

Determining Priorities for Your Local Area

Michael E. Wonacott

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You may feel that lots of improvements are needed in your local WIA youth system. However, if you tried to improve all aspects of your local system, you'd probably end up improving none of them. Working effectively to improve your local WIA youth system requires setting priorities.

For that matter, determining priorities is not a 1-time task. Rather, it's a recurring function in which the local area identifies, collects, and analyzes data in targeted areas. So, how do you go about determining priorities? How do you identify issues to target and information to collect and analyze?

Gain Support and Cooperation for Determining Priorities

The first step is to build support and promote cooperation for the task of determining priorities. Determining which improvements are most needed and making those improvements will require support and cooperation from the local workforce investment board (WIB), youth council, administrative entity, WIA youth service providers, and other WIA youth system stakeholders.

In particular, you will need to gain support by demonstrating to the local WIB and youth council how identifying and prioritizing specific improvements needed can help

- Achieve existing local area goals and priorities
- Capitalize on local WIA youth system assets
- Address known system challenges
- Align local WIA youth system goals and workforce development and economic development goals

In addition, you will need data from multiple sources including Sharing Career Opportunities and Training Information (SCOTI) records. To gain support and cooperation on accessing data, WIA staff should

- Inform the WIB, the youth council, and the administrative entity of the purpose of gathering data
- Identify administrative entity staff as points of contact for data gathering
- Agree on procedures for
 - Accessing SCOTI records and reports
 - Preserving confidentiality
 - Spot-checking for data integrity
- Develop a schedule for data gathering

Select Issues and Indicators to Analyze

There are a number of issues that can be analyzed to assess the effectiveness of the local WIA youth system. Issues might include:

- Performance under Common Measures
 - Placement in employment, education, advanced training, or the military
 - Attainment of a degree or certificate
 - Literacy/numeracy gains
- Program processes and issues
 - Youth retention
 - Goal attainment
 - Timeliness of services

- Case management
- Employment and educational issues
- Environmental scan
- Spending
- Populations served
- Customer satisfaction
- Availability and use of related resources such as in-kind contributions

For each issue, WIA youth staff should identify more specific, measurable indicators of the effectiveness of services provided or of outcomes achieved. For example, indicators for placement in employment might include these.

- Percentage of youth who are employed in their chosen occupation/career field
- Percentage of youth placed in jobs that place them above poverty or meet current needs without continuing to receive assistance
- Percentage of youth who are placed in full-time employment
- Percentage of youth employed in high-demand, high-growth industries

WIA youth staff will need access to SCOTI data for the entire area and other sources as appropriate for the issue; staff must be familiar with fields and reporting capacity in SCOTI and other data sources. However, staff must still have permission from the WIB and the administrative entity to use the data and must be certain to protect its confidentiality. After the data is analyzed, it should be deleted or destroyed if personal identifiers such as names or social security numbers are included.

If possible, recruit a data specialist from a local, county, or regional planning or economic development agency to assist in planning for determining local priorities. In addition to WIA youth staff, it is important to involve other individuals in the WIA youth system or in the community with technical knowledge and expertise in data collection and analysis.

An area may choose to gather data on all or most of the indicators for an issue, or it may decide to target a few indicators in 2-3 issues. To make that selection, WIA youth staff should use

- The collective knowledge, experience, and insight of informed individuals in the local WIA youth system
- The expert knowledge and experience of local experts in data collection and analysis

Dividing your workforce investment area into smaller geographic sections. It is often important to consider how needs differ throughout your workforce investment area. Your workforce investment area can be broken down into smaller sections using counties, ZIP codes, census tracts, school districts, or even school buildings.

You should determine whether to divide the workforce investment area into smaller geographic sections and, if so, which smaller sections to use.

- Consult the collective knowledge, experience, and insight of informed individuals in the local WIA youth system to identify smaller sections that might differ substantially.
- Use the expert knowledge and experience of experts in data collection and analysis to identify technical implications.
 - Availability of data by smaller sections
 - Discrepancies in smaller-section data available (e.g., ZIP codes versus school districts and buildings)
 - Whether discrepancies matter and how they can be handled
- Consult specialists in local, county, or regional planning or economic development agencies, who also are familiar with data issues and may have access to existing data sets.

