

# IssueBRIEF

"I want every American looking for work...to have one program, one website, and one place to go for all the information and help that they need."

*President Barack Obama  
State of the Union Address, January 2012*



## Organizing American Job Centers into Networks for the Delivery of Public Workforce Services

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### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS BRIEF

In the 28 randomly selected Local Workforce Investment Areas (local areas) in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation, we found:

- Each local area had, on average, 10 American Job Centers (AJCs).
- Local areas supplemented comprehensive AJCs (which offered access to services of all mandatory partners) with affiliate centers that offered more limited services. About two-fifths of all centers were affiliates.
- In about half of the local areas, the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs' service contractors managed the AJCs. In other local areas, the WIA administrative entity or a consortium of WIA partners managed the AJCs.
- One-third of study local areas closed AJCs over the course of the study, largely in response to funding cuts.

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To improve the integration of the many employment and training services available to job seekers and businesses, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) required each Local Workforce Investment Board (LWIB) to set up one or more American Job Centers (AJCs, formerly known as One-Stop Career Centers). In these centers, job seekers and businesses can access at a single physical location an array of services offered by multiple partner agencies. Across the country, about 2,500 AJCs currently provide services to job seekers and businesses.<sup>1</sup> The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which superseded WIA in July 2014, maintains the role of AJCs as the central access points for employment and training services.

This brief describes the AJC networks in the 28 randomly selected Local Workforce Investment Areas (local areas) that participated in the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation (WIA Gold Standard Evaluation). It begins by describing the types of AJCs established within the study local areas.

It then describes how the LWIBs organized their AJCs into service-delivery networks and the entities they designated as operators for their AJCs. It concludes by discussing changes in these networks that occurred during the study, largely as a result of reduced program funding levels. Data for this brief were collected during visits to the study local areas in 2012 and 2013 and telephone interviews in 2014, before the passage of WIOA.

## TYPES OF AMERICAN JOB CENTERS

Within the broad guidelines established by WIA, states and local areas had substantial flexibility in designing their AJC networks. WIA and subsequent federal regulations mandated that LWIBs operate at least one center that offers core services, facilitates access to services from more than a dozen mandatory partners (see box to the right), and has on-site staff from at least one mandatory partner.<sup>2</sup> States could establish additional standards for centers to be designated as comprehensive centers. It also allowed LWIBs to operate affiliate (sometimes referred to as satellite) AJCs that often offer limited services and specialized centers that target services to address special needs, such as those of dislocated workers or of industry sectors.<sup>3</sup> Because LWIBs typically considered their specialized centers to be affiliate centers, this brief describes two types of centers: (1) comprehensive centers and (2) affiliate centers.

### Comprehensive AJCs

Of the 269 AJCs operating in the 28 study local areas in 2012, 151 (56 percent) met their states' definition of a comprehensive center (see Figure 1). The 19 states containing study local areas either used the WIA definition of a comprehensive center or a more restrictive definition. (Because of states' varying requirements, one state's comprehensive AJC might resemble another state's affiliate AJC.) All but one of the 19 states in the study required that both WIA programs and the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) program, a mandatory partner, be physically located at comprehensive centers on at least a part-time basis. Some states also had more stringent requirements for the collocation of other partners at comprehensive AJCs.

For example, one state in the study required that five specified mandatory partners be physically located at comprehensive centers. Another state required that representatives of all mandatory programs be collocated at the comprehensive centers. Most states required that comprehensive AJCs be

## MANDATORY AJC PARTNERS

WIA identified mandatory AJC partners. Although partners were not required to be physically located at AJCs, the Act required that partners coordinate their job-seeker activities. Local areas were also encouraged to establish partnerships with nonmandatory programs. The mandatory partners were:

