



FEDERAL PARTNERS IN TRANSITION

What to Know About Work-Based Learning Experiences for Students and Youth with Disabilities¹

The Federal Partners in Transition (FPT) workgroup presents *What to Know About Work-Based Learning Experiences*. This fact sheet was created to address the compatible outcome goals and policy priorities identified in *The 2020 Youth Transition Plan: A Federal Interagency Strategy* and provides a quick glance of available resources. Please click on the links to learn more about each fact.

General and Legislative Information

1) **Work-based learning and why it is important**

The [National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth](#) defines [work-based learning](#) as a “supervised program sponsored by an education or training organization that links knowledge gained at the work site with a planned program of study. [Experiences range in intensity, structure, and scope](#) and include activities as diverse as site visits, job shadowing, paid and unpaid internships, structured on-the-job training, and the more formal work status as apprentice or employee.” [Work-based learning experiences](#) have been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of adult employment success for students and youth with disabilities.

2) **What to look for in a work-based learning experience and program**

A high quality work-based learning program includes the following characteristics:

- a. Clear roles and responsibilities for worksite supervisors, mentors, teachers, support personnel, and other partners;
- b. Training plans that specify learning goals tailored to individual youth with specific outcomes connected to their learning;
- c. Opportunities for a range of work-based learning experiences, especially those outside traditional youth employing industries such as hospitality and retail;
- d. Assessments to identify skills, interests, and support needs at the worksite;

¹ Youth with disabilities is defined differently by various programs and systems, including the contributing agencies. Consequently, a standard definition is not used in this document.

- e. Reinforcement of work-based learning outside of work; and
- f. Appropriate academic, social, and administrative support for youth, employers, and all involved.

3) **Service learning is a form of work-based learning**

[Service learning](#) improves employment outcomes for populations that experience significant barriers in the job market, such as individuals who do not have a high school diploma. The [income exclusions](#) available to Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries who participate in [AmeriCorps programs](#) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries in [AmeriCorps VISTA](#) add further appeal. With these employment supports, beneficiaries can gain work-based experiences and skills through participation in service learning programs [without risk of penalty or loss of disability benefits](#).

4) **WIOA and work-based learning experiences under Vocational Rehabilitation**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) made significant changes to programs authorized under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Title IV of WIOA), particularly to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services program which provides VR services to individuals with disabilities. Section 113 of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended by WIOA, requires that pre-employment transition services, including work-based learning experiences, be made available to students with disabilities in need of such services who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. Work-based learning experiences may include in-school or after school opportunities, or experiences outside the traditional school setting (including [internships](#)), that are provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible.

5) **WIOA youth formula funding and work-based-learning experiences**

[At least 20 percent of local WIOA Title I youth formula funds](#) must be used for work-based learning. Such work-experiences may include summer and year-round employment, pre-apprenticeship, on-the-job training, or internships and job shadowing. Eligible training providers deliver these services in local communities, which can be accessed through local [American Job Centers](#).

[WIOA requires coordination of services](#) to promote career readiness, secondary school completion, entry into postsecondary education, and [postsecondary credentials aligned with in-demand industry sectors](#). Additional allowable activities include entrepreneurial skills training and financial literacy education.

Benefits for the Individual

6) **Benefits of work-based learning experiences include:**

- a. **Fostering self and career exploration.** In addition to establishing a clear connection between education and work, work-based learning facilitates an [assessment of interests, strengths, and abilities](#) while exploring possible career paths.

- b. **Developing positive work habits and attitudes.** Work-based learning experiences provide the opportunity to strengthen six key [soft skill areas](#) - communication, enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism. These types of skills provide a competitive advantage for achieving career goals.
- c. **Assessing abilities and strengths.** Work-based learning experiences provide opportunities for assessing abilities and strengths outside the classroom. Participation in job related tasks provides a chance to explore how to communicate disability-related work support and accommodation needs, if necessary. [Knowing if, how and when to disclose a disability](#) is a necessary part of self-assessment.
- d. **Expanding professional networks.** [Networking](#) can provide access to professionals who have similar interests and possibly provide access to an individual's next employer.
- e. **Becoming better informed to make decisions before accepting a job offer.** Many work-based learning experiences offer rewards and/or compensation. For example, some work-based learning experiences offer a salary. If it is unpaid, the program may offer a stipend and/or housing. Some employers may offer [health insurance](#) when an employee works 40 hours or more a week. Others might offer training and/or certification in an industry of their choice. Weighing the pros and cons can be overwhelming, but it is important to make sure a person's [next move](#) is aligned with their career and [financial goals](#), and ultimately supports their well-being and independence.

Benefits for the Community

- 7) **Benefits of work-based learning experiences for State agencies, local service providers, employers, and the local economy may include:**
 - a. **Making education more relevant.** Work-based learning experiences can be a valuable component of specially designed instruction for students. [Research](#) has found that students in work-based learning programs complete related coursework at high rates and have higher attendance and graduation rates than those not enrolled in such programs.
 - b. **Allowing [employers](#) to tap into a pool of skilled workers.** Work-based learning experiences motivate potential employees and future employers to hire job ready individuals, which reduces training costs and improves employee retention. Establishing collaboration among schools and employers leads to a more productive local economy and, ultimately, builds thriving communities.
 - c. **Recognizing the shared responsibilities for a successful work experience.** Quality work experiences are especially dependent on all participants' knowledge and fulfillment of their roles in the arrangement for a [work-based learning experience](#). Students must perform job responsibilities, transition specialists must orient students to the workplace, their roles and responsibilities; and

employers must provide clear, detailed, and repeated directions to teach skills needed for successful job performance.

d. Assisting State agencies to meet requirements of Federal and State laws.

Transition services are provided to students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and to students and youth with disabilities under the Rehabilitation of 1973, as amended by WIOA. These laws are authorized to help meet the needs of students with disabilities and prepare them to obtain direct employment or a career path leading to employment. [Work-based learning experiences](#) may be used by schools and vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to help meet requirements for providing pre-employment transition services² and transition services under WIOA, and transition services under IDEA.

e. Strengthening community partnerships. Through partnerships with State agencies, including State educational agencies and State VR agencies, schools, worksites, businesses, families and community organizations, communities can create opportunities to develop transferrable skills to prepare for postsecondary education and employment.

8) Work-based learning experiences impact leadership development and genuinely engage people in their communities. Beyond the specific benefits to individuals and to the agencies and employers mentioned, [leadership development](#) can foster the voices of youth with disabilities in the decision-making processes that affect them. It improves [soft skills](#), which many employers view as [important to work readiness](#). It also encourages employers and agencies to better coordinate and better engage with all members of their community, helping them to provide better services.

This document was created by the Federal Partners in Transition (FPT). FPT is a workgroup with representatives of several federal agencies, including the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, and the Social Security Administration, which are involved in promoting inclusive service delivery for transitioning youth with disabilities from school into postsecondary education, the workforce, and independent living. Additional information about FPT's shared vision, compatible outcomes goals, and policy priorities can be found in [The 2020 Federal Youth Transition Plan: A Federal Interagency Strategy](#). The report is available at: <http://youth.gov/feature-article/federal-partners-transition>.

² Under section 113 of the Rehabilitation Act, work-based learning experiences are 1 of the 5 required pre-employment transition activities and are only available to students with disabilities.