



Wider Opportunities for Women

Promoting Economic Independence in the Public Workforce System: Using Self-Sufficiency as a Goal

Audience: WIB Board Members

Time: 35 minutes presentation. When scheduling a meeting with a WIB, you want to suggest a one hour time slot to allow for questions and dialogue.

Materials: PowerPoint Presentation Slides, Script, Frequently Asked Questions

Background:

Reality Check: Promoting Self-Sufficiency in the Public Workforce System

Reality Check is a resource for the members and staff of local and state Workforce Investment Boards (WIB's) and others responsible for addressing the workforce development needs of their community, WIB's are policy boards with legislated responsibilities under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). WIB's are charged with creating and maintaining a workforce system that responds to the needs of job seekers and employers that strengthens the local economy.

WOW reviewed practices from more than 200 workforce boards around the country to find the workforce boards that established the most far reaching policies and programs. We found that the boards who used a realistic measure of what it costs families to make ends meet and using that information to design programs and policies went a long way both in establishing training goals with employers and in preparing clients for jobs that offer self-sustaining wages in their region.

The *report* challenges the interpretation made by some workforce boards and regional US Department of Labor offices that the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) mandates a "work first" approach, that is, an approach where skills training is a last option, available only after other services have failed repeatedly to help someone secure a steady job. *Reality Check* highlights practices that improve a worker's chance of finding a good job in the labor market and using the self-sufficiency standard to set program goals, spend training dollars, establish local

economic development initiatives, and ensure access to career services for the most vulnerable job seekers.

Since conducting the original research, WOW has continued to follow the efforts of the WIBs in our report. As a follow-up to the original report, WOW deepened our research on WIBs that address the self-sufficiency needs of underrepresented groups including youth, ex-offenders, and women.

Workforce Investment Act (WIA)

The promise of WIA (passed 1998 and implemented in 2000) was to strengthen the nation's workforce development system by streamlining and coordinating the delivery of multiple employment, education and training programs. WIA has been in a steady pattern awaiting reauthorization since 2003. Since 2003 when its authorization expired, Congress has made annual appropriations based upon the original statute. This is a precarious footing for future appropriations in the face of mounting deficit pressures and demands for higher spending for education and other Congressional priorities. The President's FY 2008 Budget proposal slashes WIA funding. This is on top of a two-decade slide in federal funding for workforce training that has dropped even more precipitously since 2000.

Both the House and Senate passed their own versions of legislation to reauthorize WIA back in 2006. However, the bills were never brought to conference nor signed into law. The 2006 Senate and House bills retained the original purpose of WIA: to increase participants' employment, retention, earnings and occupational skill attainment and to improve the quality of the workforce. The Senate bill expanded the concept of self-sufficiency in provisions relating to goals, client counseling, sector projects, and reporting. In addition, the bill offers a definition of self-sufficiency consistent with the measure used in *Reality Check*. The House bill moved in the direction proposed by President Bush by emphasizing individual Career Advancement Accounts. Both versions also added a provision to promote informed choices by jobseekers.

The Senate and House bills have yet to be re-introduced or modified the in the 110th (2007) Congress. In the absence of reauthorization, DOL has taken several steps to make changes to the program, including issuing proposed regulations in late December 2006,¹ although Congress, in appropriating funds, has banned their implementation.

¹ <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/pdf/E6-21766.pdf>.

The boards highlighted in the Wider Opportunities for Women “Reality Check” report interpret the scope and performance goals embedded in WIA as the starting point rather than the answer to improving the economy and the overall quality of life in their communities. The case studies in the report show that properly directed, workforce development dollars can make a tremendous difference for workers, employers and the community as a whole.

