significant barriers—such as limited education or work experience, criminal records, or disabilities—to quality occupations through strategic adult education, job training, and employment services.²

While individuals with complex barriers are a priority for the workforce development system, there are many factors that impede the ability of education, training, and employment programs to successfully serve individuals with histories of

violence and trauma. Common obstacles include economic insecurity leading to housing instability, lack of transportation or childcare, hunger, and unaddressed physical and mental health conditions, which significantly impact one's ability to participate in training. Factors such as legal status, criminal record, English language proficiency, and addiction, further diminish one's ability to engage in workforce development programs, especially due to challenging requirements or a lack of adequate programmatic support. All of this becomes further complicated when considering the harm caused by histories of oppression and institutional racism which often exclude Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) from meaningful access and opportunity.

WIOA Training and Employment Notice (TEN) #28-16 outlines how providers can address these barriers by offering meaningful access to supportive services via referrals to culturally-responsive mental health counseling, medical care, and legal services to ensure that all learners and job seekers can successfully engage in employment services. This guidance specifically references the impacts of trauma, whether a result of human trafficking or violence experienced by refugees.⁴

In addition to experiencing many of these common obstacles to education, training, and employment services—many of which are a direct impact of human trafficking—if not properly supported, survivors also face the lasting physical, emotional and cognitive consequences of violence and trauma.⁵ Trauma and its impacts can lead to negative employment outcomes.⁶

Access to support via referral process, such as trauma-informed counseling, culturally appropriate support groups, medical care, or legal services may help them more successfully engage in the employment and training process.”

– Training and Employment Notice (TEN #28-16)

Both the workforce development system and victim services field share the goal of supporting people with such barriers and creating pathways to success.

While the workforce development system has the resources and expertise on employment and education opportunities, the victim service field are experts on addressing the immediate and long-term effects of human trafficking and trauma. Recognizing and mitigating the impacts of trauma will help both the victim services and workforce development fields fulfill their goals of supporting individuals' ability to be independent and successful. To help workforce development programs learn more about integrating trauma-responsive practices, the PEOST project produced the [Trauma-Responsiveness in an Integrated Workforce System](#) information sheet. These shared goals and unique expertise create ample room for collaboration.

SYSTEMS EXPERTISE AND RELATIONSHIPS

The victim services and workforce development fields have distinct perspectives and knowledge of how to support vulnerable people. Combining this expertise is necessary to promote the success of the individuals both fields serve. By forming cross-sector relationships, victim services providers and workforce development programs not only better serve their clients, they allow providers to maximize their strengths. Below is an example of how victim services providers can offer expertise to the workforce development system, and how the workforce development system can in turn benefit from a trauma-informed lens to create a sustainable and lasting relationship together.

Victim services agencies come to this partnership with a background and understanding of complex trauma from violence or extreme hardship, as well as strategies for healing – this expertise can benefit the workforce development system.

Meanwhile, the workforce development system has developed effective education and skill building strategies and employer partnerships that have been proven to help individuals with complex barriers attain and maintain quality employment.

MAXIMIZING FINITE RESOURCES

Both victim services agencies and workforce development programs have limited resources to fully support the success of their clients.

In workforce development programs, a lack of adequate resources constrains their ability to provide the comprehensive support needed to mitigate the many obstacles individuals face. Education and job training providers are also encumbered by outcome measures that often focus solely on obtaining and maintaining employment without consideration for an individual's personal circumstances and skill level at enrollment.⁷ This, coupled with the lack of resources to adequately identify and address obstacles to success, often results in enrollment requirements designed to screen out those who, due to a need for additional supports and flexibility, may be unsuccessful.⁸

Because funding for economic empowerment services is limited and is competitive, many victim services agencies are reliant on modest funding from federal entities such as OVC, Office on Violence Against Women (OVW); Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to support economic empowerment services. While the U.S. Department of Labor and private foundations focus on funding income security and economic development, victim services agencies typically do not tap into these resources and may not be eligible without a workforce partner. Building partnerships across sectors to access additional sources of funding and to strengthen those applications is critical, as funders prioritize community partnerships.

Creating these partnerships streamlines workload and allocate more time, money, and capacity to other existing work rather than replicating these highly specialized and time-consuming processes in siloes.

Conclusion

Despite the historic and complex obstacles survivors have encountered when pursuing education, training, and employment services, the workforce development system often provides the best pathway to a broad range of employment opportunities. Moreover, a growing number of workforce programs recognize the challenges that experiences of violence and trauma have created for survivors and want to better address the complex needs of participants in order to ensure their programs are truly accessible to all students and job seekers.⁹ Adopting a trauma-informed framework can create and foster an environment in which all learners and job seekers can thrive.

Developing a strong partnership with the victim services field can help workforce development programs create trauma-informed structures and capacity to successfully

support survivors of human trafficking. At the same time, such cross-sector partnerships can help victim services agencies improve how they help survivors navigate the workforce system. Collaboration between workforce development providers and victim services agencies is a win-win for programs and, most importantly, for survivors.

Continue on to Chapter 2.

^[1] Foot, Kristen, *Collaborating Against Human Trafficking: Cross-Sector Challenges and Practices*, 2016, p. 75.

^[2] Employment and Training Administration. (2019). Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act. <https://www.doleta.gov/wioa/about/overview/>

^[3] Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 9-12: https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL_9_12.pdf

^[4] Training and Employment Notice No. 28-16: https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEN/TEN_28-16_Acc.pdf

^[5] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014. <store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4884.pdf>

^[6] Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 2014. (Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 57.) Chapter 3, Understanding the Impact of Trauma. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/>

^[7] WIOA Performance Indicators and Measures. U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/performance/performance-indicators;> FUTURES roundtable.

^[8]Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools. (2014). One Size Fits None: The Skills Gap and America's On-Going Workforce Development Challenges. Washington, DC: Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools.

^[9] Partners for a Competitive Workforce. 2016. Findings from Intimidation and Intimate Partner Violence Screening Project with Workforce Development Programs in Greater Cincinnati Region during January - June 2016. Partners for a Competitive Workforce.