Gather Information on Youth

Demographics of WIA youth participants. You may wish to collect demographics and other characteristics of WIA youth participants in your entire local area or in smaller sections. This makes it possible to compare the results of indicators for target populations based on characteristics such as age, gender or ethnicity. It also provides information on who is being served in the WIA youth system. You might gather information on

- 3 • Demographics of all WIA youth participants
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Race
 - Ethnicity
 - Native or primary language
 - Barriers
 - In-school/out-of-school status
 - Low income status
 - Residence
- Employment goals with demographic breakdown
- Educational goals with demographic breakdown
- Outcomes with demographic breakdown
 - Placement in employment
 - Placement in education
 - Placement in advanced training
 - Placement in the military
 - Certificates or degrees attained
 - Literacy/numeracy gains
 - Retention

Demographics of the total local youth population. You may wish to gather data on the total youth population in the workforce investment area or smaller geographic section to determine whether the WIA youth program is meeting local needs or to compare characteristics and performance of WIA youth to the general youth population.

Questions an area may wish to consider include

- Are all appropriate populations being served (e.g., dropouts, pregnant youth, offenders)?
- Are youth in all smaller geographic sections of your workforce investment area being served appropriately?
- Are outcomes for youth in different populations or in different smaller geographic sections appropriate?

Tips on gathering demographic data. Data collected on WIA youth participants should be gathered in a consistent manner. Likewise, data on all youth should be organized the same way. A single information-gathering form can be used for both purposes.

Specialists in state, local, county, or regional planning or economic development agencies can play a valuable role in gathering information on the total local youth population. They may have

- Comprehensive local, state, or national datasets
- Data analyses capacity
- Knowledge of local reports of publications with applicable data

It is preferable that data specialists who are assisting in planning or who work for planning or economic development agencies gather information on the total youth population. However, such information also can be gathered by consulting a variety of sources of public information, as shown in the table below.

Sources of Local Youth Information	
Demographics	
Data	Sources
Overall population and demographics	U.S. Census Bureau’s American Fact Finder (http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets by state, county, city, and ZIP code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Aggregate demographics ◦ Selected breakdowns by age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, labor force participation, income, poverty level • Detailed demographic breakdown available on the People tab <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Age and sex ◦ Aging ◦ Disability ◦ Education ◦ Employment ◦ Income ◦ Origins and language ◦ Poverty ◦ Race and ethnicity ◦ Relationships ◦ Veterans

Sources of Local Youth Information	
Demographics	
Data	Sources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Available by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nation ▪ State ▪ Geographical areas over 65,000 population (county and combined, metropolitan, and micropolitan statistical area)
Low-income youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Research and Evaluation Database <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Older youth (http://www.fred-info.org/WIAOYouth.htm) o Younger youth (http://www.fred-info.org/WIAYYouth.htm) • Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) database • School lunch program • Kids Count Database (http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/data.htm)
Runaway and homeless youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local homeless and runaway shelters
Teen birth rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids Count Database (http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/data.htm) • Federal Research and Evaluation Database <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Older youth (http://www.fred-info.org/WIAOYouth.htm) o Younger youth (http://www.fred-info.org/WIAYYouth.htm) • Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio (http://www.cdfohio.org/Default.asp)
Migrant youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ohio Migrant Education Center (http://omec.treca.org/)
Youth in foster care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: State by State Adoption and Foster Care Statistics (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/tables/)
Youthful offenders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Research and Evaluation Database <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Older youth (http://www.fred-info.org/WIAOYouth.htm) o Younger youth (http://www.fred-info.org/WIAYYouth.htm) • Ohio Department of Youth Services (http://www.dys.ohio.gov)
Educational Data	
Data	Source
Data on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduates and dropouts • Discipline • Mobility • Attendance • Enrollment • Ohio Achievement Tests • Ohio Graduation Test 	Ohio Department of Education iLRC (interactive Local Report Card Home) (http://ilrc.ode.state.oh.us/default.asp) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latest annual school building report cards • Latest annual school district report cards • Customizable Power User reports to retrieve data on multiple schools, districts, and years • Statewide district and building data for multiple years in downloadable Microsoft Excel spreadsheets that can be used for analysis
Aggregated or disaggregated by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race/ethnicity • Gender • Disability status • Economic status • Limited English proficiency • Gifted • Migrant 	Data available by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School building • School district • State
<p>Note. Summary demographic information also is available in the state, county, regional, and workforce investment area profiles identified in the sources of youth employment information table on page 6.</p>	

5 **Information on the youth perspective.** It is vital to capture youth's perspective of the WIA system as well as statistical data. Questions to consider include

- What do youth want from the WIA youth system?
- What do youth want from other youth programs?
- What services do youth need?
- How should services be provided?
- What increases youths' access and ability to use services?
- What hinders youths' access and ability to use services?
- Do potential participants know about WIA services?
- What is the impression of potential participants about WIA services?
- If youth know about WIA services but don't take advantage of them, why not?