Goal of Presenting to WIB Board Members:

WIA is the largest single source of federal funds for workforce development, offers universal access to services to a range of different workers, and forms the community-based system of one-stop centers.² Workforce Development Board members are critical stakeholders in how WIA funding is allocated in a community. WIB members are charged with being an advisor focused on meeting employer and worker needs for economic growth and stability, providing policy guidance, evaluating performance, and recommending continuous improvements. More information on a WIBs function is available at:

http://www.forumpartnerships.net/attach/USA_WorkforceInvestmentBoards.pdf

As a community stakeholder the benefit of presenting this information to Workforce Development Board members is to:

- Affect the WIB members' vision to improve both the economy and the overall quality of life in their community.
- Provide information and tools about self-sufficiency strategies that can lead to innovative solutions to workforce development system requirements and challenges.
- Demonstrate how Workforce Investment Boards across the country to view self-sufficiency as a mechanism that builds a comprehensive and systemic response to workforce needs in a community.
- Engage the Workforce Investment Board members in using a tool such as a self-sufficiency measure to improve on existing policy and program goals and daily service functioning.

Based on your organization's priorities, you may have more detailed goals. If so, insert those here:

² http://www.workforcealliance.org/atf/cf/{93353952-1DF1-473A-B105-713F4529EBB}/Briefing_Ed2.pdf

Preparing for the Presentation:

- Read the *Reality Check* online materials prior to delivering this presentation at: <http://www.wowonline.org/wow>
 - The supplemental materials with each case study provides excellent examples of policy and program guidance.
 - Please contact WOW to gain more information beyond the case studies in the report.
- WOW's second Reality Check publication on best practices for Women, Youth and Ex-Offenders can be obtained in hard copy by contacting vstaples@wowonline.org
- Review your state's Self-Sufficiency Standard report to prepare for questions related to the Self-Sufficiency Standard data. To find your latest Self-Sufficiency Standard, please visit: <http://www.sixstrategies.org>
- Insert current Self-Sufficiency Standard information for your state in the PowerPoint presentation and script.
- Review your state or local WIBs goal-setting documents, such as vision, mission, state plans, etc. You can review your state's Strategic Plan document at: <http://www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/WIA/planstatus.cfm>
- Identify other guiding documents on the WIB through their website. The information may help refine your presentation to meet your specific state workforce needs.
- Insert detailed state information into PowerPoint and script, for example:
 - **Slide 7:** Insert your own county, state, and year of Self-Sufficiency Standard that applies to the Workforce Investment Board you are presenting.
 - **Slide 8:** Insert a Table of "The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Selected Family Types" for the county and state that applies to the Workforce Investment Board you are presenting. If you are unable to copy and paste the table from your Self-Sufficiency Standard's PDF document, you will have to recreate the table and insert the data.
 - **Slide 9:** Insert appropriate LLSIL information for your state in the PowerPoint presentation and on the page script. The Federal Register updates the levels each year. To find your 2007 LLSIL levels, please visit: <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20071800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2007/pdf/E7-10662.pdf>
- Review and practice the PowerPoint presentation with the script at least once before presenting.

- Make copies of the PowerPoint presentation for the Board Members
- Contact Susan Rees, Director of National Programs and Policy at Wider Opportunities for Women at srees@wowonline.org or 202-464-1596 with any questions about the *Reality Check* online materials, Self-Sufficiency Standards, or this presentation.

Script and Guidance for Presentation Delivery:

This script provides guiding language to use in combination with the PowerPoint presentation to WIB members. The script includes language for each slide that corresponds to the PowerPoint.

Slide 1: Thank the Board Members for the opportunity to present. Introduce the topic of the presentation, yourself, your organization.

Slide 2: Introduce your goal of presenting this information to the WIB.

The purpose of presenting this information to Board members is to:

- Describe innovative practices and tools on self-sufficiency strategies from across the country that can improve local community practices
 - Demonstrate how Workforce Investment Boards across the country utilize the self-sufficiency framework to enhance programs and policies
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Slide 3: Workforce Development leaders across the country have embraced self-sufficiency as a tool to improve their communities' ability to meet both the needs of employers and workers in light of local/regional economic factors.

Read through each of the quotes as they come up.

