

CERTIFICATION PROCESS FOR COMPREHENSIVE AJCCs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy provides the guidance and establishes the procedures regarding certification of comprehensive America's Job Center of CaliforniaSM (AJCC) locations. This policy applies to all Local Workforce Development Boards (Local Board), and is effective immediately.

This policy contains all state-imposed requirements.

This directive finalizes Workforce Services Draft Directive *Certification Process for Comprehensive AJCCs* (WSDD-165), issued for comment on April 13, 2017. The Workforce Development Community submitted 15 comments during the draft comment period. A summary of comments, including all changes, is provided as Attachment 3.

Retain this directive until further notice.

REFERENCES

- *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA) (Public Law 113-128) Sections 121(g) and 188
- *Americans with Disability Act Amendment Act of 2008* (ADA) (Public Law 110-325)
- Title 20 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR), "WIOA Department of Labor (DOL); Final Rule" (WIOA DOL Final Rule)
- Title 34 CFR "WIOA, Joint Rule for Unified and Combined State Plans, Performance Accountability, and the One-Stop System Joint Provisions" (WIOA Joint Final Rule)
- Title 29 CFR Part 38 "Implementation of the Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Provisions of the WIOA"
- DOL Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 16-16, "One-Stop Operations Guidance for the American Job Center Network" (January 18, 2017)
- DOL TEGL 4-15, "Vision for the One-Stop Delivery System Under the WIOA" (August 13, 2015)
- *California's Unified Strategic Workforce Development Plan 2016-2020* (State Plan)
- Workforce Services Directive WSD16-14, Subject: *Selection of AJCC Operators and Career Services Providers* (December 19, 2016)

- WSD16-09, Subject: *WIOA Phase II Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) – Comprehensive AJCCs* (October 14, 2016)
- WSD15-12, Subject: *WIOA Phase I MOUs* (January 20, 2016)
- Workforce Services Information Notice 12-43, Subject: *New One-Stop Branding – America’s Job Center of California Network* (March 15, 2013)

BACKGROUND

The WIOA establishes a framework under which Local Boards are responsible for maintaining a network of high-quality, effective AJCCs. To assist in these efforts, the California Workforce Development Board (State Board), in consultation with an AJCC Certification Workgroup comprised of state-level partners and Local Board representatives, developed objective criteria and procedures for Local Boards to use when certifying the AJCCs within their Local Workforce Development Areas (Local Area).

The WIOA Joint Final Rule outlines three key requirements for AJCC certification: effectiveness of the AJCC, physical and programmatic accessibility for individuals with disabilities, and continuous improvement. California’s certification process is centered on these key requirements and sets a statewide standard of service delivery that ensures all customers consistently receive a high-quality level of service.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

In accordance with WIOA Section 121(g), Local Boards must conduct an independent and objective evaluation of the AJCCs in their Local Areas once every three years using criteria and procedures established by the State Board. The Local Board can choose to add additional certification criteria tailored to the needs of their Local Area, but they may not remove or replace any of the federal or state criteria.

The initial AJCC certification process will be conducted during Program Year (PY) 2017-18 and take effect PY 2018-19. For this initial certification, Local Boards are only required to certify their comprehensive AJCCs.

Beginning PY 2018-19, Local Boards will be required to certify their affiliate and specialized AJCCs. The initial AJCC certification process for affiliate and specialized AJCCs will be conducted during PY 2018-19 and take effect PY 2019-20. Further guidance regarding the certification of affiliate and specialized AJCCs will be released in a Directive during PY 2017-18.

Certification Levels

There are two levels of AJCC certification: Baseline and Hallmarks of Excellence. The Baseline AJCC Certification is intended to ensure that every comprehensive AJCC is in compliance with key WIOA statutory and regulatory requirements. The Hallmarks of Excellence AJCC Certification is intended to encourage continuous improvement by identifying areas where an AJCC may be exceeding quality expectations, as well as areas where improvement is needed. The Hallmarks of Excellence were developed in alignment with TEGL 4-15, the State Plan, and the AJCC Certification Workgroup's vision for California's One-Stop delivery system.

It is important to note that certification is an individualized process; it will not be used to compare or rank one AJCC or Local Board against another AJCC or Local Board.

