

## AJCC COMPREHENSIVE AND AFFILIATE/SPECIALIZED CERTIFICATION

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This policy provides the guidance and establishes the procedures regarding certification of comprehensive and affiliate/specialized America's Job Center of California<sup>SM</sup> (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 *AJCC Comprehensive and Affiliate/Specialized Certification* (WSD20-218), issued for comment on December 7, 2020. The Workforce Development Community submitted three comments during the draft comment period. A summary of comments, including all changes, is provided as Attachment 4.

This policy supersedes Workforce Services Directive *Certification Process for Comprehensive AJCCs* (WSD16-20), dated June 9, 2017 and Workforce Services Directive *Certification Process for Affiliate and Specialized AJCCs* (WSD18-11), dated March 14, 2019.

### REFERENCES

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- *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA) (Public Law 113-128) Sections 121(g) and 188
- *Americans with Disability Act Amendments Act of 2008* (ADA) (Public Law 110-325)
- Title 20 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) Sections 678.800 and 679.370(q)
- Title 29 CFR Part 38 *Implementation of the Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Provisions of the WIOA*
- 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)
- Department of Labor (DOL) Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 16-16, *One-Stop Operations Guidance for the American Job Center Network* (January 18, 2017)

*The EDD is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.*

- DOL TEGL [4-15 \(PDF\)](#), *Vision for the One-Stop Delivery System Under the WIOA* (August 13, 2015)
- *California's Unified Strategic Workforce Development Plan 2020-2023* (State Plan)
- WSD19-13, *Selection of AJCC Operators and Career Services Providers* (June 8, 2020)
- WSD18-12, *WIOA Memorandums of Understanding* (April 30, 2019)
- Workforce Services Information Notice WSIN12-43, *New One-Stop Branding – America's Job Center of California Network* (March 15, 2013)

## BACKGROUND

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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 (CWDB), 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: 1) effectiveness of the AJCC, 2) physical and programmatic accessibility for individuals with disabilities, and 3) 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.

To ensure that AJCCs deliver a better experience and continuously improve services for job seekers, workers, and employers, the CWDB in partnership with a workgroup from the Employment Development Department (EDD) developed a streamlined process with this Directive with easier objective criteria and procedures for AJCC certification. The initial certification process was designed with two separate Directives, one for comprehensive AJCCs outlined in [WSD16-20 \(PDF\)](#) and the other for affiliate/specialized AJCCs outlined in [WSD18-11 \(PDF\)](#).

Comprehensive AJCC and affiliate/specialized certifications are due by **November 1, 2021**.

## POLICY AND PROCEDURES

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In accordance with WIOA Section 121(g), Local Boards must select an evaluation panel(s) to perform an independent and objective evaluation of the AJCCs in their Local Areas once every three years using criteria and procedures established by the CWDB. 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.

Local Boards have maximum flexibility to conduct an AJCC Certification through an on-site, remote/virtual, or desk review evaluation due to COVID-19 and must meet the requirements of this Directive.

The certification process for comprehensive and affiliate/specialized AJCCs will be conducted during Program Year (PY) 2021-22 and take effect January 1, 2022.

### **Baseline Certification**

The Baseline AJCC Certification is intended to ensure that every comprehensive, specialized and affiliate AJCC is in compliance with key WIOA statutory and regulatory requirements. 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.

### **AJCC Comprehensive**

The following requirements must be met in order for a comprehensive AJCC to receive Baseline AJCC Certification (Attachment 1):

1. Each Local Board and partner within the affiliate/specialized AJCC has a signed and implemented Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Local Board meeting the requirements in [WSD18-12 \(PDF\)](#).
2. 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).
3. The AJCC complies with equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in accordance with the ADA, WIOA Section 188, Title 29 CFR Part 38, and all other applicable federal and state guidance.
4. The AJCC meets all regulatory requirements to be considered a comprehensive AJCC as identified in the WIOA Joint Final Rule Section 678.305.

### **Affiliate/Specialized Baseline AJCC Certification**

The following requirements must be met in order for an affiliate/specialized AJCC to receive Baseline AJCC Certification (Attachment 2):

1. Each Local Board and partner within the affiliate/specialized AJCC has a signed and implemented MOU with the Local Board meeting the requirements in [WSD18-12 \(PDF\)](#).
2. The affiliate/specialized AJCC complies with equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in accordance with the ADA, WIOA Section 188, Title 29 CFR Part 38, and all other applicable federal and state guidance.