**This slide is intended to provide Board Members information on what other members of their professional community have brought to this work. See other quotes within the Reality Check report.*

Slide 4: Self-sufficiency as a solution to workforce challenges

- **Challenge:** Stabilizing and growing business amidst industry skills gap
 - Sector-focused initiatives improve engagement with the business community, better address current and future skills

shortages, and create high-value jobs in local high-growth industries.³

- **Self-Sufficiency as an Innovative Solution:**
 - The use of a self-sufficiency measure in labor market analysis allows a board to better meet its goal of moving workers and job seekers towards economic self-sufficiency by targeting those industries and occupations that are most likely to pay family-sustaining wages.⁴
 - Career paths can be developed within sector strategies that will lead to economic stability for the community and workers' families.
 - Using a goal of self-sufficiency in guiding the connection between workforce development and economic development, collaborative decisions can ensure companies are contributing to the community's economic success and well-being .
- **Challenge:** Investing in and rewarding hard work
 - Both Workforce Investment Boards and employers are interested in improving the job retention rate of workers, raising their “soft” and “hard” skill levels, and making work supports available.⁵
 - **Self-Sufficiency as an Innovative Solution:**
 - The goal of economic self-sufficiency guides policy and program decisions that take into account the full economic realities for a worker. WIB members guide systems in using it to be an invaluable tool in setting employment goals.
 - Workforce Investment Boards are establishing wage quality and job quality standards for the employer-specific training they subsidize through On-the-Job Training contracts.
 - A workforce board goal may encourage providing intensive or longer training to prepare workers for placement in higher quality jobs rather than encouraging quick placements in jobs that do not lead to self-sufficiency.
- **Challenge:** Many workers are unable to make ends meet and the growth of low-wage labor is not diminishing. The Bureau of

³ The Workforce Alliance

⁴ http://www.workingforamerica.org/documents/PDF/SSS_SurveyReport.pdf

⁵ Wallace, John. “A Vision for the Future of the Workforce Investment System” MDRC. January 2007. <http://www.mdrc.org>

Labor Statistics projects that the proportion of low-wage work will barely drop --- to about 46% of the workforce--- in 2014.⁶

- Work supports can make a difference in the income of working families unable to make ends meet. Unfortunately, less than 50 percent of those eligible actually receive benefits.
- **Self-Sufficiency as an Innovative Solution:**
 - By utilizing the realistic goal of self-sufficiency WIBs can ensure customers are connected to work support programs and illustrate their impact on the household budget.
 - The One-Stop System can integrate the bridge of work supports into the career planning of their workers trying to reach self-sufficiency.
- **Challenge:** Creating and supporting a workforce system that is good for business and the worker
 - Performance standards are not going away, but WIBs must question what could enhance the story they are telling for both internal decision-making and the external view of the system by both policymakers and the public. Current measures are short-term and the labor market is demanding a vision of lifelong learning.
 - **Self-Sufficiency as an Innovative Solution:**
 - Using the goal of self-sufficiency as a benchmark enables a WIB to discover if they are moving individuals toward economic security. It evaluates how well the WIB is performing relative to placement wage levels and in the long-term will build the quality of job placements and training services that is needed.⁷ It enables the WIB to demonstrate the need to invest in long-term strategies that will move customers to economic stability, such as career ladders, mentoring, retention services, and extended case management.
 - Using the measure of self-sufficiency tells a full story of economic stability of the customer because it is family-focused, unlike most other individual-based measures found in labor policy.
- **Challenge:** Doing more with less.

⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics

⁷ http://www.workingforamerica.org/documents/PDF/SSS_SurveyReport.pdf

- The workforce system has experienced continuous funding cuts. The President's FY 2008 Budget proposal slashes WIA funding. This is on top of a two-decade slide in federal funding for workforce training that has dropped even more precipitously since 2000.
- **Self-Sufficiency as an Innovative Solution:**
 - Using a self-sufficiency measure allows WIBs to establish priorities for their current funding to achieve the greatest impact in meeting their goals.
 - Using a self-sufficiency measure allows WIBs to make the case to external stakeholders that their work is providing positive benefits to the local economy and community. This demonstration of effectiveness can build the case for current and future investment in the system.

