



EQUITY BARRIERS IN THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM

National Able Network, Inc. (Able) is a leading non-profit organization specializing in providing employment counseling, training, and placement services for job seekers across Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, and Nebraska. In 2018, Able began its journey to change the workforce system by adopting an equity framework.

Able's programs are designed to assist jobseekers from all backgrounds, including the unemployed, working poor, military veterans, seniors, and those who are making a career change. Over the last year, it became evident that the larger workforce system – that was designed to help people find employment opportunities – was unintentionally failing them. **The labor market and workforce programs add unnecessary barriers and penalties to people of color and individuals at the bottom of the wage scale.**

Five minutes in any American Jobs Center will tell you that our workforce system needs to change so that it can provide real, tangible benefits for the people it is there to serve. National Able Network underwent a comprehensive analysis to **identify solutions that address the systemic challenges to workforce programs for workers of color, eliminate barriers that prevent job seekers from unlocking economic opportunity, and champion equitable solutions to digital access and literacy.**

These solutions require collaboration across all entities that administer and supervise workforce programs. **We need your help** to evolve our workforce system to best serve diverse workers, empower businesses – large and small – to source and hire local talent from the public workforce system.

THE CHALLENGES MOST-IN-NEED WORKERS ENROLLED IN FEDERAL PROGRAMS ARE FACING

1 in 4

Are facing challenges with securing food for their household

1 in 5

Are facing challenges with secure housing

30%

Do not have a home computer or tablet

1 in 5

Do not have reliable home internet access

29%

Lost their job because of the pandemic

Source: National Able Network, Inc. Client Survey, November 2020



ABOUT NATIONAL ABLE NETWORK:

National Able Network, Inc. is a leading non-profit organization specializing in providing employment counseling, training, and placement services for job seekers. Our programs are designed to assist jobseekers from all backgrounds, including the unemployed, career changers, military veterans, seniors, and aspiring IT professionals. Each year, National Able Network serves more than 75,000 individuals throughout Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Nebraska.

BARRIERS TO FEDERAL WORKFORCE PROGRAMS

National Able Network compiled a list of barriers that impact job seekers' entry and matriculation through the federal workforce programs designed to help them progress along career pathways.

A snapshot of barriers is included in the chart, and a full list is available upon request.

JOB SEEKER WORKFORCE PROGRAM FLOWCHART



	BARRIER	SOURCE	RECOMMENDATION
RECRUITMENT	Rigid performance metrics incentivize providers to serve job seekers with better employment prospects and facing the fewest challenges or barriers to success, creating a system that inequitably eliminates opportunities for those with the greatest need for workforce programs.	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) law (DOL/Congress)	Revise WIOA performance metrics to account for service delivery that allows providers to serve most-in-need job seekers without fear of under-performance. Utilize or expand the statistical regression model by giving providers credit for serving the most in-need job seekers.
ENROLLMENT	Program compliance requirements are extensive, duplicative, and profoundly time-consuming for frontline staff to collect and enter into data systems. Compliance time impedes effective coaching and training for job seeker customers.	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) law, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) law (DOL/Congress/States)	Reorganize services at the state level. Mandate compliance requirements at the federal level and ensure states do not add additional compliance burdens. Adjust funding to ensure caseloads and service levels recognize the reality of the level of work needed to support the service population.
DIGITAL TOOLS	Digital tools and internet access are vital job search and career advancement resources, yet funds do not allow the costs associated with providing job seekers needed digital tools and internet access.	DOL/State/Local policy	Update supportive service policies and funding to promote flexibility and expand funding for key activities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer/tablet purchases for clients. • Expending program funds for home internet access as well as partnering with broader municipal internet accessibility efforts. • Digital literacy training as a core component of workforce preparation.
JOB TRAINING	Training funds help job seekers access skill development opportunities, but predatory for-profit training institutions capitalize on vulnerable job seekers with misleading career promises but poor completion and employment outcomes.	DOL/State	Require LWIAs to evaluate outcomes and ban predatory training companies that have a track record of poor completion and employment outcomes.
JOB PLACEMENT	A majority of disadvantaged job seekers are receiving public assistance to meet basic needs such as food and housing. These individuals risk losing benefits almost immediately upon employment creating a harmful “benefits cliff”.	Health and Human Services (HHS), US Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Replace the “benefits cliff” with an “off-ramp” process where individuals can build economic stability and self-sufficiency over time through a mix of both personal income and continued supplemental assistance.