## **AJCC Certification Indicator Assessment**

In order to highlight areas where AJCCs can continuously improve their service delivery, the AJCC Certification Workgroup identified seven AJCC Certification Indicators to measure continuous improvement for all AJCCs.

The AJCC Certification Indicators are as follows:

1. The AJCC ensures universal access, with an emphasis on individuals with barriers to employment.
2. The AJCC actively supports the One-Stop system through effective partnerships.
3. The AJCC provides integrated, customer-centered services.
4. 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 pathway.
5. The AJCC actively engages industry and labor and supports regional sector strategies through an integrated business service strategy that focuses on quality jobs.
6. The AJCC has high-quality, well-informed, and cross-trained staff.
7. The AJCC achieves business results through data-driven continuous improvement.

The AJCC Certification Indicator Assessment provides a description of each Certification Indicator along with examples of criteria. The assessment requires a full rationale for each Certification Indicator provided.

The Local Board may establish additional criteria, or set higher standards for continuous improvement than those suggested by the state criteria above.

Local Boards must submit a completed AJCC Certification Indicator Assessment to their [Regional Advisor](#) by November 1, 2021.

## **Continuous Improvement Plan**

Once the AJCC Certification Indicator Assessment is completed, the Local Board must use the recommendations and evaluations from the assessment to create a continuous improvement plan for the AJCC.

Since Local Boards oversee the AJCC system within the Local Workforce Development Area, the AJCC Continuous Improvement Plan should be developed locally in coordination with the Local Board, AJCC Operator, and in alignment with the agreed upon goals and objectives within the established Regional and Local Plans and MOUs to drive continuous improvement for the AJCC system. The continuous improvement plan does not need to be submitted with the Baseline Criteria Matrix and the AJCC Certification Indicator Assessment.

Since the goal is for Local Boards to work with each of their comprehensive and affiliate/specialized AJCCs to continually improve and progress within each AJCC Certification

Indicator, all Local Boards must attest to developing the Continuous Improvement Plan with target dates with the AJCC. The Continuous Improvement Plan must be completed by **December 31, 2021**.

Local Boards are encouraged to note the changes that have taken place in the form of virtual services due to COVID-19. Additionally, Local Boards may use the Continuous Improvement Plan to highlight key procedural changes that have occurred as a result of the pandemic and how those changes have been beneficial toward the AJCC's continuous improvement.

### **Local Board Certification 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 open, independent evaluation of each comprehensive and affiliate/specialized 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 Baseline Criteria Matrix and accompanying AJCC Certification Indicator Assessment for each of the comprehensive and specialized/affiliate AJCCs in the Local Area.

To avoid potential conflicts of interest, the entity that conducts the evaluations cannot be an 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 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 evaluations of those AJCCs. In this case, the CWDB 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, ADA compliance monitoring 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, the CWDB, or the EDD 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) evaluation.

### **CWDB 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 CWDB must certify the AJCC(s) where the Local Board is the AJCC's Operator. Prior to the CWDB's certification process, the Local Board must conduct an initial self-assessment for certification for all of its comprehensive and affiliate/specialized AJCCs using the Baseline Criteria Matrix and complete an AJCC Certification Indicator Assessment.

The Local Board must submit the Baseline Criteria Matrix, and the AJCC Certification Indicator Assessment by November 1, 2021. The CWDB will review certification packets for the certification status of each comprehensive and affiliate/specialized AJCC by December 17, 2021.

### **Submissions**

Local Boards must electronically submit their Baseline Criteria Matrix and AJCC Certification Indicator Assessment via email to their Regional Advisor.

The Local Board Director must sign both the Baseline Criteria Matrix and AJCC Certification Indicator Assessment to attest to the Local Board's approval of each comprehensive and affiliate/specialized AJCC's certification level and agreement to develop a Continuous Improvement Plan with target dates with the AJCCs.

## **ACTION**

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Bring this Directive to the attention of all relevant parties.

## INQUIRIES

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

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

### Attachments:

1. [Comprehensive AJCC Certification Baseline Criteria Matrix \(DOCX\)](#)
2. [Affiliate/Specialized AJCC Certification Baseline Criteria Matrix \(DOCX\)](#)
3. [AJCC Certification Indicator Assessment \(DOCX\)](#)
4. [Summary of Comments \(DOCX\)](#)