Slide 5: The Self-Sufficiency Standard measures how much income families need to cover their basic costs, depending on where they live and who is in their family. The Standard adds up the costs of housing, child care, food, transportation, health care and taxes and subtracts out tax credits to calculate the income a family would need for long-term economic self-sufficiency—assuming no public or private supports or subsidies. The Standard takes into account the cost differences associated with the number and age of children and where the family lives.

The methodology embodied in the Standard was developed by WOW's research partner, Dr. Diana Pearce, when she directed the Women and Poverty Project at WOW. Today she teaches at the School of Social Work, University of Washington. The Self-Sufficiency Standard undergirds the six strategies of the *Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project* (FESS). The FESS Project is led by Wider Opportunities for Women and was created to provide tools to communities to help low income working families make ends meet.

[Describe your own state history in producing the Self-Sufficiency Standard.]

** If state history not known or you have other questions about the FESS Project or the Standard, please contact Susan Rees, Director of National Programs and Policy at Wider Opportunities for Women, srees@wowonline.org or 202-464-1596*

Slide 6: I will walk you through a sample of the Self-Sufficiency Standard data for [Insert county, state]. This data is available for 35 states and the District of Columbia, produced by county, and for 70 different family

types. The example you will see includes just 4 of the 70 family types available.

Slide 7: This table is the Self-Sufficiency Standard for *[insert county, state, year]*.

**If the Standard is outdated, you may have to explain the process through which the data is updated. The Standard data is updated by the researcher Diana Pearce and requires funding to do so. Many workforce agencies have committed funding to ensure that this data is regularly updated for their use. Such states include Connecticut, Florida, Washington State, West Virginia, and Wyoming.*

Let's look at the column for One Adult.

These cost components are data collected or calculated using standardized or equivalent methodology. The data comes from credible public or scholarly sources such as the HUD's Fair Market Rents, are updated at least annually, and are age- and/or geographically-specific.

For One Adult in *[insert county, state]*:

Housing costs are *[insert amount]* The Housing costs are calculated according to the Fair Market Rents from HUD and include basic utilities.

There are no costs for child care. But, child care costs are determined by state Child Care Market Rate Surveys.

Food costs are *[insert amount]* Food costs are based on the USDA "Low-Cost Food Plan." This Food Plan meets the family's basic nutritional needs but does not include such "luxuries" as eating out or a latte from Starbucks.

Transportation costs are *[insert amount]* Choose one statement and explain the difference in transportation costs: (1) In this county, public transportation is assumed because a certain percentage of the population utilizes it. OR (2) In this county, the costs of owning and operating a vehicle are assumed because a certain percentage of the population does not use public transportation.

Health care costs are *[insert amount]* Health care costs are calculated by assuming the worker is covered by employer health care, but pays a premium and out-of-pocket costs.

Miscellaneous adds up to *[insert amount]* Miscellaneous is 10% of the rest of the costs and includes household items, clothes, phone, etc.

Taxes, including federal and state income taxes, payroll taxes, sales tax is *[insert amount]*

This one adult does not receive any tax credits.

These cost components all add up to a Self-Sufficiency Wage, or what this individual needs to meet their basic needs in *[insert county, state]*

For this one adult, that wage need is *[insert amount]*

Now, moving to the self-sufficiency need for a family of one adult and one preschooler, you can see the impact that adding this child has to the basic needs costs.

All costs have risen, but looking at the most significant changes: The child care costs for this county are *[insert amount]* Plus, this family is eligible for tax credits. When adding up the costs for this family type, the Self-Sufficiency Wage need is *[insert amount]*. This is about *[insert amount]* more for this family with one child rather than the single adult.

You can see the two other family types and their different costs.

All the way in the farthest right column, you can see the data for a family with 2 adults, one preschooler, and one schoolage child. Here as you build to the Self-Sufficiency Wage, it demonstrates what each worker would need to be making to meet the family's basic needs.

