Country Report

10th International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy, Auckland, New Zealand, November 2026

Country name

United States of America

This country report has been prepared for discussion and information purposes in connection with the 10th International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy. It draws on an online questionnaire on the Symposium themes, which national teams were invited to complete in advance.

ICCDPP: Navigating new horizons - Country perspectives survey

Introduction

Q1. Do you agree to participate in this survey?

Yes

Q2. I confirm that I am providing a response on behalf of my country.

Yes

Q3. I confirm that I am happy for the responses to this survey to be shared publicly.

Yes

Q4. Is your country going to participate in the 2026 ICCDPP symposium in New Zealand?

Yes

Q5. Who have you consulted with before completing this survey?

The National Career Development Association (NCDA) of the United States appointed a six person team to attend the ICCDPP Symposium. Team members were selected to represent different constituency groups within the United States including experts in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Government Relations and Policy, and various other perspectives. All six team members have given consensus with the answers to this survey. Team members include Dr. Brian Hutchison (team leader), Dr. Spencer G. Niles, Dr. Jane Goodman, Dr. Sonja Robinson, Shelby McIntyre, and Mary Ellen Earnhardt (NCDA Board Representative).

About you

Q6. What is your name?

Brian. Hutchison

Q7. What organisation do you work for?

Walden University

Q8. What is your job title?

Associate Professor

Q9. What is your email address?

brian.lewis.hutchison@gmail.com

Q10. Are you happy for your contact details to be published on the ICCDPP website/ relevant documents as part of the publication of this data?

Yes

About your country

Q11. What is the name of your country?

United States of America

Q12. Which groups can access career development services in your country?

	Accessible and free to everyone	Accessible and free to some groups	Accessible to those who can pay	Not accessible
Indigenous people		X		
Young people in schools	X			
Young people in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)	X			
Young people in university or higher education		X		
Young people not in education or work (e.g. NEETs)	X			
Adults in education		X		
Adults in work			X	
Adults not in education or work (e.g. unemployed workers and the economic inactive)	X			
Migrants			X	
People in the criminal justice system		X		
Employers/businesses			X	

Q13. Are there any other groups in your country, not listed in Question 12 above, that can access career development services?

None

About your country

Q14. How far do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The career development policies, programmes and services in my				X	

Q14. How far do you agree with the following statements?

country are meeting the career needs of the population.					
School leavers in my country are well prepared for successful transitions to work or further learning.					X
There is a strong evidence base to support the provision of career development services in my country.			X		
AI is having a major impact on the education system in my country.		X			
AI is having a major impact on labour market in my country.		X			
AI is having a major impact on the provision of career development services in my country.			X		

Q15. Are indigenous groups involved in the design of career development services in your country?

Yes, to some extent

About your country

Q16. Please provide a short summary of your country's career development system. [Up to 300 words]

The United States career development system is a complex amalgamation of federal, state and territorial, and local governance structures. There are also private organizations, e.g., unions, employers, that provide services and have their own policies. This multiplicity of governmental and non-governmental structures makes it difficult to state what policies are true for the entire country.

The federal and state career development systems are primarily organized around short-term placement outcomes, with a focus that reflects workforce development rather than career development. Policies often center employer perspectives and economic needs, and immediate workforce reentry is prioritized over decent work or sustainable career pathways.

At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Labor (DoL) oversees CareerOneStop providing direct career services via online platforms and over 2500 American Job Centers. The DoL is also responsible for occupational safety, wage and hours standards, unemployment benefits, the Bureau of labor Statistics, specific training programs such as Job Corps, and programs that serve specific populations such as the Office of Disabilities Employment Policy. The Department of Education provides guidance and encourages localized activity via grants for career and technical focused efforts.

Many state and local governments provide substantial career development programs to support the needs and encourage employment growth in targeted sectors. Post-secondary institutions of higher and technical education are often a dynamic part of state level intervention via budget allocations and grant funded initiatives. Locally governed k-12 school systems are a bedrock of early career development programs and interventions as well as TVET programs.