Information on the youth perspective can be gathered through focus groups, surveys, or 1-on-1 interviews. The table below shows advantages and disadvantages of those three methods.

Advantages of Focus Groups, Surveys, and 1-on-1 Interviews

Focus Groups	Surveys	1-on-1 Interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore views and feelings of small groups of people • Act as sounding boards • Generate new ideas and challenge prior assumptions • Elicit more considered views and more natural conversation • Collect data from group responses • Cost-efficient • Speedy results • Stimulate additional thoughts through group interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get answers to exactly the same questions from larger group • Relatively short time commitment from respondents • Can be given to larger group of people • Can be written, oral, in person, phone, or e-mail • Can be done at the respondent's leisure • Usually closed questions, though open-ended questions should be included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can talk at length about specific topics and issues • Provide detailed feedback and follow-up questions • Can be more flexible and informal than other methods • Allow facilitator to gauge immediate reaction • Elicit honest, personal responses • Allow interviewees to speak more candidly – no group pressure • Allow interviewees to express unique needs and opinions and interests • Get more information per respondent than with focus group

Identify Local Employer and Labor Market Needs and Priorities

To evaluate the effectiveness of the WIA youth system in achieving its goal of assisting youth in making a successful transition to adulthood through education and work, data must be considered in the context of the local labor market.

Data on youth employment is important because it can answer questions about the types of employment available to youth as well as data on wages, full-time versus part-time employment, and benefits. All of this data can be used to help inform indicators on the quality of youth placements. For example, to judge whether the WIA system is effective in placing youth in high-quality employment opportunities, you must first understand whether high-quality jobs are available for youth.

Local labor market information can reveal high-demand and high-wage jobs available locally. Knowing the labor market can help the local area WIA youth staff evaluate whether WIA youth training opportunities are aligned with local labor needs.

Gathering data on the perspective of local employers also is important when creating a picture of the local labor market. Examples of information from employers include

- What characteristics, occupational skills, and soft skills do employers need?
- Are employers willing or able to hire youth?
- What barriers, real or perceived, to hiring youth exist?
- What are employers' perceptions of the WIA youth system?
- Do employers feel the WIA youth system meets their needs?
- What emerging employment trends do employers see?

The same strategies used to gather similar information from youth – focus groups, interviews and surveys – can be used to gather information from employers.

Sources of Employment Information	
Data	Sources
State Profile	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic and demographic overview Industry employment trends Measures of economic health and well-being 	<p><i>Ohio Economic Analysis, 2007: Understanding the Environment and Charting a Course for the Future</i> (http://www.ohioworkforce.org/docs/localboards/OhioEconomicAnalysisReport_June2007_1.pdf)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statewide data Comparisons with Ohio metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) and neighboring states
County and Regional Profiles	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population by race and age Educational attainment Family types Household income and poverty status Employment by industry sectors 	<p>Ohio Department of Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ohio County Profiles (http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research/files/s0.htm) Ohio Economic Development Regional Profiles (http://www.odod.state.oh.us/Regionals.htm)
Workforce Investment Area Profiles	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about state and local labor markets Demographic and economic characteristics Trends in population, employment, unemployment rates, income and housing 	<p>2007 Workforce Analysis Reports by Ohio Workforce Investment Area (http://lmi.state.oh.us/wa/waWIA.htm)</p>
Labor Market Information	
<p>Employment statistics and trends</p>	<p>Ohio Labor Market Info Classic (http://lmi.state.oh.us/ces/lmr.htm)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly Labor Market Review Employment by industry sector Unemployment Trends over last 10 years Manufacturing sector hours and earnings Data available for state and MSAs <p>Annual Averages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nonagricultural wage and salary employment for state and MSAs State data only Average weekly earnings Average weekly hours Average hourly earnings

In addition, there are numerous existing sources of employment and labor market information. Some of those sources are listed below.