Remember, this data is produced for 70 different family types to offer the specificity to the real costs for a certain family in your community.

Are there any questions about the data or the calculations?

Please see the end of the document, "Frequently Asked Questions" for more information about the Standard.

Slide 8: The Self-Sufficiency Standard can be compared to other familiar measures of income adequacy. WIA regulations establish that the minimum self-sufficiency threshold is the Lower Living Standard Income Level (LLSIL) (a Bureau of Labor Statistics calculation). The regulations also

direct state and local WIBs to develop their own threshold for self-sufficiency, as long as it is at least equal to the LLSIL.

The LLSIL does not capture the costs of child care, and so it understates the real costs of employment for working parents of young children, possibly disqualifying otherwise eligible families from receiving services.

Updating the LLSIL does not account for changing prices of goods within the family budget, and so can lead to misrepresentation of the true costs of essential budget items like housing and transportation, as their relative share of income grows over time.

In *[insert state]* the graph demonstrates several levels of income adequacy. According to 2007 HHS Poverty Guidelines, the Federal Poverty Threshold for a family of 3 is \$17,170.

You can see that the data for 70% and 100% of the Lower Living Standard Income Level for *[insert state]* is somewhat higher than this poverty level, but does not truly represent the self-sufficiency needs of this family in your community. Under WIA, an individual is considered "low-income" if they received income for a six-month period that did not exceed the Federal Poverty Level or 70% of the LLSIL.

A 2004 survey by the Working for America Institute found that nearly half of the responding workforce boards defined self-sufficiency higher than the federal default. Of those, more than 1/3 used the Self-Sufficiency Standard.

By establishing a more accurate measure of self-sufficiency, WIBs can direct resources to those families who are working but need additional investment in their skills through intensive and training services to help them access or retain jobs with family sustaining wages. Doing so, increases the likelihood of long-term self-sufficiency for these members of their community.⁸

Slide 9: The Promising Practices for Self-Sufficiency in Workforce Development were developed over a multi-year project by Wider Opportunities for Women supported by the Ford Foundation. Here at *[insert your organization]* we are pleased to share the findings in order for our workforce system to learn from other states' innovative practices.

The practices include:

⁸ http://www.workingforamerica.org/documents/PDF/SSS_SurveyReport.pdf

Choosing a High Definition of Self-Sufficiency

Many Workforce Investment Boards have already opted to adopt the Self-Sufficiency Standard or similar cost-of-living measure to determine eligibility for intensive and training services. The measure offers a strategic planning mechanism and targets resources and programs to build progressive career paths for clients.

Counseling Customers About Income Goals, Career Paths and Work Supports

Self-sufficiency-based career counseling strategies help customers set realistic goals and make better decisions about potential career paths and the education or training needed to pursue them. Tools such as on-line calculators and case manager training provide more appropriate career counseling for clients

Employing Sector Strategies

A combined focus on high-wage and high-demand occupations (or sectors) is necessary to ensure that job seekers are able to move toward economic self-sufficiency. Sectoral strategies are often effective in pursuing these goals, while also ensuring maximum responsiveness to employer needs.

Negotiating on the Job Training Contracts and Customized Training Services

Many states have developed On the Job Training (OJT) requirements for contractors that are more specific than those mandated by WIA. Some local boards have taken this further by incorporating self-sufficiency wage goals into their employer agreements.

Increasing Access to Work Supports

Workforce boards have been able to better leverage the success of their programs, including decreasing absenteeism and turnover, by coordinating their services with a range of public work supports such as stable housing, access and use of safe and appropriate child care, health care coverage and access to transportation.

Assessing Outcomes Through Data Collection and Benchmarking Goals

Several Workforce Investment Boards have concluded that collecting and analyzing certain data beyond federally required performance measures can distinguish between the types of programs/policies that are working to move workers towards self-sufficiency and those that are not.