Q17. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide insights into your country's career development policies and systems. [Up to 300 words]

Career development policies are largely governed by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/employers/workforce-development-solutions

Q17. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide insights into your country's career development policies and systems. [Up to 300 words]

Over 2500 American Job Centers are coordinated by the U.S. Department of Labor. Laws and policies can be found on the website below.

https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/training/onestop

The National Career Development Guidelines is a national career development competency framework for youth and adults. It was created in 2024 and is found on the National Career Development Association (NCDA) website below.

https://www.ncda.org/aws/NCDA/pt/sp/NCDG_home_page

State standards for career development vary. Three state standards websites are highlighted by NCDA at the following NCDA website.

https://www.ncda.org/aws/NCDA/pt/sp/ncdg_national

The following report from the Center for American Progress provides an overview of best practices. This report was issued in October, 2024.

https://www.americanprogress.org/article/workforce-development-state-strategies-a-50-state-scan-of-best-practices-from-recent-action/

While a bit dated, the report Transforming U.S. Workforce Development Policies for the 21st Century (2015) is a comprehensive report.

https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Transforming-Workforce-Development-Policies-for-the-21st-Century-.pdf

Q18. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make about the way in which your country organises its career development services? [Up to 300 words]

There is often a wide gap between policy and implementation. A parallel but important issue is that of the qualifications of practitioners. Many are highly trained, holding at least a master's degree; others may have a weekend training or none at all. The National Career Development association has policy and competency frameworks, but these have no official force. lack of quality standards for career development services is a primary issue when considering US policies. While many programs may include career advisors, workforce specialists, and similar roles, there are no quality standards embedded in the policies to ensure career development practitioners are adequately trained. While the National Career Development Association has multiple credentials and standards, these are not required of practitioners in public-facing roles and there are no accountability mechanisms comparable to those of other professions that are regulated by state licensing boards, such as clinical counselors.

Productivity and the inclusive economy

Q19. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services contribute to economic growth.		X			
Career development services contribute to workforce productivity.		X			
Career development services deliver a		X			

Q19. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services contribute to economic growth.		X			
positive return on investment on public spending.					
Career development services support entrepreneurialism.		X			
Career development services help to address employers' skills and labour needs.		X			
Career development services can be accessed by small and medium sized businesses (SMEs).			X		
Career development services improve levels of job satisfaction.	X				
Career development services contribute to decent work (jobs with access to training, a living wage and other benefits).		X			
Career development services support equality of access to learning and work opportunities.				X	
Career development services contribute to the green transition.				X	

Productivity and the inclusive economy

Q20. Provide further information about the way in which policies and practices for career development services in your country support productivity. [Up to 300 words]

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides the national framework and funds states to build regional workforce plans matched to local high-demand industries.

Upskilling and continuous learning are central to how these policies move the needle on productivity. On-the-job training, tuition assistance, and Registered Apprenticeships let workers build new competencies while employed and offset training costs for employers.
Productivity is also a function of who is in the labor market. Through WIOA, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the statewide Job Service, the US network of workforce centers, the states provide career coaching, skill assessments, and support services like childcare and transportation assistance for low-income workers, displaced workers, and people with disabilities. The Rural Healthcare Transformation Program (RHTP) extends this approach into rural communities, where workforce shortages are most acute. By lowering barriers to employment and connecting underutilized workers to jobs that match their skills, these services raise labor force participation and give state employers a deeper, more capable workforce to draw from.

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins) is a major source of federal funding aimed at upgrading Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in secondary schools and community colleges.

Q21. Provide further information about the way in which policies and practices for career development services in your country support an inclusive economy. [Up to 300 words]

Career development services strengthen an inclusive economy by connecting job search assistance, training, and wraparound supports that help individuals facing employment barriers move into stable career pathways. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides the national framework for these services, guiding states as they deliver career guidance, training, and job placement that prioritize low-income individuals, public assistance recipients, and people with basic-skills needs. States expand on WIOA through additional programs and partnerships, including statewide networks of workforce centers that link residents in both urban and rural regions to career exploration, training referrals, and hiring events. Programs such as HELP-Link support lower-income adults by connecting Medicaid recipients to career coaching, free training, and employment opportunities while also providing employer-side grants to offset training costs, tools, and health insurance for eligible new hires. Additional initiatives, such as participation in the Partners for Reentry Opportunities in Workforce Development (PROWD) grant, connect individuals returning from federal prison to apprenticeships, education, and career support, addressing persistent barriers to employment and reducing recidivism. Efforts like the Rural Healthcare Transformation Program (RHTP) further expand inclusion by strengthening health workforce capacity in rural areas where access to jobs and services is limited. These strategies align with the broader U.S. career development system, a decentralized network of educational institutions, workforce agencies, employers, and community organizations that support career decision-making across the lifespan.