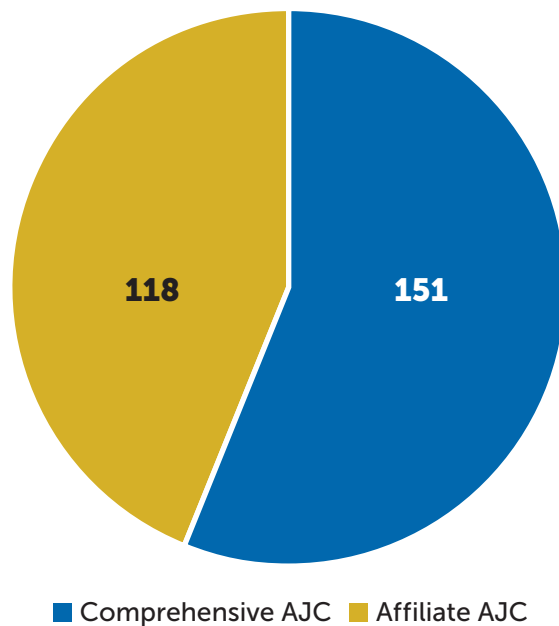
- Programs authorized under Title I of WIA—programs for adults, dislocated workers, youth (including Job Corps), Native Americans, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, and veterans
- Wagner-Peyser Employment Service (ES) programs
- Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) programs
- Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS)
- Unemployment insurance programs
- Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)
- Adult education and literacy activities (authorized under Title II of WIA)
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Postsecondary vocational education
- Employment and training activities carried out under Community Services Block Grants
- Employment and training programs administered by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Welfare-to-work programs under the Social Security Act 403(a)(5) (no longer in existence at the time of the study)

Source: Workforce Investment Act, Section 6220.200.

open during regular business hours five days a week and that WIA staff be available for customers to access core, intensive, and training services during all business hours.

Comprehensive centers sometimes varied in the extent of partner collocation and services even within local areas. For example, the Central Pennsylvania local area's six comprehensive AJCs included a mix of large and small centers. The three largest comprehensive AJCs had full-time managers and staff from both the WIA and ES programs. The three smaller comprehensive AJCs shared management staff with another center, and WIA intake staff members spent only a few days a week at these smaller comprehensive centers.

**Figure 1. Types of AJCs in study local areas in 2012**



Source: WIA Gold Standard Evaluation qualitative data collection, 2012.

Note: An AJC is defined as comprehensive according to the state's definition. Some affiliate centers may have been comprehensive as defined by WIA but did not meet the state's additional requirements for a comprehensive center.

### Affiliate AJCs

Affiliate centers serve customers who cannot easily travel to a comprehensive AJC or who might want specialized services. Together, the study local areas operated 118 affiliate centers. Of these, about three in five centers offered limited WIA services and/or were not open during regular business hours. Other affiliate centers offered a full range of WIA services and were open during regular business hours but did not have representatives from all state-required collocated partners.

Affiliate AJCs might also provide services targeting specific groups of job seekers or industry sectors. For example, in 2012, the Chicago Workforce Investment Council in Illinois contracted with 17 community-based organizations to operate affiliate AJCs, most of which were designed to reach special groups of customers, such as immigrants, people with limited English proficiency, homeless individuals, older workers, veterans, or ex-offenders. The Sacramento Works Workforce Investment Board in California established an AJC specifically to serve homeless people, and the EmployIndy

Workforce Investment Board in Indianapolis, Indiana, operated an AJC tailored to the needs of experienced professionals and to employers that needed business services.

Two study local areas established specialized centers that focused on a specific industry sector. These four "sector AJCs" were similar to comprehensive AJCs in providing a full range of services to customers but different in their focus on one sector. These AJCs worked closely with employers to understand their needs and to better prepare job seekers for successful employment in specific high growth sectors. For example, New York City operated a healthcare center and an industrial and transportation center.

### ORGANIZING AJCS INTO NETWORKS

The number of AJCs varied considerably by local area. One small study local area—Essex County (New Jersey)—had one AJC. In contrast, in early 2012, the Chicago (Illinois) local area had 30 AJCs. On average, there were about 10 AJCs per study local area.

Most of the local areas in the study formed AJC networks by supporting their comprehensive AJCs with different types of affiliate AJCs. Nine study local areas had a network comprised only of comprehensive centers. Eleven study local areas created two-tiered systems, in which comprehensive centers were supplemented by affiliate centers, such as those with only part-time staff or those only providing WIA core services. The remaining nine study local areas had at least three tiers of access points that included comprehensive centers and different types of affiliate centers. For example, the Fresno County (California) local area had one comprehensive AJC that provided full WIA services and services of multiple partners, four affiliate centers that provided full WIA services but did not provide services of all required partners, and two affiliate centers that did not provide full WIA services.

LWIB administrators of seven study local areas noted that other types of access points further expanded their networks. These other access points included:

- **Mobile vans.** Five local areas used mobile vans, often called "mobile resource rooms," that brought computer stations and staff on an as-needed basis to customers living in remote locations. In three of these local areas, mobile vans provided a regular schedule of weekly appearances at libraries or community colleges in counties that

did not have their own AJCs. In the two other local areas, mobile vans were reserved for special purposes, such as providing rapid response services at the site of a large lay-off, or conducting outreach to rural areas or hard-to-reach customers on an infrequent or ad hoc schedule.