Responding to the Demographics of a Community

Several boards developed creative responses to local labor market circumstances, such as shifting demographics or particular economic and geographic challenges.

Slide 10: Following up on the first report, Wider Opportunities for Women deepened the research to examine promising practices that utilized the self-sufficiency framework in serving the populations - women, youth, and ex-offenders. The Workforce Investment Act takes a universal approach, however, the reality is that certain populations face particular issues in accessing and successfully making use of the workforce system. The research shows that using the framework of self-sufficiency as a tool can offer a way of reaching economic needs and forming career paths.

Women

With the exception of TANF and Displaced Homemaker programs, minimal federal workforce funding exists to specifically address the needs of female customers, despite the fact that women have identifiable characteristics associated with their gender (i.e., lower earnings, concentration in low paying service jobs, and prevalence of child care and family caretaking responsibilities). Several WIBs have made support services and distance learning a priority in serving female customers.

Youth

To improve services for youth, WIBs are funding more foundational skills training for youth under age 18 to prepare for self-sufficiency wage careers; surveying employers to identify transferable skills sets across an industry and incorporate those into youth programs, to help young people become job-ready for multiple occupations; and working with high schools to set upon-site job training programs for high-wage, high-skill occupations.

Ex-Offenders

To move ex-offenders into long-term self-sufficiency, WIBs are using a self-sufficiency measure to identify target high-wage/high-demand industries to focus the ex-offender program on these occupations; cultivating relationships with employers and involving them in coordinating training; and using a self-sufficiency measure to maintain ongoing services to ex-offenders as they move out of low-wage work.

Slide 11: As a WIB Board Member learning about the integration of self-sufficiency you should consider:

- How the self-sufficiency framework may be used to meet the opportunities and challenges of the Board
- Practices the Board can institute that may set more accurate goals and outcomes
- Tools and resources the Board can use to empower workforce development staff and increase effectiveness with customers

Slide 12: Thank you for your time. Listed in resources is my contact information, the website where you can dig deeper into all of these Promising Practices, and a website to access all of the Self-Sufficiency Standards.

The Promising Practices website offers detailed information about the case studies referenced in seven practice areas. Corollary materials developed by the workforce boards accompany the description of each case study. Each case study also identifies key areas that lead to successful implementation of the practice area, challenges that occurred along the way, contact information to key staff involved in the development of the practice area and other helpful information to help WIBs implement procedures that best promote economic well being for workers and their families.

Any additional questions or comments?

Please see “Frequently Asked Questions” below for assistance in these questions and/or comments.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Q: What is the Self-Sufficiency Standard?

A: The *Self-Sufficiency Standard* calculates the income working families need to meet their most basic expenses, without public or private assistance of any kind. The Standard includes costs for housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, miscellaneous expenses (clothing, telephone, household items) and taxes. The Self-Sufficiency Standard is calculated on a county-by-county basis for 70 different family types in a state. Currently, 35 states and the District of Columbia have developed Self-Sufficiency Standard reports.

Q: How is the Self-Sufficiency Standard Different from the Official Federal Poverty Measure?

A: The Self-Sufficiency Standard is based on all of the costs a working family faces on a daily basis—housing, child care, food, health care, transportation, miscellaneous costs and taxes—and varies depending on where one lives and who is in one's family. The Standard accounts for differences not just by the size of the family and number of children, but also by the age of the children. This is because some costs faced by working families, particularly child care, differ dramatically by age. The Standard also varies geographically on the county level within a state to capture the cost differences between rural and urban locations, and regional variations in cost.

In contrast, the federal poverty level (FPL) is a 4-decades-old, one-size-fits-all calculation based solely on the cost of food and is the same no matter if a family lives and works in New York City, Tulsa, OK, or Mobile, AL. The FPL assumes that food is one-third of a family's budget, and varies based only on the size and number of children in the family. The FPL is indexed for inflation every year while the Standard can be updated yearly allowing the cost of each basic need to increase at its own rate.

Q: Where Does the Data Come From?

