Workforce Innovation Fund
National Evaluation Coordinator (NEC)
Defining Workforce Interventions

The following definitions are provided to assist WIF grantees’ evaluators in identifying the relevant literature and evidence base regarding past workforce-related interventions. By definition, the WIF grantees are innovative and often combine established or existing strategies as well as untested interventions. To the extent that established interventions may shed some light on the innovate interventions proposed by WIF grantees, we suggest that each evaluator review the research related to the particular service strategy being evaluated. The studies are included in the WIF NEC clearinghouse and are categorized by the type of intervention, defined as follows:

- **Service Change: Career Pathways.** Numerous grantees are focusing on career pathways strategies with or as part of an existing programs or creating new programs based upon career pathways practices. Relevant literature on career pathways includes evaluations of career pathways strategies as a whole, as well as evaluations of programs that represent different components of the career pathway approach. Career pathways interventions typically include:
  - Sector-specific and industry partnership strategies
  - Sequential training with, if applicable, industry-recognized credentials
  - Appropriate supportive “wrap-around” services, including worker readiness
  - Instructional innovations, such as integrating basic skills and training, and flexibility in entry and exit points

- **Service Change: New Service:** The interventions geared toward changes in services being delivered, other than career pathways strategies are included in this category. These include additions to or expansions of existing programs or new service offerings common in other workforce development organizations, including supportive services, case management, coaching or counseling, and structuring formal peer support and networks.

- **Service Change: New Population.** This group of interventions focuses on new recruiting and serving new target populations, typically based on such categories as: distinct demographic or economic conditions; specific barriers to workforce entry, such as mental, physical, or English-language impediments; or the access to other social services that may or may not be coordinated with workforce services. This intervention category does not include special populations that the entities have already been serving. Rather, it includes new populations that may or may not have been accessing existing services but that require additional approaches or tools to improve their access or outcomes. The WIF NEC has included studies relating to youth, veterans, public housing residents, homeless people, immigrants and English-language learners.
• **Partnerships: Industry.** Some WIF grantees are either entering into sector-specific service delivery or expect to provide this delivery for industries in which they have not worked before. These interventions create and utilize industry partnerships (e.g., partnerships between the WIB and/or other workforce development organizations and local industry associations, employers, unions, etc.) with the aim of improving the relevance and effectiveness of service delivery, and sometimes resulting in direct job placement. Entrepreneurship-focused interventions are also classified in this category because they approach entrepreneurialism in a similar fashion as a new “sector.” This category does not cover all career pathways strategies, though career pathways generally include: industry partnerships. Sector- and industry-specific partnerships include performing intensive labor market analyses; defining job specifications for recruitment and eligibility to training; developing the appropriate curricula for the industry in question, including integrating on-the-job training; and job placements.

• **Partnerships: Service Providers.** A few WIF grantees are hoping to alter the internal procedures or operations in workforce services by improving relationships with current partners (such as community colleges) or fostering new partners to provide existing services, such as recruitment, supportive services, training, or job placement assistance. Service provider partnership interventions also include programs that are jointly operated by two or more partners. These interventions strive to create and utilize partnerships to improve the quality or efficiency of service delivery. For clarity’s sake we distinguish this intervention (which focuses on new partnerships to provide workforce services) and systems change (which focuses on new partnerships to provide new workforce and non-workforce services). This category does not cover career pathways, though pathways generally include some service provider partnerships (such as training and education partners).

• **Administration: Systems Change:** This categorization applies to interventions that involve coordinating workforce services with other workforce and non-workforce service agencies. This includes improvement of coordination and cooperation among existing partners, or bundling and co-locating existing services for efficiency. Some of these interventions are alterations to broader social service frameworks that are geared toward reducing duplicative services in a geographic area. Systems change efforts may also be focused on enacting broader policy or community changes. Partnerships with industry and with service providers are common within systems change interventions, but systems change interventions go beyond common workforce partnerships to significantly change the way services are provided. This category does not include changes to internal systems, such as procedures, information management, or service delivery partners for existing services. In focusing on systems-wide change, workforce development providers may be looking at interactions between workforce services and those in areas like housing, education, criminal justice, and other unemployment or financial and economic services.
- **Administration: Management Information Systems (MIS).** Several grantees are focused on designing and/or implementing advanced or enhanced MIS for administrative or program efficiencies that are geared toward improving service delivery. Much of the literature on MIS improvements is exploratory, focusing both on technological considerations (e.g. building systems that link with others) and content (e.g. identifying and using relevant interim measures). This can include improvements to key operations, such as: participant tracking; participation rates; customer service; budgeting, staffing, and communications and reporting both internally and externally. Online technologies that are involved in actual service provision to participants are included under online service delivery. The general goal of this type of intervention is the improvement of coordination and cooperation within a workforce development organization’s operations and management though many of these efficiencies may also have service delivery benefits for participants.

- **Service Change: Online Delivery.** In contrast to the MIS-focused grantees, many grantees plan to use telecommunications innovations as their service strategy. These interventions create or enhance new online service delivery modules, allowing customers to access learning tools, job referrals, and/or training programs online. The transition from “bricks-and-mortar” in-person service delivery to online often includes developing the physical and software infrastructure, training staff on their use, ensuring usability and security for students, and developing “back office” functionality that allows for real-time data collection and reporting.