Baseline AJCC Certification

In order to receive Baseline AJCC Certification, an AJCC must meet all of the following requirements:

- The Local Board has implemented a signed MOU with all the required AJCC partners. This includes both Phase I and Phase II of the MOU process.
- The AJCC has implemented the board-defined roles and responsibilities of the AJCC Operator and Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker Career Services Provider (i.e., an AJCC Operator and Career Services Provider is in place and functioning within the AJCC).
- The AJCC meets all regulatory requirements to be considered a comprehensive AJCC as identified in the WIOA Joint Final Rule Section 678.305.
- The AJCC ensures equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in accordance with the ADA, WIOA Section 188, and all other applicable federal and state guidance.

A matrix that includes further information on each Baseline AJCC Certification criteria is included as Attachment 1. Local Boards must submit the Baseline AJCC Certification matrix to their Regional Advisor by December 31, 2017.

Not Yet Able to Certify

If an AJCC does not meet one or more of the Baseline AJCC Certification criteria by December 31, 2017, it will be deemed as "not yet able to certify." In this instance, the Local Board must submit a corrective action plan along with their Baseline AJCC Certification matrix to their Regional Advisor by December 31, 2017. The corrective action plan must outline how the Local Board will work with the comprehensive AJCC to bring the AJCC into compliance by April 1, 2018. The deadline to meet Baseline AJCC Certification was set at April 1, 2018 to allow time for Local Boards to meet the Hallmarks of Excellence AJCC Certification criteria by June 30, 2018.

Hallmarks of Excellence AJCC Certification

In order to highlight areas where AJCCs can continuously improve their service delivery, the State Board has identified eight Hallmarks of Excellence, with each one ranked on a scale of 1-5. In order to receive a Hallmarks of Excellence AJCC Certification, an AJCC must meet Baseline AJCC Certification and receive a ranking of a least 3 for each of the following:

1. The AJCC physical location enhances the customer experience.
2. The AJCC ensures universal access, with an emphasis on individuals with barriers to employment.
3. The AJCC actively supports the One-Stop system through effective partnerships.
4. The AJCC provides integrated, customer-centered services.
5. The AJCC is an on-ramp for skill development and the attainment of industry-recognized credentials which meet the needs of targeted regional sectors and pathways.
6. The AJCC actively engages industry and labor and supports regional sector strategies through an integrated business service strategy that focuses on quality jobs.
7. The AJCC has high-quality, well-informed, and cross-trained staff.
8. The AJCC achieves business results through data-driven continuous improvement.

A matrix that includes further information and quality indicators for each Hallmark of Excellence is included as Attachment 2. The attachment requires a full rationale to be written for each ranking provided on the Hallmarks of Excellence.

Since the goal is for Local Boards to work with each of their AJCCs to continually improve and progress within each Hallmark of Excellence, all Local Boards must also develop a continuous improvement plan, with target dates, for each AJCC that outlines how they plan to increase their ranking for each Hallmark of Excellence or maintain their ranking for any Hallmark of Excellence in which they have already achieved a 5.

Local Boards must submit a completed matrix and continuous improvement plan to their Regional Advisor for each comprehensive AJCC by June 30, 2018.

Local Board Certification Process

Each Local Board must develop and submit to their Regional Advisor by September 30, 2017, an outline of the process they plan to use to certify each comprehensive AJCC within their Local Area. The Regional Advisors will respond by November 1st, 2017 with the State Board's decision on whether or not the certification process is sufficient.

The outline must include the following information:

- Who will conduct the independent review and evaluation(s).
- What firewalls are in place to avoid a conflict of interest (if applicable).
- What steps will be included in the process and the associated timeline.
- Any additional criteria the Local Board has chosen to include (if applicable).

As part of their process, Local Boards may choose to use staff, the AJCC Operator (unless it's the Local Board), a subcommittee, or a neutral third-party to conduct the on-site, open, and independent evaluation of each comprehensive AJCC. Based on those evaluations, the individual(s) or entity that conducted the independent review can provide recommendations to the Local Board regarding certification status and continuous improvement strategies. It is the Local Board, however, that must officially decide and submit the certification status and accompanying continuous improvement plan for each of the comprehensive AJCCs in the Local Area.

To avoid potential conflicts of interest, the entity that conducts the on-site evaluations cannot be AJCC program partner staff or the Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker Career Services Provider. If a Local Board contracts out with a provider to serve as both the AJCC Operator and the Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker Career Services provider, that entity is also not allowed to conduct the on-site evaluation.