A: For each basic cost category, data are collected or calculated using standardized or equivalent methodology; come from scholarly, credible sources, such as the U.S. Bureau of the Census; are updated at least annually; and are age- and/or geographically-specific (where appropriate).

Q: How is the Self-Sufficiency Standard Calculated?

A: First, the basic costs for each family type (which vary by the number and age of children, and by number of adults) are added in each county or metropolitan statistical area. Ten percent of this total is then added to take account of miscellaneous costs. Second, taxes and tax credits are

calculated using formulas that are specific with regard to state income and sales tax. Finally, the total income is checked for certain assumptions in the model—such as whether the proper Child Care Tax Credit rate has been used—and adjusted as appropriate.

Q: Aren't the Self-Sufficiency Wages "too high"?

A: No. Because the Self-Sufficiency Standard is calculated using the real costs of goods and services purchased in the regular marketplace, it reflects the real expenses consumers face. The Standard is a no-frills budget that does not allow for entertainment, carry-out or fast food (not even a pizza), savings, credit card debt or emergency expenses such as car repairs.

Q: Many families do not earn the wages indicated by the Self-Sufficiency Standard. How are they getting by?

A: Obviously, many families lack a Self-Sufficiency level income and manage to survive. If they do, it may mean that they are getting help meeting their needs with public or private subsidies. Receiving a child care subsidy from the state or a Section 8 voucher can dramatically lower the wage a worker needs to make ends meet and provide for her family. Unfortunately, however, many working families are simply foregoing one or more need to get by—using less desirable child care, doubling-up or living in substandard housing, obtaining free food or doing without, or not obtaining needed medical care.

Q: Isn't the Self-Sufficiency Standard an Unrealistic Benchmark for Most Working Families?

A: No, the Self-Sufficiency Standard sets a goal for working families and helps them plan a path to reach that goal. Achieving self-sufficiency is a process that involves not just finding a job with certain wages and benefits, but achieving income security over time. There are several ways—separately or in combination—that low-wage workers can achieve self-sufficiency. First, they can receive temporary subsidies until either their wages increase, or as is the case for child care, their needs decrease. (By definition, preschool children will "age out" of need for full-time care in just a few years.) Second, they can obtain training and/or education that will prepare them for high-wage jobs. Third, they can combine low-wage jobs with self-employment initiatives.

Q: Do You Expect Employers to Pay Workers These Wages?

A: Not entirely. Employers are only one of several stakeholders that have a role in ensuring that families have incomes sufficient to cover their costs. The government has a role in ensuring that job training and education, as well as work supports like child care, are affordable and accessible to families. Individuals are responsible for taking advantage of opportunities to invest in themselves and their potential. And finally, employers are

responsible for paying decent wages and providing benefits, such as health insurance, transportation assistance, and benefits to their workers.

Q: What is the difference between a “living wage” and the Self-Sufficiency Standard?

A: The Self-Sufficiency Standard calculates the amount of income a working families needs to cover all of their basic needs without public or private supports. Decent wages are essential to moving families to self-sufficiency incomes. Employers have a responsibility to pay their workers fairly, provide benefits, such as health care coverage, and make career ladders visible to entry-level workers. In some cases, however, wages alone may not be enough for families to reach self-sufficiency incomes. Work supports--like child care and transportation assistance--can play a critical role in helping families make ends meet while they gain experience and skills to move to better paying jobs.

Living wage ordinances require private businesses that benefit from public money to pay their employees a “living wage.” Across the country, “living wages” have ranged anywhere from \$6.25 to \$12.00 an hour, with many requiring businesses to pay a higher wage if health insurance is not provided to the employee. The Self-Sufficiency Standard can serve as a strong data source for living wage campaigns as evidence of the real cost of living in a community. It can be used to persuade government officials, business owners and community members about the necessity for living wage ordinances in their community.

Q: Who Produced the Report?

A: The methodology embodied in the Standard was developed by WOW's research partner, Dr. Diana Pearce, when she directed the Women and Poverty Project at WOW. Today she teaches at the School of Social Work, University of Washington.

