



Chapter 7: Work-Based Learning and Employer Engagement

Overview

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Identify the types of JTED work experiences.
- List work-based learning experiences.
- Adhere to the general requirements for work-based learning experiences.
- Comply with state monitoring expectations.

Work-based learning is an important strategy under the Job Training and Economic Development (JTED) Program that helps customers develop workplace skills, gain occupational exposure, build professional networks, and connect training to employment opportunities.



Work-based Learning Experiences

JTED programs are encouraged to provide employer-connected learning opportunities whenever feasible. Work-based learning experiences should align with customer career goals, employer needs, and local labor market demand.

Work-based learning may be used to:

- Explore career pathways
- Develop occupational skills
- Build work history
- Strengthening employability skills
- Support credential attainment
- Increasing employment opportunities

Programs should incorporate work-based learning activities that are appropriate to the customer population, industry sector, and training model.

Youth Versus Adult Programs

There are both **youth** and **adult** work-based learning work programs and experiences:

Youth Programs

Paid and unpaid work experience is one of the fourteen (14) required JTED Youth program elements and is **not** considered training.

Eligible types include:

- Paid or unpaid summer and year-round employment opportunities (including internships)
- Pre-apprenticeship programs
- Job shadowing
- On-the-job training (OJT)

Adult Programs

Work experience, internships, and transitional jobs are considered **individualized career services** under JTED.



Eligible types include:

- Paid or unpaid internships/work experiences
- Pre-apprenticeship programs
- Job shadowing
- Transitional jobs

Types of Experiences

Paid and Unpaid Work Experience/Internship

For the purposes of this program, the terms **internship** and **work experience** are used interchangeably. The following criteria must apply for a work-based learning work experience or internship:

- It must be planned and structured learning activities that take place in a workplace, including virtual worksites when appropriate.
 - Worksites may be in the private, nonprofit, or public sector.
 - It must primarily benefit the customer, even when employers receive incidental benefits.
 - It may be paid or unpaid and must comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and all other applicable laws.
 - For youth, it may occur during summer months (May 1–September 30); or year-round
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Note: *Public service employment is prohibited under JTED.*

Pre-Apprenticeship Program

Pre-apprenticeship programs help customers develop foundational skills and prepare for entry into Registered Apprenticeship Programs or other career pathway opportunities.

High-quality pre-apprenticeships should include:

- Employer-aligned curriculum
- Career exploration
- Employability skills development
- Hands-on learning opportunities
- Connections to apprenticeship and employment opportunities



- Industry-recognized credentials when appropriate

Job Shadowing

Job shadowing allows customers to observe employees performing daily job duties within a specific occupation or industry. It is generally short-term and unpaid.

Benefits include:

- Career exploration
- Exposure to workplace culture
- Understanding employer expectations
- Increased awareness of occupational opportunities

Transitional Jobs (Adults Only)

Transitional jobs are time-limited, wage-paid work experiences subsidized up to one hundred percent (100%) for individuals with significant barriers and unstable work histories.

Transitional jobs features include:

- They are only allowable for JTED Adult programs.
- They may occur in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors.
- They help customers build work history and move toward unsubsidized employment.

Requirements include:

- Combined delivery with career and supportive services.
- Focus on building work history, demonstrating workplace success, and developing skills for unsubsidized employment.
- No employer retention requirement (unlike OJT), though continued employment is an ideal outcome.

Transitional job activities strengthen skills such as ethics and integrity, work ethic, initiative, communication, dependability, listening, teamwork, critical thinking, and accountability.



If transitional jobs are used, Grantees implementing transitional jobs should establish written policies addressing eligibility, wage reimbursement, supportive services, duration, employer selection, and customer expectations

- Eligibility (chronically unemployed/inconsistent work history)
- Wage reimbursement amounts
- Supportive services
- Duration limits
- Employer selection criteria
- Target populations (e.g., long-term unemployed, ex-offenders, TANF recipients)

Transitional jobs must comply with all related sections, including contracts, wages, monitoring, and documentation policies.

On-the-job Training (OJT) (Youth Only)

OJT provides youth with paid employment where the employer delivers occupation-specific training. Customers are employees of the business from day one, and employers are expected to retain them after training. OJT is provided under contract and includes wage reimbursement for the employer's extraordinary training costs. JTED supports youth OJT as a work experience strategy. Adult OJT may be available through partner workforce programs such as WIOA and should be coordinated through the appropriate workforce agency.

On-the-job Training (OJT) features include:

- Timeframe limited to duration needed for customers to gain proficiency.
- Decision-making that considers skill requirements, customer abilities, and the Individual Service Strategy (ISS).

Note:

Youth OJT is counted under the youth work experience element—not the training performance measures.

Work-Based Learning Continuum:



General Requirements

Work-based learning work experience must be based on an assessment and identification in the Individual Employment Plan (IEP)/Individual Service Strategy (ISS). Work experience providers are not subject to ETPL requirements. Activities must not interfere with collective bargaining agreements and customers must receive the same health and safety protection as employees. Employer of record may be the host employer, Youth provider, and JTED grantee. The experience may be unpaid if customers perform no or minimal productive work.

