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# Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI)

Using WDQI to Enhance ETPL

**Resource #4**

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## Introduction

The US Department of Labor (DOL) launched the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) in 2010 to support states in developing and improving their workforce and education longitudinal data systems (LDS) and in increasing linkages between them with a view to improving programs, evaluating new models, and integrating evidence-based policies and practices.

With the help of WDQI grants, 40 states have launched or enhanced these systems. Most states have also leveraged grants from the US Department of Education's sister grant program—[Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems \(SLDS\)](#), operated by the Institute for Education Sciences' National Center for Educational Statistics—as well as state resources, foundation grants, and other resources. Over time, states have integrated data from a broad range of workforce, education, and human service agencies and programs, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and corrections and reentry programs.

In recent years, more states have developed or enhanced public-facing decision-support products for employers, individual customers, and workforce development professionals. The eligible training provider list, or ETPL, required under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), is one such product.

### The ETPL in the States: Evolution and Innovation

The ETPL dates back to the passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 1998, which aimed to improve training opportunities for dislocated workers looking to re-enter the workforce. The creation of the ETPL was a core component of this effort. The new system allowed training customers to use federally funded vouchers to pay for training through programs that appeared on a state-approved list—the ETPL (see Table 1 for a complete list of allowable training types).

States were required to review training programs before adding them to their ETPLs and to include key information about the cost and performance of each program on the list. Together, these practices were intended to provide customers seeking training with a list of high-quality providers and the information required to make an educated decision about which program would best meet their needs.

However, states retained significant flexibility underneath these guiding rules and adopted a variety of strategies for developing and managing their lists. As a result, states vary in how they set criteria for training program eligibility, collaborate with local workforce development boards to update lists of providers, and so on.



State approaches have changed since their inception in 1998. A key lever for change was the adoption in 2014 of WIOA, which now provides the legislative framework for ETPLs across states. While WIOA retained many of the core provisions of WIA’s ETPL guidance, it also pointed states in new directions. For example, WIOA’s greater emphasis on career pathways underscored the importance of defining and aligning services within a career pathways framework.

*Table 1: Types of training allowed on an ETPL under Title I of WIOA*

1	Occupational skills training, including training for nontraditional employment
2	On-the-job training
3	Incumbent worker training
4	Combined workplace training and related instruction programs (including cooperative education)
5	Training programs operated by the private sector
6	Skill upgrading and retraining
7	Entrepreneurial training
8	Job readiness training provided in combination with other training services
9	Adult education and literacy activities provided in combination with other training services
10	Additional customized training provided by employer after hiring an individual

In recent years, states have continued to innovate in their ETPL uses, finding ways to integrate registered apprenticeship programs or non-degree credentials, or pushing in entirely new directions. For example, Alabama is leveraging its ETPL as part of a “no wrong door” approach to the workforce system that is designed to mitigate the benefit cliff and smooth the transition from public assistance to paid employment. Likewise, Minnesota uses its ETPL to promote equity and connect workers with training to enter industries that align with the interests of local economies.

## WDQI and the ETPL

States with WDQI grants have used these funds to improve their ETPLs in different ways, including to expand data breadth, quality, security, and alignment across systems, and to increase the availability of data to the public, as referenced in Table 2 below.



Table 2: Uses of WDQI funds to improve ETPLs

<b>Expanding the breadth of data</b>
Increasing the number of qualified training providers that report data
Capturing new types of data from existing reporters
<b>Improving data quality</b>
Providing technical assistance to help training providers report consistently and promptly
Engaging in technical consultations with training providers to ensure the data that they report accurately reflects real-world activities
<b>Improving data security</b>
Upgrading data security systems
Adopting easy-to-use file transfer systems that do not require training providers to possess technical knowledge about encryption
<b>Aligning data across systems</b>
Ensuring that formatting requirements are aligned across data systems
Eliminating data fields so training providers do not have to enter the same data in multiple systems
<b>Disseminating data to the public</b>
Launching new public-facing portals
Adding new features to public-facing portals
Redesigning public-facing portals to improve usability

## Round 8 Grantee Spotlight: Arkansas

In applying for WDQI funds during Round 8, Arkansas identified “workforce training provider performance information and outcomes” as a key priority. The WDQI team focused on two goals—simplifying the reporting process for training providers and improving data quality for internal and external customers. During the grant period, they made progress in both areas.

### Simplifying Reporting Processes

When states require training providers to enter the same information into multiple data collection systems, response rates may suffer as providers decline to re-enter information they have already submitted through other channels. To simplify the process for training providers, Arkansas is aligning its WIOA ETPL performance data collection with other state data systems. For example, Arkansas is working to make sure that Classification of Instruction Program (CIP) codes entered in the America’s Job Link (AJL) WIOA case management system match those entered in the Arkansas Higher Education Information System (AHEIS). Aligning codes across systems will make data matching easier and faster for for-credit providers. Arkansas has also updated its system for non-credit providers, setting up a process that entails filling out a roster for each training program. The roster comes with detailed instructions, illustrations, and a recorded “how-to” presentation, all designed to make the process simpler and easier to understand.



A related challenge for providers arises when they are asked to navigate sophisticated file transfer systems without the requisite in-house technical expertise. To address this barrier, as well as any data security concerns, Arkansas uses a FEDRamp-compliant encrypted file transfer system to allow providers with any level of expertise to easily point and click to transfer files containing student information.

To further reduce the burden on training providers, once individual-level participant data is compiled, the ARData team uses an administrative data matching process to obtain in-state and out-of-state employment data, do all necessary calculations, and share aggregated outcomes with providers to enter in their case management systems for federal reporting. This centralized approach reduces risks and increases consistency in reporting.

### **Improving Data Quality**

In previous years, Arkansas experienced data quality issues when a single training program could produce more than one type of credential. For example, a provider might offer a welding program in which participants could earn multiple credentials. However, the reporting system could only recognize whether a credential was earned, not the nature of the credential itself. This matters because one of the value propositions of the ETPL is to communicate the benefit of different kinds of credentials from different institutions to students, parents, and employers—and not being able to identify the specific credential that a participant earned reduces the quality of credential information available to the ETPL’s users.

To address this issue, Arkansas is working with providers and updating policy and training materials in order to ensure that all its ETPL programs include only one credential in a given program. And, to obtain even more detailed credential information, Arkansas is also now collecting the unique degree codes that providers use in the event that multiple credentials have the same CIP code.

Ultimately, these improvements in data quality help provide consumers using the ETPL with higher-quality information about program costs, the time it takes to complete a program, and employment and earnings outcomes associated with different credentials. This also helps more clearly lay out credentials that may be part of a stackable pathway, allowing participants to better plan out their use of the ETPL to earn industry-recognized credentials and increase their economic independence.

### **A More Robust Decision-Support Future**

As states see a rise in demand for data that can help agencies and programs understand what works and why and guide customers to programs suited to their needs, tools like the ETPL play increasingly important decision-support roles at many levels. By using WDQI resources



to improve the quality of data and increase the accessibility of their ETPLs, states can extend the value of their services and reporting infrastructure to many more people, firms, and communities who can, in turn, make better decisions about their jobs, careers, and livelihoods.