Highlights of
The Final Report on Kansas Department of Commerce’s
Workforce Innovation Fund Project

This brief, one of a series highlighting findings from final Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) evaluation reports, 1 summarizes information from the study conducted by Public Policy Associates on the Kansas Workforce Innovation Fund project.

The Kansas Department of Commerce used its WIF grant (a Type A project for new and untested ideas) to design, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of cross-system training, along with other activities. The aim of the WIF project was to strengthen the service delivery and improve workforce system alignment in order to improve customer experience and outcomes. Key partners for the project included the Kansas Department for Children and Families, the Kansas Board of Regents, the Kansas Department of Labor, and all five local workforce development boards in Kansas. The WIF project activities included: develop and conduct cross-system training for workforce staff, assisting job seekers with on-the-job (OJT) placements and co-enrollment in partner services, and build an online portal (ReEmployKS) to support customer access to partners and their services.

The evaluation consisted of an outcomes study, implementation study, and cost study. Data sources for the evaluation included site visits, observations of cross-system training, interviews with staff and employers, participant survey, as well as program and administrative data. Findings included the following:

- A lack of a communication plan and structure for collaboration among the partner agencies caused challenges early in the grant implementation. Once a communication plan was put in place, communication between partner agencies improved.
- The ReEmployKS online portal, including a mobile App, for job seekers was successfully developed and launched. ReEmployKS is expected to be maintained beyond the WIF grant.
- A total of 19 in-person cross-system trainings were conducted with a total of 513 workforce staff in attendance. Staff who attended the training reported being satisfied with the training and found it valuable.
- Program enrollment and on-the-job training (OJT) placements were highest toward the end of the grant period. Enrollments exceeded the planned goal, with 240 participants enrolled. However, the percentage of participants who started and completed an OJT placement was 43 and 54 percent, lower than the planned targets of 80 and 70 percent. A little over three-quarter of employers interviewed (21 of 27) reported that the OJT placement met their performance standards. However, less than half of employers interviewed (41%) reported that they still employed their OJT placement.

The evaluator offered several recommendations for implementing similar projects in the future. These included: 1) establish the value proposition of the initiative for each partner to ensure greater buy-in; 2) share best practices for enhancing OJTs across the system; 3) invest time in educating employers about OJTs; and 4) designate a dedicated staff to monitor the relevancy of training content.

1 Under the Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF), the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) provided 43 competitive grants to States, regions, Tribal entities and localities to design and evaluate new approaches in the public workforce system. Using a “tiered evidence” model (which builds on past research), WIF projects tested a variety of new service combinations, technological innovations, and systems changes (with a focus on program coordination and integration). ETA required grantees to procure independent third-party evaluations to document project implementation, costs, and results, all in order to inform future experimentation and to promote continuous improvement in operations and performance in the public workforce system.