

OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING

Occupational Skills Training (OST) is an organized program of study providing specific vocational skills leading to proficiency in performing actual tasks and technical functions required by certain occupational fields at entry, intermediate, or advanced levels. This policy applies to WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth, as well as Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) participants.

OST must be made available to WIOA Title I Youth as one of the 14 youth service elements. It is arranged by DLR in coordination with an approved training provider on the South Dakota Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL).

An Individual Training Account (ITA) agreement is developed for each individual receiving the OST service.

INDIVIDUAL ELIGIBILITY

A WIOA Title I individual must be eligible to receive training services. Individuals must be enrolled as a full-time student (exception for TAA), as considered by the training provider. Use the Occupational Skills Training Request to review requirements and expectations of an OST. The participant will agree to the following requirements below in their Employment Plan. TAA requests are completed in SDWORKS. Eligibility determination and justification for training includes an interview, assessment, and Employment Plan which determines:

- The participant meets eligibility and priority for OST funding as a WIOA Title I Youth, Dislocated Worker, TAA, or as an Adult in one of the DLR priority groups eligible for financial assistance.
- The participant would benefit from training and is unlikely or unable to obtain or retain employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency or wages comparable to or higher than previous wages.
- The participant has the interest, skills and qualifications, based on assessments, to successfully engage in training services. **Example:** *WorkKeys® assessment the individual scored low, however when given the Accuplacer their score did not require remedial.* This includes sufficient reading and math skill level to indicate success in the program of training services as determined by one of the following:
 - WorkKeys® Assessment or scores indicate success based on the [ACT job profile database](#) for the occupation. **Example:** *Welding requires a level 3, so the individual would need to score a level 3 on WorkKeys® to indicate that they would be ready for this level of training.*
 - Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores indicate success.
 - ACCUPLACER® scores required for the program of study indicate success (no remedial classes).
 - ACT scores.
- Labor Market Information in the local or regional area supports direct linkage to employment with attainment of the credential or the individual is willing to commute or relocate to areas with such employment.
- The participant has reviewed the Conditions and Assurances ([Form 10B](#)), signed the Conditions and Assurances Signature Page ([Form 10A](#)) and the requested program of training is on the Eligible Training Provider List ([ETPL](#)). TAA programs are not required to be on the ETPL.
- The participant has completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and has provided their Financial Aid Award Letter from the provider/institute.
- To continue OST funding for subsequent semesters, the participant agrees to maintain a cumulative 2.0 grade point average or higher.
- The participant demonstrates availability of financial resources to successfully complete the program and case notes supporting this must be entered into SDWORKS.
 - An individual may select a program of training services beyond the maximum funding amount allowed with an ITA when other sources of funding are available to supplement the ITA. Examples of other sources are not limited to but may include: TAA, Pell Grants, scholarships, loans, severance pay and other sources. The

individual's ability for paying for the full amount of the training must be documented in the individual's case notes.

- Individuals are responsible for full payment of tuition, fees and other costs not specifically approved and provided under Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I.
- Individuals in default of previous student loans may be considered for DLR assistance with verification of an agreed upon re-payment plan with the financial institution for the defaulted amount.

Other Eligibility Scenarios

Individuals working with DLR but have not been determined eligible for training by the training start date, may be considered for OST tuition assistance once eligibility has been determined.

Individuals who are enrolled into WIOA Title I prior to the beginning of their training program but are denied due to lack of WIOA Title I funding may still be considered for second semester OST tuition assistance as long as they have passed their first semester course work at a grade point average of 2.0 or higher.

Individuals who may have just started a program of training and those who may have completed one or more semesters/quarters and are now seeking DLR assistance should not be considered for WIOA funded OST. Exception is given to individuals who have suddenly become dislocated from their employment. Other considerations are based on an individual's circumstances, such as individuals who are on public assistance or individuals whose financial situation has suddenly changed and may be approved by DLR staff. Special considerations must be documented in case notes.

Exceptions to full-time student status must be approved by a Labor Program Specialist. Consideration will be based on individual circumstances such as class offerings, progress to date, completion of the approved program within two years, participant's abilities, etc. Special considerations must be documented in case notes. Individuals who were previously enrolled in WIOA Title I, received OST, went to work and are now seeking additional training assistance, may be considered for training. However, eligibility must be met, and additional training must follow all areas of this policy. Additional training must be directly related to the individual securing better paying jobs and/or career development.

Individuals who have left the training program of their own accord or as a result of academic probation or suspension may be considered for training assistance. Eligibility must be met, and training must follow all areas of this policy. Reasons for consideration may include medical issues, family emergencies, etc. Special determinations must be established in the individual's case notes.