However, if a Local Board has been approved by the Governor to also act as the Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker Career Services Provider, Local Board staff may conduct the evaluation so long as there are clear and strong firewalls in place that separate the Local Board staff who work in the AJCCs from the Local Board staff who would be conducting the on-site evaluations of those AJCCs. In this case, the State Board may request additional information and documentation from the Local Board to verify that the firewalls are substantive enough to remove any potential conflicts or biases.

The Local Board must also retain adequate supporting documentation of their certification determination for each AJCC. This includes, but is not limited to: reports, MOUs, procedure manuals, questionnaires, surveys, interview notes from customers, partners, or staff, and performance information that was used during the certification process. Certification documentation may be requested by the DOL, State Board, or Employment Development Department in order to substantiate a certification decision.

Although not required, AJCC staff may want to conduct an initial self-assessment prior to the Local Board's evaluation. A self-assessment is a helpful tool that can assist the AJCC in addressing potential compliance issues or areas of improvement prior to the Local Board's certification decision. As a self-assessment is not an independent and objective evaluation it cannot be used in lieu of the Local Board's (or official designee's) on-site evaluation.

State Board Certification Process

As required by the WIOA Joint Final Rule Section 678.800, when a Local Board is approved by the Governor to also serve as the AJCC Operator, the State Board must certify the AJCC(s) where the Local Board is the AJCC's Operator. Prior to the State Board's certification process, the Local Board must conduct an initial on-site self-assessment of Baseline AJCC Certification and Hallmarks of Excellence AJCC Certification for all of its comprehensive AJCCs using the attached matrices. The Local Board must submit the Baseline AJCC Certification matrix by December 31, 2017, and the Hallmarks of Excellence AJCC Certification matrix by January 31,

2018. After both matrices have been submitted, the State Board will conduct formal on-site evaluations in order to make an official decision on the certification status of each comprehensive AJCC by June 30th, 2018.

As part of their evaluation, the State Board will make recommendations for continuous improvement. However, the Local Board and each individual comprehensive AJCC must still work together to create a continuous improvement plan with target dates and submit the plans to the State Board.

Timelines

When Local Board Certifies

- September 30, 2017
Local Boards submit their AJCC certification process.
- November 1, 2017
Local Boards receive the State Board's decision on their AJCC certification process.
- December 31, 2017
Local Boards submit the Baseline Criteria Matrix (Attachment 1) and, if necessary, corrective action plans for each comprehensive AJCC.
- April 1, 2018
Local Boards with AJCCs that were deemed "not yet able to certify" must have corrected any Baseline AJCC Certification compliance issues, in line with their corrective plans, and submit an updated Baseline Criteria Matrix.
- June 30, 2018
Local Boards submit the Hallmarks of Excellence Criteria Matrix (Attachment 2) and continuous improvement plans for each comprehensive AJCC.

When State Board Certifies

- December 31, 2017
Local Boards submit the Baseline Criteria Matrix (Attachment 1) self-assessment for each comprehensive AJCC.
- January 31, 2018
Local Boards submit the Hallmarks of Excellence Criteria Matrix (Attachment 2) self-assessment for each comprehensive AJCC.

- June 30, 2018
The State Board will have notified Local Boards of the certification status for each of their comprehensive AJCCs.

Submissions

Local Boards must electronically submit their certification process, Baseline Criteria Matrix, any corrective action plan(s), Hallmarks of Excellence Criteria Matrix, and all continuous improvement plans via email to their Regional Advisor.

Hard copy documentation (customer surveys, performance information, center procedure manuals, etc.) does not need to be included with the submissions, but must be retained by the Local Board. The Local Board Director must sign both Attachment 1 and Attachment 2 to attest to the Local Board's approval of each comprehensive AJCC's certification level.

ACTION

Bring this directive to the attention of staff and other relevant parties.

INQUIRIES

If you have any questions, contact your [Regional Advisor](#).

/S/ JAIME L. GUTIERREZ, Chief
Central Office Workforce Services Division

Attachments are available on the internet:

1. [Comprehensive AJCC Certification Matrix – Baseline Criteria](#)
2. [Comprehensive AJCC Certification Matrix – Hallmarks of Excellence](#)
3. [Summary of Comments](#)