

## Top 5 Reasons Why WIOA Matters to People with Disabilities

[Last year, a new law called the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\) was passed.](#) This new law is important for the 1 in 5 Americans who have a disability because it requires the entire workforce system to become accessible for people with disabilities. This law can help people with a wide range of differences to get the skills and training they need in order to pursue the American dream, just like everyone else. However, whether WIOA really helps to empower people with disabilities to get jobs depends on state and local organization getting involved and making your voices heard. Here's how:

- 1. Each State Must Complete a State Plan and You Can Help!** Every state must create a “Unified integrated state workforce plan” before March 2016. When a state has completed their plan, they have to publish it online. Organizations that work to empower people with disabilities can and should review their state plan and write public comments about ways the plan can help people enter the workforce. As a community, we want each state to move forward a state plan that will be inclusive of the most integrated job opportunities for people with disabilities. However, states might not know how to do that unless you write them and tell them about what works.
- 2. We Can Help Your Organization to Submit Public Comments.** Submitting public comments on state economic plans can seem daunting. However, getting the workforce system to understand what barriers keep people with disabilities from employment depends on making your voices heard. RespectAbility can help by sending information about what references to disability and youth are included in each plan. We can also send to you a copy of our toolkit that contains information on best practices and model systems. We can also send you our public comments to help you to know what issues to focus on.
- 3. Key Issues: Having the Right Data, Best Practices, and Focusing on Youth.** There are certain key issues that your comments can address and can empower people with disabilities get the supports they need. For example, states often focus solely on unemployment statistics which exclude people with disabilities. [Instead, state plans should focus on the workforce participation rates.](#) It is critical that state plans reflect proven best practices and cost-effective models. In terms of best practices, [your comments could point to successful programs in your own state or to the good work being done in places like the Dakotas, Wyoming, and Alaska.](#) Lastly, many requirements in WIOA focus on youth and this is a huge opportunity for young people with differences. Your public comments could focus on ways to have a “Jackie Robinson Strategy.” This means that States should focus resources on what works best – [early interventions](#), [inclusive internships](#), [connecting youth with apprenticeships](#), and [job coaching](#).
- 4. We Have Resources that Can Help.** It is critical that state plans reflect proven best practices and cost-effective models. RespectAbility, has created a toolkit which can help you to know what to write about in your comments. [Our Disability Employment First Planning Toolkit reflects data driven insights and practical solutions for empowering people with disabilities.](#) We also have extensive data available about disability and employment in each and every state. [You can freely use this data to educate state leaders and inform them about the needs of your state community.](#) [We also have a list of webinars about proven models that your state can follow in order to achieve win-win-win solutions for people with disabilities, employers and taxpayers alike.](#)
- 5. Time Is Short – Act Now!** WIOA is a historic change as the entire workforce system must now be accessible to people with disabilities. **However, time is short.** [For example, comments must be submitted to California by January 2<sup>nd</sup>.](#) RespectAbility will be working hard to review plans. **We need YOUR HELP! We need local and state organizations to make their voices heard, raise their concerns, and advocate for more jobs for people with disabilities!**