VA benefits for education and training services do not constitute "other grant assistance" under WIOA's eligibility requirements. Therefore, eligibility for VA benefits for education and training services do not preclude a veteran or eligible spouse from receiving WIOA funded services.

APPEAL PROCESS

In the event that an Occupational Skills Training Request is denied, an individual has access to an appeal process as identified in the Other Grievances section found in Equal Opportunity is the Law ([Form 2](#)).

PROGRAMS

When selecting a program for training services, career pathways; the ETPL, including a program description; performance outcomes of the program; and cost information should be reviewed with the individual. An individual should be fully aware of Labor Market Information related to employment in their field of study. This includes wages, employment projections, job openings in the area in which they live, etc.

Programs of training services for OST must be on the ETPL. (See [Eligible Training Providers](#) Policy 4.10).

Trade Adjustment Assistance: See [TAA](#) Policy 5.40.

Registered Apprenticeships

OST agreements may be entered into with registered apprenticeship program sponsors or participating employers in registered apprenticeship programs for the classroom portion of the registered apprenticeship program in accordance with the requirements of this policy.

TRAINING PROGRAM LENGTH

Tuition assistance is only available for individuals expected to earn a credential, or more than one credential, within two years of starting a program of study. If an individual must go above and beyond the two years, exceptions may be considered. Contact the appropriate Labor Program Specialist for exception consideration if the individual:

1. Has a disability which requires part-time attendance.
2. Must re-take a class (without WIOA Title I tuition assistance).
3. Has had unexpected changes in their life. Changes are not limited to, but may include, family emergencies, medical situations, or an income change.
4. Cannot complete the training with the current schedule of class offerings.
5. Needs pre-requisite courses to extend the program of study (i.e. CNA).

If an exception is made, a case note must be included in the individual's SDWORKS file by the Labor Program Specialist outlining the reason for and the length of the extension.

FUNDING

The maximum funding allowed for an OST for participants in the Adult and/or Dislocated Worker programs is \$8,000 per training program, as approved by the Workforce Development Council. Maximum funding allowed for the Youth program is \$10,400 per program. Maximum funding totals includes tuition and required program fees. Books and supplies will be paid for with WIOA Title I funds under Support Services (see [Policy 5.34](#)). However, the amount to be funded for each individual is on an individual basis and determined by DLR staff.

WIOA Title I funds will not be used for remedial courses (less than 100 level courses). In situations where such courses are recommended by the training provider, a remediation schedule should be established between the individual and the Adult Education and Literacy partners to improve an individual's scores. Once an individual's basic skills indicate success for their identified program of study, WIOA Title I funding may begin.

WIOA Title I funds will not be used for retaken classes without prior approval from the appropriate Labor Program Specialist. In making this determination, the Labor Program Specialist will take into account an individual's situation, such as medical situation, family emergencies, etc. Special considerations must be established in the individual's case notes.

Non-ETPL Funded OST

In limited circumstances, Non-ITA trainings may be made available to individuals for OST programs not on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). In situations where a provider may have no additional participants in a training program and there are no other ETPL providers available, it may not be feasible for the training program provider to apply for the program to be on the ETPL. Non-ITA funded training must be approved by the appropriate Labor Program Specialist on a case-by-case basis.

Non-WIOA

Workforce Development may take credit for non-WIOA funded OST only if the participant is enrolled as a Youth or co-enrolled as a Youth and Adult. Examples of this may be another member of the Integrated Resource Team is providing the funding or the individual is receiving a Build Dakota scholarship. This would be only be appropriate to do if the program and individual would normally be approved by the Workforce Development program - the provider is on the ETPL, justification is met, individual is eligible, etc.

DETERMINING UNMET NEED

Total cost of WIOA Title I training may include tuition and required fees. A Financial Aid Award Letter from the training provider is required. Other funding, such as Pell Grants, scholarships, Vocational Rehabilitation, etc. are then subtracted from this total cost of training to determine an individual's unmet need. Loans are not to be included in this determination. WIOA financial assistance may not exceed the maximum funding total or the individual's unmet tuition or fees, whichever is less.

When an individual is enrolled in more than one partner program where training funds are available, the individual's Integrated Resource Team (IRT) should establish a method to blend and braid resources, in order to provide the most benefit to the individual without duplicating funding.

Additional Assistance

WIOA Title I funds may be used to assist an individual in training costs above and beyond tuition and fees, including books, housing, dependent care, transportation. These associated costs are paid for through Support Services (see [Policy 5.34](#)).

DOCUMENTATION AND OBLIGATION

Individual eligibility related to the program must be justified in a SDWORKS case note. This **justification note** compiles the objective information. It should include analysis and recommendations from the Employment Specialist and must be entered into SDWORKS case notes. This is the justification note to reference during the funding obligation process. Ensure all required documentation is complete, legible, and uploaded to the Obligation Voucher in SDWORKS. In the comment box on the Obligation Voucher, include the date of the **justification note**.