Funds may **not** be used to:

- Influence union organizing



- Fill jobs affected by strikes or labor disputes

JTED funds may **not** be used to:

- Encourage business relocation resulting in job loss
- Provide work tied to sectarian instruction or religious worship

Customers may **not**:

- Displace employees
- Replace laid-off workers fringe on promotional opportunities
- Be supervised by immediate family members

Determination of “trainee” vs. “employee” must follow FLSA guidance. A six-part test is provided to determine trainee status.

Youth Specific Requirements

Youth Work Experience Requirements

All youth work experiences—paid or unpaid—must include academic and occupational education.

Education components may include:

- Industry-specific knowledge
- Workforce preparation
- Basic academic skills
- Hands-on occupational training

Education may occur:

- Concurrently or sequentially, on- or off-site
- Through the employer or another provider



Note: Combining Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) with work experience is allowable due to Illinois' ISY waiver.

Youth Work Experience Expenditure Requirement

Local areas must spend at least **20%** of youth funds on work experience.

Allowable expenditures include:

- Wages/stipends
- Staff time developing and managing WEX
- Evaluating WEX
- Youth and employer orientations
- Academic and occupational education
- WEX portions of youth apprenticeships
- Incentives tied to WEX
- Job Readiness training

Note: 20% is calculated after administrative costs and applied to each funding year separately. Supportive services cannot count toward the 20% requirement.

Wages, Stipends, and Incentives

Wages and Stipends

Grantees should establish written procedures for work-based learning activities that address customer eligibility, employer engagement, supervision, monitoring, and documentation requirements. The employer of record may be the local area or provider.

Features:

- Wages must reflect the prevailing wage unless skills do not meet occupation standards.
- Wages may not fall below minimum wage.

Stipends are allowed but only for work-based learning—not classroom-only time.



Stipends must:

- Not exceed minimum wage
- Be taxable, documented with clear expectations, and prorated if customers partially complete activities

Incentive Payments (Youth)

Incentives may reward progress tied directly to work experience, education, or training.

Incentives may **not** be used for:

- Recruitment
- Eligibility verification
- General participation
- Adult/DW funding

Policies must include:

- Eligibility
- Limits and timeframes
- Allowable milestones
- Documentation requirements
- Internal controls for safeguarding funds

All incentives **must** be:

- Outlined in the ISS before activities begin
- Documented in the case management system
- Supported by evidence of achievement
- Included in the case file

Work Experience Contracts and Documentation



Written contracts between the employer and Local Workforce Innovation Area (LWIA)/contractor are required.

Contracts must describe:

- Worksite information
- Requirements
- Employer assurances
- Terms and conditions

A Work Experience Outline/Plan must detail the type of WEX, as well as the:

- Location
- Dates
- Compensation
- Required skills
- Supervision
- Skill gap analysis

Progress reports must include:

- Hours worked
- Skills gained
- customer evaluations
- Required signatures

Employer Engagement Expectations

Strong employer partnerships are essential to successful workforce development programs. **Employer engagement** is activities that build relationships with employers to support recruitment, curriculum development, work-based learning opportunities, hiring, and long-term workforce partnerships. Grantees should identify and maintain relationships with employers that support customer learning and employment outcomes. Employer engagement should begin during program design and continue throughout recruitment, training, work-based learning, placement, and follow-up activities.

Examples of employer engagement activities include:



- Workplace tours
- Employer panels
- Guest speakers
- Mock interviews
- Job shadowing opportunities
- Internships and work experiences
- Apprenticeships
- Hiring events
- Industry mentoring
- Direct employment opportunities
- Programs should make reasonable efforts to connect customers with employers throughout the training process.

Worksite Safety

Grantees are responsible for ensuring customers receive appropriate workplace safety orientation and training.

Providers should document:

- Safety orientation
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) issued
- Emergency procedures
- Supervisor information

Monitoring

Grantees are responsible for ensuring work-based learning activities provide meaningful learning opportunities and support customer success.

Employer Monitoring

Providers should:

- Conduct regular employer check-ins
- Monitor customer progress



- Address concerns promptly
- Document employer feedback
- Maintain communication throughout placement

State Monitoring

Programs should:

- Maintain communication with employer partners
- Monitor customer progress
- Address workplace concerns promptly
- Document outcomes and customer achievements
- Evaluate employer and customer satisfaction
- Worksites that do not provide safe, supportive, or meaningful learning opportunities should be reviewed and corrective action taken as appropriate.

DCEO may review:

- Worksite agreements
- Employer eligibility
- Timesheets
- Payroll documentation
- Learning plans
- Customer evaluations
- Monitoring visits
- Safety documentation
- Case notes
- Supportive services

Additional Resources

See the [JTED Partner Guide](#) for additional resources.