This development of the Self-Sufficiency Standard is part of the national Family Economic Self-Sufficiency project, convened by WOW, to provide state-level advocates and governments with tools to help them strengthen government investments in low-income families.

Q: Is There a Self-Sufficiency Standard in my State?

A: WOW and the University of Washington have worked with state-level groups in a total of 35 states and the District of Columbia to develop Self-Sufficiency Standards. These states are: IA, CA, DC, TX, NC, PA, IL, MA, IN, NY, NJ, CT, SD, WI, CO, WA, UT, KY, MD, MT, OK, NV, AZ, WV, TN, GA, VA, FL, NE, MO, DE, AL, MS, LA, WY and HI. Across the country, state-level coalitions have used the Standard to change policies and programs to help families move out of poverty and to economic self-sufficiency.

Reality Check: Promoting Self-Sufficiency in the Public Workforce System

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Q: How can I use a higher definition of self-sufficiency and serve more individuals when I do not have enough funding to serve my current customers?

A: By establishing a goal for self-sufficiency with a true measurement, it will refocus and target your programs and services. Having limited funding is an even greater incentive to ensure that the eligibility guidelines, counseling, training programs, and connection to work supports are all leading customers to economic independence.

Q: How did Wider Opportunities for Women collect this information?

A: WOW combined its work on the Self-Sufficiency Standard with its workforce investment board activities around the country. They laid out areas first where they knew the concept of self-sufficiency can be/had been used to improve the public workforce system. These areas were further defined from the research, interviews, and writing of the report that resulted in seven different promising practice areas.

Once WOW defined the general practice areas and conducted basic background research, WOW created a "Call for Information" to distribute to workforce development professionals around the country. These questionnaires were distributed to over 1000 individuals who are part of the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB), National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP), and WOW networks. This broad search was intended to get information from local workforce investment boards to see if there were innovative ideas or practices taking shape at the state or local level around self-sufficiency that had not crossed our radar screen through our prior work or research. WOW ultimately collected information from over 200 Workforce Investment Boards.

The information garnered from the research was the basis of extensive follow-up to complete the picture about the promising practices. The information gathered was able to take shape in a printed executive summary and as an online resource with greater detail and corollary materials. WOW also engaged key stakeholders as a part of a working advisory group in the development of the report.

Q: How can I learn how another Workforce Investment Boards implemented one of these practices?

A: The *Reality Check* portion of Wider Opportunities for Women's website offers detailed information about the case studies referenced in seven practice areas. Corollary materials developed by the workforce boards

accompany the description of each case study. Each case study also identifies key areas that lead to successful implementation of the practice area, challenges that occurred along the way, contact information to key staff involved in the development of the practice area and other helpful information to help WIBs implement procedures that best promote economic well being for workers and their families.

Q: Is the measure of the Self-Sufficiency Standard used in all of these practices?

A: No. These practices utilize the concept of self-sufficiency in their work with a higher goal or measure such as the Self-Sufficiency Standard. All states have access to a self-sufficiency standard or similar measure. In addition to the Self-Sufficiency Standard, the Economic Policy Institute calculates similar, though less geographically and family-specific, cost of living budgets for all 50 states. In addition, some states have developed their own state-specific measures, using differing methodologies

Q: What were the main keys to success and challenges for the WIBs implementing these practices?

A: Keys to Success:

- Partnerships
- Clear vision
- Knowing community
- Concrete information
- Engaged employers
- Common language
- Staff feedback mechanisms

Challenges:

- More work
- Political considerations
- Data collection
- Getting all stakeholders on same page
- Setting high goal and not being able to meet that "success" standard
- Gaining support for new idea
- Employer buy-in

Access WOW's Reality Check at: <http://www.wowonline.org/wow> The supplemental materials included with each of the case studies provide excellent examples of policy and program guidance. WOW's second publication on Women, Youth and Ex-Offenders can be accessed in hard copy by contacting vstaples@wowonline.org