Analyze Data to Identify Candidate Issues

Tracking data trends. Now that all data is collected, trends can be established for performance on each indicator selected above. Trends can be tracked for different geographic sections and different youth populations. Analyze performance on each selected indicator in the issue, not performance on the issue as a whole. Data trends include

- Comparisons over time
- Comparisons of 1 smaller geographic section with other sections, the entire workforce investment area, a like workforce investment area, the state, or the nation
- Comparisons of 1 youth target population with all local WIA youth participants, the same target population statewide and nationwide, and all WIA youth participants statewide and nationwide

7 Analyzing data. Established trends are now analyzed to determine whether they are positive, negative, or neutral.

- **Positive.** Performance on this indicator is better for your local area, smaller geographic section, or target population than for other local areas, smaller geographic sections or target populations.
- **Negative.** Performance on this indicator is worse.
- **Neutral.** Performance on this indicator is the same for your local area, smaller geographic section, or target population than for other local areas, smaller geographic sections or target populations.

Analyzing indicators. Performance on each indicator should be analyzed, whether performance is positive, negative, or neutral. Positive performance on an indicator can indicate a strength that you may be able to apply in other areas. Negative performance can indicate a problem that you may need to address. Neutral performance can indicate an area where improvement may yield maximum benefits. For example, it may be more productive to focus on raising performance from neutral to positive than from negative to positive.

Each indicator can be analyzed to determine whether addressing it is a low-level, moderate-level, or high-level need and whether the improvement would yield low-level, moderate-level, or high-level benefits.

Consider these questions to determine the level of need and level of benefit for each indicator:

- How many youth experience the need and would benefit from the improvement?
- How immediate are the need and the benefit?
- How serious are the short-term consequences if the need *is not* addressed? How beneficial are the short-term consequences if the need *is* addressed?
- How serious are the long-term consequences if the need *is not* addressed? How beneficial are the long-term consequences if the need *is* addressed?
- Are there feasible actions that can be taken?

Ranking Candidate Issues

Now, you have a list of candidate issues – indicators that show trends and are categorized as low-level, moderate-level, or high-level needs. Your final step is to rank those indicators in order of importance – according to the informed judgment of the local WIB, youth council, administrative entity, WIA youth service providers, and other key WIA system stakeholders.

Connecting Candidate Issues with Economic Development Goals

As one part of the workforce development system, the WIA youth system cannot be effective unless its goals align with the goals of the economic development system.

The long-term goal of any economic development system is to create a highly skilled workforce that leads to a thriving economy. However, the specifics of that goal – how the economy thrives and what workforce is needed – are defined by the community. Every community has 5 broad objectives.

- Attracting and retaining employers that provide jobs – ideally, high-quality jobs
- Providing training and education to youth that lead to a successful transition to employment
- Upgrading the skills of incumbent workers
- Re-employing and, if needed, re-skilling dislocated workers
- Connecting employers and highly qualified workers

The WIA youth system is clearly a part of the second objective, providing training and education to youth that leads to a successful transition to employment.

Identify local economic development goals. Local economic development goals may be contained in a variety of documents.

- An economic development plan, strategy, report, or other formal document published in paper or electronically as a webpage
- A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, required for funding assistance from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration
- A 5-year Consolidated Plan, required for funding assistance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development

- o The primary focus of 5-year Consolidated Plans is housing, but plans also include economic development components.
- o City and county 5-year Consolidated Plans may be available at www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/about/conplan/local/oh/
- o Ohio's statewide 5-year Consolidated Plan is available at www.odod.state.oh.us/cdd/ohcp/publications.htm

Economic development plans and goals also are developed by a variety of public and private agencies.

- Local, county and regional economic development agencies
- Local, county and regional planning agencies
- Private, not-for-profit economic development or planning corporations
- Community organizations like the Chamber of Commerce

Web searching also can yield some economic development plans, but the best way to find a local plan is a personal contact in

- A local, county, or regional economic development agency, corporation or community organization
- Mayor's office
- County commissioners' office

If nothing else, every city and county should have an economic development agency – or at least a zoning agency – with knowledgeable staff. A knowledgeable, personal contact can help you identify and obtain any and all local documents with economic development outcomes.

Once local economic development plans are collected, WIA youth staff need to identify those goals that are relevant to your local WIA youth system. Then, WIA youth staff need to determine how those goals impact each of the ranked candidate issues – indicator and smaller section or target population. This will demonstrate what connections the goals have on the identified areas of need.