Through K–12 career awareness activities, postsecondary counseling services, public workforce programs, employer-sponsored training, and professional career guidance, individuals gain access to opportunities that strengthen career readiness and lifelong learning. Technology enhances these efforts with online assessments, virtual counseling, labor market databases, and digital job-search tools. Together, these interconnected resources expand workforce participation, broaden employer talent pools, and help ensure economic growth reaches diverse communities statewide.

Q22. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide further insights into the relationship in your country between policies for career development, and policies for productivity and the inclusive economy. [Up to 300 words]

U.S. Department of Labor – Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
Primary federal legislation governing workforce development and career services.
https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa

CareerOneStop
Department of Labor career exploration, labor market, and training resource.
https://www.careeronestop.org

U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Labor Talent Strategy Resources
Information on alignment of education and workforce systems.
https://www.ed.gov

National Career Development Association (NCDA)
Leading U.S. professional association for career development practitioners.
https://www.ncda.org

NCDA Career Resources
Career guidance tools, state resources, and practitioner materials.
https://www.ncda.org/resources

Advance CTE
National organization supporting Career and Technical Education policy and practice.
https://careertech.org

American School Counselor association (ASCA)
These standards help school counselors develop, implement and assess their school counseling program to improve student outcomes.
https///www.schoolcounselor.org

Jobs for the Future (JFF)
Research and policy reports on workforce development and career pathways.

Q22. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide further insights into the relationship in your country between policies for career development, and policies for productivity and the inclusive economy. [Up to 300 words]

https://www.jff.org

Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP)
Federal initiative is designed to protect and enhance rural healthcare ecosystems nationwide.
https://www.cms.gov

Harvard Kennedy School Project on Workforce
Research on workforce systems, training, and labor market outcomes.
https://pw.hks.harvard.edu

OECD Career Guidance
International comparative analyses of career guidance policies and systems.
https://www.oecd.org/education/career-guidance/
/career-guidance/

Enhancing skills and developing technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

Q23. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services support people to develop skills	X				
Career development services support people to access training	X				
Career development services support the uptake of TVET pathways		X			
Career development services support lifelong learning		X			

Q24. What are the biggest challenges for participation in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system in your country? [Please tick all that apply.]

School leavers do not see TVET pathways as attractive
Parents do not see TVET pathways as attractive for their children
The practice of compulsory assignment of students with academic challenges to TVET programmes
Career development practitioners do not know enough about TVET pathways and the occupations they lead to
TVET options do not provide opportunities for educational progression e.g. to higher education
Lack of career development services for learners considering TVET
Lack of ongoing career development support for learners studying TVET pathways

Enhancing skills and developing technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

Q25. At what age do young people generally move onto a TVET pathway if that is the path they take?

Adolescents in secondary school typically have the option for early exposure to a TVET pathway through

Q25. At what age do young people generally move onto a TVET pathway if that is the path they take?

career education programs embedded in their high school or via partnerships (e.g. early-college, pre-apprenticeship, dual enrollment, etc.). The vast majority of secondary students in the US have participated in at least one career technical education (CTE) course before graduation.

Upon completion of secondary school (typically averaging age 18 in the US), adolescents generally move onto a TVET pathway through a variety of options, including community college, trade school, or apprenticeship. Given the emphasis in US culture on freedom of choice, lifelong learning, and adaptation, individuals in the US can enter a TVET pathway at any age. Those who pursue TVET pathways above age 18 might be pursuing this direction for a variety of reasons, including up-skilling or re-skilling after time in the workforce, parenting, incarceration, or other unique life circumstances.