- **Roving outreach teams.** AJC partners in two local areas organized small “outreach teams,” whose members traveled to service locations to increase customer access to services. In one local area, four outreach teams of ES staff regularly traveled to 45 locations in 6 counties that did not have AJCs. The ES staff provided assistance to customers seeking employment; individuals interested in training were referred to the AJCs. AJC staff in another local area formed mobile teams consisting of WIA staff and adult basic education program counselors. They visited community-based organizations to serve customers with multiple barriers to employment who were unlikely to visit the AJCs.
- **Unstaffed community access points.** Three local areas provided online access to basic services at locations such as libraries, community colleges, or other community facilities. For example, one large urban local area provided computers at 11 public locations and then trained the staff at these locations to guide customers in using online career exploration and job search tools.

Both urban and rural local areas established multiple-tier networks. Some LWIBs in large rural local areas used several strategies to cover their entire geographic region. For example, the rural Lower Savannah (South Carolina) local area had three comprehensive AJCs; two affiliate AJCs that provided WIA, ES, and unemployment insurance services; and two additional affiliate centers that only provided WIA services. WIA staff who worked out of the comprehensive AJCs traveled to the affiliate centers. Urban areas also used multi-tiered networks to meet the needs of their diverse populations. For example, the Chicago Workforce Investment Council developed a multi-tiered system that included (1) comprehensive workforce centers; (2) small affiliate centers that targeted smaller geographic areas or special populations, such as job seekers with limited-English proficiency; and (3) sector workforce centers.

To promote their networks, many local areas used a brand name for all its AJCs, whether comprehensive or not. For example, all AJCs in Pennsylvania were called Career-Links, and all AJCs in the Indianapolis local area were called WorkOne Indy.

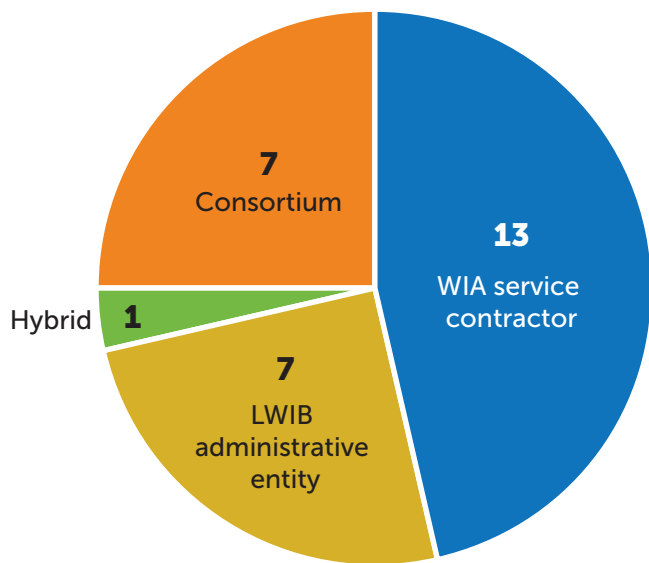
## AJC OPERATORS

WIA required each LWIB—along with its chief local elected officials—to designate one or more AJC operators within the local area. Designated AJC operators, which oversee the daily management of the AJCs, could be public or private agencies or consortia of agencies.

Of the 28 local areas, 15 had a single operator, 6 had multiple operators that worked independently (usually to oversee different AJCs), and 7 were operated by a consortium of organizations. The types of entities that operated AJCs included:

- **WIA service contractor.** The most common approach was for the contractors responsible for providing WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs’ services to act as AJC operators (see Figure 2). Thirteen LWIBs employed only this method; another local area used a hybrid approach in which the LWIB administrative entity was the operator for some AJCs and WIA service contractors were the operators for others. When WIA contractors were AJC operators, the on-site AJC manager was typically an employee of the contractor. However, in a few instances, a staff member employed by another partner agency was selected to manage the center.
- **LWIB administrative entity.** In eight local areas, including the local area with a hybrid approach, the LWIB administrative entity was an AJC operator. In six of these local areas, the administrative entity directly provided WIA services. In seven of the eight local areas, the administrative entity hired a manager for each AJC. In the eighth local area, the WIA and ES program managers shared center management, and the administrative entity oversaw center operations by hosting monthly meetings of WIA and ES program managers across all of the area’s AJCs.
- **Consortium.** As allowed under WIA, seven local areas in the study designated consortia of AJC partners as AJC operators. In six of these local areas, the same consortium served as the AJC operator for the entire local area. In the seventh local area, the LWIB designated a different operator consortium for each AJC, based on the partners that were collocated at that center. Consortium members in all seven local areas included the WIA administrative entity, the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs’ service contractor, and the state workforce agency. Other consortium members included community colleges, adult education agencies,

**Figure 2. Types of entities acting as AJC operators in study local areas**



Source: WIA Gold Standard Evaluation qualitative data collection, 2012.