The completed Occupational Skills Training Cost Estimate and Funding Approval ([Form 21](#)) should be completed by all parties in order to obligate funding.

Upon receipt of an **itemized** invoice or OST Billing Statement ([Form 23](#)) from the training provider and the individual's class schedule, payment can request. If the invoice does not itemize the tuition costs and associated fees, Form 23 must be completed by the provider. DLR cannot accept invoices for tuition and fees that are not itemized.

A job service office manager must review and approve the obligation voucher material, ensuring all requirements have been met and documented. The approving manager is also responsible for ensuring all documentation is uploaded, correct, and legible before authorizing Obligation and Payment Vouchers.

Funding obligations for **subsequent semesters or quarters** require:

- Completion of Monthly Monitors from previous semesters or quarters.
- Receipt of previous semester grades.
- Documentation of a Measurable Skills Gain, if appropriate, in SDWORKS.

MONITORING

Monthly Monitors must be completed for any type of training that is beyond 30 days to evaluate the progress to date and identify issues of concern to ensure a successful training. Monitoring of progress must be done on a monthly basis using the Monitor Progress Report ([Form 22](#)) and must include grades. Receipt of transcript or grade report the end of semester or quarter is required.

An IRT meeting can take place whenever needed and can meet the monthly monitor requirement if Form 22 is completed. Upload copies of completed Monitor ([Form 22](#)) and any additional documents provided. The completed Monitor Progress Report ([Form 22](#)) should be received by DLR by the 7th day of each month.

Once Form 22 is received by DLR:

- If satisfactory progress is being made, no attendance issues are reported, and no other obstacles that could prevent successful program completion are noted, upload the completed monitor to the SDWORKS participant file and enter a case note. Send a new Form 22 to the participant for next month's monitor.
- If indication of unsatisfactory performance is reported, contact the participant to schedule a meeting (by phone, virtually, or in-person) before supplying a new Form 22. At the meeting:
 - Discuss monitor outcomes and potential additional services (Support Services, tutoring, etc..)
 - Revise the Employment Plan to outline how DLR will assist in overcoming any obstacles reported. Upload the new signed Employment Plan into SDWORKS
 - Add a case note regarding the meeting outcomes and action to be taken

It is the responsibility of DLR staff to take action any time an issue is disclosed that may prevent the participant from completing the program successfully. If a Monthly Monitor is not completed, an SDWORKS case note should be entered detailing the reason for noncompliance.

Every effort should be made to ensure the participant is aware of all the resources available. All correspondence and determinations must be documented in SDWORKS along with contact information for the participant's advisor or support staff assigned by the training provider.

PAYMENT

An Individual Training Account (ITA) is established with a training provider, on behalf of the participant, for payment of a training service. ITAs are paid per semester, quarter or once for a short-term training. Fiscal payments are made based on appropriate documentation with correlation to the unmet need as outlined by the training provider.

MODIFICATION

Modification for OSTs are allowed for unmet need, change in costs, changes in participant's financial situation, etc. A Labor Program Specialist will determine if other reasons for modification are appropriate.

EMPLOYMENT SPECIALIST RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE PARTICIPANT

- Determine the training eligibility of the individual and assist in the development of an employment plan, as well as any revisions to that plan for the participant to reach their goal.
- Provide information on in-demand industry sectors and occupations.
- Provide information relating to in-demand local occupations and earnings, skill requirements, and opportunities for advancement in such jobs.
- Provide information on nontraditional employment. Refer to [Nontraditional Employment](#) Policy 6.5.
- Provide information relating to the availability of support services.
- Assist in establishing eligibility for programs of financial aid assistance for training and education programs.
- Assist in providing or connecting the individual with appropriate financial literacy services for them to develop a budget for the duration of the training period.
- Provide information to the individual on loan repayment, grants vs. loans, self-sufficiency, and occupation demands and wages.
- Ensure reasonable accommodations are available.
- Monitor the individual's progress on a monthly basis (see "Monitoring" above).
- Determine the individual's unmet financial need for the program of training.
- Determine if WIOA Title I funds should continue to be committed to assist the individual with completion of the program.

- Ensure WIOA Title I funds are in addition to and do not duplicate those otherwise available to the participant.
- Help coordinate tutoring services for a participant with the training provider, as needed.
- Provide job search and placement assistance, including career counseling.
- Ensure all activities related to the training program are in accordance with the policy and are being met.
- Confirm the training provider is on the ETPL located on the DLR website at dlr.sd.gov/workforce_services/individuals/training_opportunities/approved_programs.

**WIOA Law §129(c)(2) & §134(b)(3)
20 CFR §680.200 - §680.230, §681.540 & §681.550**