Prioritize candidate issues. Next, WIA youth staff and other key WIA youth stakeholders should identify 2-3 priorities for local system improvement. To identify the 2-3 priorities, analyze the

- Ranked candidate issues
- Alignment of issues with economic development goals
- Alignment of issues with workforce development goals

It also can be helpful at this point to assess the feasibility of addressing a particular area of concern. Processes such as a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) analysis are useful tools in assessing the likelihood that a candidate issue can be successfully addressed by the local WIA youth system.

Develop appropriate outcomes. Outcomes measure the effectiveness of the WIA youth system in addressing local priorities. Three different types of outcomes are defined and illustrated below.

WIA Youth System Outcomes			
Type of outcome	Long-term outcomes	Intermediate outcomes	Short-term outcomes
Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System or community-wide change that occurs after substantial, coordinated programming • Measure how well the community has met its long-term economic development goal • Defined by local economic development or government entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes that occur in individual participants after exit from programs • Measure the effectiveness of the different systems that comprise the strategies for each objective • Defined by the local WIB and youth council for the local WIA youth system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes that occur for individual participants during the program or immediately upon conclusion of program activities • Measure the effectiveness of tactics, or individual programs • Defined by program providers
When measured	After 6-10 years	After 1-5 years	End of program

WIA Youth System Outcomes

Type of outcome	Long-term outcomes	Intermediate outcomes	Short-term outcomes
Examples of what to measure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in number of employers • Increased number of higher-paying jobs • Increase in standard of living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in number of youth entering employment • Increase in number of youth entering postsecondary education • Increased retention in employment • Increase in wages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of youth who attain specific skills • Percentage of youth who demonstrate gains in numeracy or literacy • Percentage of youth who demonstrate an increase in employability skills

Two WIA youth Common Measures are intermediate outcomes:

- Attainment of a degree or certificate
- Entered employment, education, or the military

These 2 measures assess the effectiveness of the WIA youth system in preparing youth to be successful in the workplace. However, these 2 measures alone are not sufficient to fully assess the effectiveness of the system in addressing local priorities. It is important to remember that intermediate outcomes are applied to the entire local WIA youth system, **not** to individual programs. Local WIA youth staff and contracted service providers also develop short-term program outcomes to measure the effectiveness of specific elements of the local WIA youth system.

Desired outcomes should be

- **Specific.** Each outcome should specify a candidate issue.
- **Measurable.** Each outcome should specify a verifiable increase or decrease in performance on the candidate issue.
- **Realistic.** Each outcome should be actually attainable within the time allotted in light of the current state of the WIA youth system but also high enough to present a challenge

Define barriers to desired outcomes. To understand what factors prevent individual youth from meeting the desired outcomes, WIA youth staff must identify barriers to meeting those outcomes. It is important for areas to remember that desired outcomes should focus on changes in individuals, i.e., youth.

Understanding the barriers to meeting desired outcomes will reinforce your local priorities, provide further direction when completing the resource assessment, and inform decisions that are made when developing RFPs and issuing contracts.

WIA youth staff should involve the local WIB, youth council, administrative entity, WIA youth service providers, and other key WIA system stakeholders as appropriate in identifying barriers to meeting the desired outcomes. Those individuals should then use their collective informed judgment to rank barriers according to

- The number of youth who experience the barrier
- How serious the *short-term* consequences are if the barrier is not addressed
- How serious the *long-term* consequences are if the barrier is not addressed

Recommend 2-3 priorities and desired outcomes to the youth council. The identified priorities and outcomes should now be recommended to the youth council by WIA youth staff for formal adoption. For each priority and outcome recommended to the youth council, be sure to provide rationale including

- A brief description of the process used in ranking indicators and prioritizing candidate issues
- A summary of the data used to justify the ranking
- The community values that influenced the ranking
- The employer needs that influenced the ranking
- The labor market conditions that influenced the ranking
- A summary of the analysis of ranked candidate issues and economic development outcomes

The youth council makes the final and formal decision on priorities to be addressed and outcomes to be attained. In this task, the youth council moves beyond planning, which involves identifying issues and gathering data, thereby creating the opportunity for data-informed decision making.

In adopting priorities and outcomes, the youth council is making decisions – or adopting recommended decisions – about worthwhile investments.

- Are these priorities expressed as verifiable outcomes?
- Do these priorities and outcomes represent worthwhile allocations of WIA system resources?

Sources

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LearningWork Connection
Center for Learning Excellence
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210
614.292.8665
www.learningworkconnection.org