Due to a history of students from marginalized identity groups (e.g. socioeconomically and/or racially/ethnically marginalized students) being pushed onto a TVET educational track with reduced options for higher education and higher skill professions, a stigma still lingers around TVET pathways in the US. TVET pathways can be seen as less prestigious or lower status options compared to professions requiring a bachelor's degree or higher. However, given the US Bureau of Labor Statistics still shows higher wages and lower unemployment on average for postsecondary credential completers, individuals pursuing TVET pathways at an older age might be willing to overlook the stigma.

Q26. Does the age of pathway selection cause challenges for your TVET system?

No

Q27. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the age of pathway selection? [Up to 300 words]

The age of pathway selection is not a primary source of challenge for the US TVET system, compared to other major factors. The larger workforce challenge that necessitates TVET is "worker shortages" or "skills gaps." In a 2022 Congressional Research Service review by Donovan, Stoll, Bradley, & Collins, multiple potential causes of misalignment between employers' needs and worker skills were discussed, and while potential oversupply or undersupply of specific skill pathways within TVET might be a contributing factor, there was no reference of the age of pathway selection as a challenge to the TVET system or employers. Additionally, students who pursue TVET pathways at an older age are valued in US public policy, as evidenced by a 2024 Center for American Progress report that reviewed different states' approach to workforce development, highlighting Massachusetts' MassReconnect program that allows students 25 and older to attend community college for free, as well as a similar program in Michigan.

Q28. Provide further information on the ways in which policies for career development services in your country enhance policies for skills development, TVET, and lifelong learning. [Up to 300 words]

Policies for career development services vary widely by state, as well as by age/life stage. For example, access to career development services (such as a career counselor, coach, advisor, or similar) is typically embedded within most educational systems. For adults outside of the educational system, access to career development services can be more tenuous, with a system of job centers funded from the Workforce Opportunity Investment Act (WIOA) as well as private practice career development professionals. The publicly funded career development services are highly decentralized and locally determined via funding administered by Workforce Development Boards. This decentralized system includes advantages, such as allowing local regions to be adaptable to local client and workforce needs, and disadvantages, including inconsistent standards and services. A 2021 OECD report surveyed adults in 6 countries including the US, and highlighted that 25% of those surveyed sought out career guidance services to learn about education and training options, which suggests policies that increase access to career development services for adults positively enhances skills development, TVET, and lifelong learning.

Q29. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide further insights about how career development services can enhance skills and support TVET. [Up to 300 words]

Donovan, S. A., Stoll, A., Bradley, D. H., & Collins, B. (2022). Skills Gaps: A Review of Underlying Concepts and Evidence. CRS Report R47059, Version 3. Congressional Research Service. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED622537.pdf

Goodman, V., Otero-Martinez, T., & Andara, K. (2024). Workforce development state strategies: A 50-state scan of best practices from recent action. Center for American Progress, 31. https://www.americanprogress.org/article/workforce-development-state-strategies-a-50-state-scan-of-best-practices-from-recent-action/

McGrath, E., Stettner, A., West, R., & Lavere, M. (2025). Beyond Job Placement: Reimagining WIOA for Economic Mobility and Workforce Resilience. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/report/beyond-job-placement-reimagining-wioa-for-economic-mobility-and-workforce-resilience/

OECD (2021), Career Guidance for Adults in a Changing World of Work, Getting Skills Right, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9a94bfad-en

Ensuring disadvantaged and vulnerable groups can thrive

Q30. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services help vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to thrive.					X
Vulnerable and disadvantaged groups can access career development services.		X			
Career development services support vulnerable groups to access decent work.					X
Career development services support vulnerable groups to access the education and training system.				X	
There is adequate funding for career development services targeting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.		X			
Policies for social inclusion intersect with policies for education, training, and employment.					X

Q31. Which disadvantaged and vulnerable groups does your government have policies to support and which are provided with bespoke or targeted career development services. [Tick all that apply]

	Government has policies to support	Provided with bespoke or targeted career development services
Indigenous people	X	X
Women and girls	X	

Q31. Which disadvantaged and vulnerable groups does your government have policies to support and which are provided with bespoke or targeted career development services. [Tick all that apply]

