

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE	NO. 31-15
	DATE March 18, 2016

TO: COMPREHENSIVE AMERICAN JOB CENTER MANAGERS
AFFILIATE AMERICAN JOB CENTER MANAGERS
EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION (ETA) REGIONAL ADMINISTRATORS
STATE WORKFORCE AGENCY ADMINISTRATORS
STATE WORKFORCE ADMINISTRATORS WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT
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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD STATE AND LOCAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD STATE AND LOCAL CHAIRS
ALL EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION GRANTEEES

FROM: PORTIA WU 
Assistant Secretary

SUBJECT: Release and Availability of a Final Report, *Exploring the Role and Adoption of Technology-Based Training and Employment Services*

1. Purpose. The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) announces the release and availability of a final report, *Exploring the Role and Adoption of Technology-Based Training and Employment Services*.

2. Background. The dramatic evolution of computer and communications technology, coupled with an ever-increasing emphasis on cost-effectiveness, underscores the potential of technology-based learning (TBL), or e-learning, in the public workforce system. ETA launched a national initiative in 2008 to systematically explore the role and adoption of TBL within the public workforce system (see Training and Employment Guidance Letter Number 17-07 at: <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL17-07.pdf>, which was issued to implement the TBL Initiative). While several demonstration grants funded under the TBL Initiative have examined the structure and outcomes of specific training programs, comparatively little is known about the emphasis on TBL at the state policy level or its systematic adoption and use at the local level by American Job Centers (AJC) and other providers of workforce services.

In this study, TBL is defined as an umbrella term for any learning via electronic technology. Further, TBL is subdivided into two distinct uses of electronic technology. The first is the use of technology to promote skills building that supports academic, occupational training or personal development objectives. The second is the use of technology to provide information or resources needed to support the workforce development process (e.g., provision of labor market or career

information). In this report, the term “TBL” is used to describe either type of learning, and where appropriate, the report draws a distinction between the two forms of TBL, technology-based *skills building* and technology-based *services*.

3. Research Design and Analytical Approach. In 2011, ETA commissioned Abt Associates, Inc. to develop and implement surveys to collect descriptive information about the use of TBL at the state and local levels of the public workforce system and provide a report on the findings from these surveys. The two surveys were administered during an eight-week period in spring 2013. For additional information on the administration of these surveys, see Training and Employment Notice Number 21-12 at: http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEN/TEN_21_12.pdf.

The state survey was sent to 57 state workforce agency (SWA) administrators, and the local survey was sent to 580 Executive Directors of Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDB). LWDBs oversee each local area. A total of 47 state surveys (81 percent response rate for SWA administrators) and 399 local surveys (69 percent response rate for LWDB Executive Directors) were completed by respondents, respectively.

4. Publication Description. This study surveyed workforce system policymakers and practitioners regarding the use of TBL for employment, training, and education activities and the factors that influence the policies, decisions, and practices concerning TBL. Specifically, the final report provides a description of SWAs’ efforts to promote and support TBL, as well as actual adoption and use of TBL at the local level in providing Workforce Investment Act (WIA)¹ services. These include WIA Title I core, intensive, and training services, and WIA Title II educational services. The final report also identifies factors that appear to facilitate or impede state supports for TBL and local area use of TBL.

5. Key Findings. As technologies continue to evolve, there is greater potential for technology to be used to supplement the employment services and training provided by AJCs and other providers of workforce services. This survey research effort collected current information on TBL opportunities and usage at the local and state levels, and factors that influenced its adoption and design in the public workforce system since ETA implemented the TBL Initiative in 2008. Analysis of the data collected has identified issues that might be further explored by ETA and other workforce system stakeholders as technology-based skills building strategies and services continue to be used to meet the varied skills requirements of the labor market. These areas to consider include:

- Understanding exactly what constitutes an appropriate level of technological literacy and where the current competency gaps are for individuals served by the workforce system;
- Promoting instructional effectiveness and consistency of TBL by working with training and education providers and other partners to further convey expectations or standards around TBL (e.g., course design and pilot testing, online teaching credentials, and availability of student support options);

¹Note: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) became law on July 22, 2014, and WIOA supersedes WIA and amends the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

- Exploring institutional options to share developmental costs and defray operating costs of TBL;
- Understanding the dynamics of promoting technology in terms of what it takes to establish a technology-friendly service delivery environment, how to reduce dependence on or expectations of staff-based services, and how to use existing technology to promote newer technology; and
- Examining the role and effectiveness of technical assistance to:
 - Provide the support needed for AJC participants to reap maximum benefit from WIA services; and
 - Create and communicate a supportive learning environment that will attract and retain participants in the future.

In relation to these connected matters, the public workforce system has a long established history of providing individualized and hands-on support to workforce participants looking to enhance their employability and career opportunities. This research demonstrates the prevalence of blended delivery options for both technology-based services and technology-based skills building. That emphasis on blended options underscores the importance of continuing to implement TBL at a pace and in such a way that maintains the essential character of the workforce system.

In the context of these considerations, the researchers suggest that it is important for ETA to be aware of and sensitive to establishing realistic and balanced expectations around the pace of TBL adoption. While the analysis of the survey results suggest that state and local stakeholders have embraced the value and potential of TBL, there were issues such as infrastructure costs to the providers and the technological literacy of some workforce participants, that might defer or impede utilization of TBL. Therefore, the researchers consider it essential that ETA establish a message that avoids any implication that more is better or sooner is better, and they state that integral to this is ETA's challenge to develop an appropriately balanced message to policymakers, planners, practitioners, and providers. In other words, the researchers suggest that ETA continue to offer both the insight and support needed for state decision-makers and LWDBs to make informed decisions about where and when to invest in TBL.

6. Inquiries. To view an abstract of this publication, as well as to download the executive summary and full report, visit the ETA Research Publication Database Web site at: <http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/keyword.cfm>.