



New tools to help rural workers get good jobs

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Rural America has an abundance of talent, and during the Biden-Harris administration [its poverty rates have declined](#). This year, the administration is offering new tools to advance good jobs in rural America through the Department of Labor's Workforce Opportunities in Rural Communities (WORC) grant program. The department is investing millions of dollars into rural America to connect workers to good jobs that pay at least \$15 per hour. We're doing it by funding projects that remove barriers created by the childcare, healthcare and transportation shortages in the areas, and in programs that are creating those high-paying jobs.



[This year's WORC grants](#) will invest \$49.2 million to connect rural workers to good jobs paying at least \$15 per hour. This rate aligns with administration efforts to promote fair wages through federal projects, including federally contracted Investing in America projects that [pay a \\$17.20 minimum wage](#). This year's WORC grants could connect workers to new work-based training programs (such as [Registered Apprenticeship](#)) that pay at least \$15 per hour pay for services that help workers get and keep good jobs.

The department's Employment and Training Administration announced the grants in April with support from our [Good Jobs Initiative](#). The WORC program serves more than 700 specific counties and parishes running from Louisiana to Maine in partnership with the [Appalachian Regional Commission](#), [Delta Regional Authority](#) and [Northern Border Regional Commission](#).

The program already has a history of increasing access by removing barriers. For example, a grant we awarded in 2022 funds a comprehensive training model for successful returns to the workforce by Southwest Virginia workers returning from incarceration or in recovery from substance-use disorder. [Steady work provides stability](#) that increases both groups' long-term chances of success.

The north star for this year's WORC grant—and all the Good Jobs Initiative's work—is the [Good Jobs Principles](#), a shared federal vision of job quality informing billions of dollars from the administration's generational investments in infrastructure, technology and communities. The Good Jobs Pay Principle calls for “a stable and predictable living wage.” In developing this year's grants, the department deeply researched the WORC region. We found [localvoices](#) highlighting [trends](#) and [barriers](#) that [prevent some rural workers](#) from getting stable jobs meeting the pay principle:

- Rural workers [tend to drive farther](#), spend more on fuel and have fewer transportation options.
- Many rural caregivers deal with [dwindling, or no, access to affordable, quality childcare](#) or dependent care.
- Rural residents are [more likely to deal with health and behavioral health issues](#), including [the substance-use disorder epidemic](#), amid [diminishing local access to healthcare](#) due to [trends like rural hospital closures](#).

When it is hard to get to work, or you have no one to take care of your loved ones, or you cannot get care you need, it can be harder to get and keep a good job.

The WORC program is not the only administration effort to deal with these issues., but it offers stakeholders a suite of additional tools to engage these barriers to rural workers connecting with good jobs.

For example, grantees can arrange slots at a daycare center for training participants or help employers set up onsite childcare, coordinate employer van pools, and help employers adjust scheduling to account for longer commutes by rural workers. Grantees also could connect workers to healthcare services, including behavioral health care services.

Additionally, grantees could create new Registered Apprenticeships with a starting wage of at least \$15 per hour, a step that could have a powerful financial impact on some workers in the region. In some WORC states, women with a high school diploma only earn around \$26,000 a year—more than \$5,000 fewer than the annual full-time income produced by a \$15 hourly wage. Because Registered Apprenticeship wages increase based on skills acquired, the financial impact from \$15 hourly wages could grow quickly, providing the win-win of better wages for workers and better retention for employers. Also, WORC’s support of new Registered Apprenticeships, work-based programs and labor-management partnerships could create paying, non-degree pathways to a good job in communities [where many residents do not have a bachelor’s degree](#).

Applications close June 20 for this year’s grant and the department will make awards by the fall. You can learn more about what this year’s WORC grant from [the funding opportunity announcement at grants.gov](#).

Nick Beadle is policy counselor for the Department of Labor’s Good Jobs Initiative and co-leads the department’s place-based Good Jobs efforts in Alabama. Dr. Robert Kight leads the Division of Adult Services and Governance in ETA’s Office of Workforce Investment, which administers workforce development grants including WORC.

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