Note: In the hybrid model, the WIA administrative entity was the AJC operator for some centers, and WIA contractors served as AJC operator for other centers. If an administrative entity that also provided WIA services was the AJC operator, we categorized the AJC operator as an “administrative entity.”

and WIA youth program contractors. For day-to-day management of the AJCs, consortia used one of three arrangements: (1) they hired an AJC manager who had no affiliation to any consortium member (three local areas); (2) the WIA service provider and state workforce agency manager co-managed the AJC (two local areas); and (3) one member of the consortium hired the center manager (two local areas).

## CHANGES IN AJC NETWORKS OVER TIME

After initial data collection in 2012, the number of AJCs in the local areas fluctuated as part of a dynamic process of balancing changes in customer demand and local budgets. As some LWIBs were reducing the number of AJCs in their networks, others opened new types of centers, such as those specializing in services to recently laid-off individuals, to diversify the mix of AJCs within their systems. By the time the evaluation team completed qualitative data collection for the study in early 2014, administrators in most local areas reported that, largely as a result of

reductions in WIA and/or ES program funds, they had closed AJCs or made other changes to their networks to reduce service-delivery costs.

About one-third of the study local areas closed one or more AJCs during the study period. Although most closed one or two centers, one local area closed half of the 18 AJCs it had operated at the beginning of the study. By early 2014, the number of AJCs in the study local areas had decreased by 12 percent—from 269 to 236.

Over the same period, five local areas reported that they had managed to keep all AJCs open only by taking one or more of the following steps to reduce costs: (1) discontinuing evening hours of operation at all AJCs; (2) reducing the operating hours of affiliate centers; (3) reducing the number of WIA staff members at each AJC; (4) moving some AJCs to facilities, such as community colleges, where they could receive free or reduced rent; and (5) devolving more AJC management and service-delivery responsibilities to the LWIB administrative entity to reduce the number of management layers.

Respondents from an additional three local areas reported that the reduction in ES funding that occurred over the same period had sharply reduced the level of ES staffing within centers and had forced the ES program to withdraw completely from some centers. For example, LWIB administrators of the East Tennessee local area reported that all on-site ES staff were withdrawn from seven of the nine centers that had collocated ES staff. As a result, the remaining partners were being asked to contribute a larger share of facility costs, making it uncertain whether other partners would be able to remain in the centers.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO AJC NETWORK ORGANIZATION UNDER WIOA

WIOA reaffirms the role of AJCs as the cornerstone of service delivery for the public workforce system, but particular provisions will likely affect many local areas’ AJC networks. For example, WIOA mandates the collocation of the ES program at AJCs. It also removes the WIA provision that allowed LWIBs to designate certain consortia to operate AJCs without a competitive process; under WIOA, all AJC operators, including consortia, must be selected through a competitive process. In addition, WIOA explicitly specifies that specialized centers may include “key industry sectors or clusters” to address special needs.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> America's service locator. Retrieved from <http://www.service-locator.org>.

<sup>2</sup> 65 Federal Register (FR) 156 (August 11, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Another brief in this series, "Sector Strategies: Aligning the Skills of the Workforce with the Needs of Employers," provides more discussion of sector initiatives conducted by study local areas.

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

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Through the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), Congress allocated about \$2 billion annually for employment and training services that states and their Local Workforce Investment Areas (local areas) provided through their Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. WIA mandated that job seekers and employers have access to employment and training resources provided by more than a dozen workforce system partners through American Job Centers. At these centers, job seekers could access core services, such as information on local labor markets and job openings. In addition, eligible adults and dislocated workers could receive intensive services, such as career counseling and skills assessments, and training services. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which superseded WIA, made important changes to the public workforce systems but largely maintained the services provided through the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs.

This issue brief is one in a series of briefs that presents findings from the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation, which is being conducted for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Employment and Training Administration (ETA). The study examines the implementation, effectiveness, and benefits and costs of the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs using an experimental design. The study occurred in 28 local areas that were randomly selected to participate. For more information about the evaluation, please visit the [project web page](#).

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