	Government has policies to support	Provided with bespoke or targeted career development services
Indigenous people	X	X
Men and boys	X	
Ethnic minorities		
Religious minorities		
Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people		
People from low-socio-economic backgrounds	X	X
People with low skill levels	X	X
Migrants		
People with disabilities	X	X
People with health and mental health challenges		
Younger people	X	X
Older people	X	X
Other		

Ensuring disadvantaged and vulnerable groups can thrive

Q32. Can you provide any further information about the way in which policies for career development in your country support vulnerable and disadvantaged people? [Up to 300 words]

The United States employs a multi-layered federal policy framework to support vulnerable and disadvantaged populations through career development. The primary legislative vehicle is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014), which explicitly designates priority populations including individuals with disabilities, low-income adults, ex-offenders, homeless individuals, migrants, limited-English-proficient individuals, and disconnected youth. American Job Centers, the public workforce delivery system, are mandated to provide individualized career services to these groups at no cost. At the same time, a recent Executive Order is currently calling into question the stability of programs designed to target the needs of specific groups, so there is a possibility to these population-specific resources being dismantled in the future.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990, amended 2008) prohibits employment discrimination and requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations across hiring, training, advancement, and all conditions of employment. It works in tandem with the Rehabilitation Act (1973), which funds state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies that deliver individualized career counseling, job training, and placement services specifically for people with disabilities.

For Indigenous populations, WIOA Section 166 provides direct federal grants to federally recognized tribes, tribal organizations, Alaska Native entities, and Native Hawaiian organizations to fund culturally grounded employment and training services for unemployed and low-income Native Americans.
The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act funds CTE programs with statutory equity provisions covering students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged learners, English-language learners, single parents, foster youth, and children of active-duty military personnel.
Additional targeted policies include the Second Chance Act, supporting career reentry for formerly incarcerated individuals, and WIOA Section 167, the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Program. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) also funds workforce preparation for very low-income families at the state level.

Q32. Can you provide any further information about the way in which policies for career development in your country support vulnerable and disadvantaged people? [Up to 300 words]

Implementation varies significantly across states. The federal framework sets equity mandates, but the quality and reach of services for vulnerable populations depends substantially on state and local capacity and prioritization. Professional organizations, particularly NCDA, complement federal policy by setting competency frameworks, ethical standards, and credentials that guide practitioners serving these populations.

Q33. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide further insights into the way that your country's career development system supports vulnerable and disadvantaged people. [Up to 300 words]

It is important to begin with a caveat. Many diversity-focused programs have been closed in the past 17 months due to Presidential Executive Order - https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/. Services provided under those programs may be disappearing, adapting, or continuing under other funding models; all is currently in flux. The following are programs that remain, focusing on federal programs with one private university initiative included.

The federal programs listed below are funded under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and managed by the US Department of labor.
https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa

Adult and Dislocated Worker Program
This federal initiative helps job seekers, targeted towards low income, upgrade their skills, access career counseling, and secure employment in high demand fields.
https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/workforce-investment/adult

CareerOneStop
This is a nationwide network of more than 2400 physical locations offering career services to job seekers including resume building, unemployment assistance, and career development resources and training.
https://www.careeronestop.org/LocalHelp/AmericanJobCenters/find-american-job-centers.aspx

Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce
This university research center produces US focused labor market research, often focused on marginalized populations.
https://cew.georgetown.edu/research/

Indian and Native American Employment Training Grants
Eligible Indian, Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiians are eligible to apply for federal funds to support education, training, and employment services.
https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/dinap

Job Corps
A federally funded residential career training program helps eligible young people ages 16 through 24 complete their high school education while training them for in demand technical careers. The program also supports child care, employment seeking, housing and transportation to program participants.
https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/jobcorps

Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)
A federally funded job training and employment program to help low income, unemployed adults aged 55 and older to reenter the workforce.
https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/seniors

YouthBuild
A federally managed pre-apprenticeship program for disadvantaged youth ages 16-24 offering occupational skills training in construction while earning a high school diploma or equivalent.
https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/youth/youthbuild


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