

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE	NO. 48-11
	DATE May 30, 2012

TO: STATE WORKFORCE AGENCIES
STATE WORKFORCE LIAISONS
STATE AND LOCAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARDS
STATE ONE-STOP SYSTEM LEADS
ALL WIA SECTION 166 INDIAN AND NATIVE AMERICAN
GRANTEES

FROM: KATHLEEN MARTINEZ /s/
Assistant Secretary
Office of Disability Employment Policy

JANE OATES /s/
Assistant Secretary
Employment and Training Administration

SUBJECT: Announcement of *Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success* Curriculum

1. **Purpose.** To inform the workforce system of a curriculum for teaching soft skills or work readiness skills to youth.
2. **References.**
 - Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Section 134(d)(3)(C)(vi); and
 - Training and Employment Notice No. 31-10, *Increasing Enrollment and Improving Services to Youth with Disabilities*,
<http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL31-10ACC.pdf>.
3. **Background.** As young adults seek employment in an increasingly competitive job market, it becomes even more important that the workforce system adequately prepare them to obtain employment while ensuring they advance along a career pathway that leads to future high-demand jobs. Many disadvantaged youth, including youth with disabilities, may lack understanding of the basic expectations employers have regarding attitudes, skills, and behaviors necessary to succeed within the social environment of the workplace. Soft skills, sometimes called work readiness, employability or job readiness skills, are essential in helping a youth stand out to an employer and can impact the likelihood of continued employment. Under Title I of WIA, state and local areas are required to provide workforce preparation and training for adults and youth. Section 129(a)(1) specifies the use of funds for youth activities and includes providing "...assistance in achieving academic and employment

success, effective and comprehensive activities, which include a variety of options for improving educational and skill competencies and providing effective connections to employers.”

“Hard skills,” or occupational skills, are the result of education and training provided to an individual to perform an actual job. Soft skills are generally considered as the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication skills, personal habits, friendliness, optimism, team work, critical thinking, and language that characterize relationships within the workplace. Based on a Job Outlook 2008 survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, soft skills were identified as top characteristics looked for in new hires by employers.

4. **Development of Skills to Pay the Bills.** To gain additional insight about the needs of employers, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) convened a group of businesses to further explore the issue of basic workplace skills, and identify those skills they deemed most important for inclusion in the curriculum. Participating employers identified the following competencies as key to the success of young workers:

- Communication – ability to give and receive information and convey ideas and opinions via verbal, aural, non-verbal, written and visual means.
- Networking – ability to interact with a group of people.
- Enthusiasm and Attitude – ability to have a positive attitude in the workplace and an eagerness to complete tasks.
- Teamwork – ability to work well with others to accomplish a goal.
- Problem Solving and Critical Thinking – ability to use knowledge, facts, and data to effectively solve problems.
- Professionalism – ability to conduct oneself responsibly and work effectively with others.

Specific information on each of these competencies is available within the *Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success* curriculum, which ODEP developed.

In addition, *Skills to Pay the Bills* was positively field-tested by youth service professionals and students across the country. The curriculum is available in both English and Spanish at: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/> or <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/topic/soft-skills>.

5. **Strategies for Workforce Professionals.** The participating employers recommended materials be made available to youth service professionals to encourage and support youth in attaining basic soft skills. Consequently, *Skills to Pay the Bills* was designed to be used by youth service professionals assisting both in-school and out-of-school youth ages 14-21 with career and work readiness skills development. Each chapter offers activities aligned with the

six topics presented above. Information is provided on potential teaching strategies, including tips on how to ensure that each activity is inclusive, accessible, and supports universal design for all youth. Instructors are encouraged to adapt activities to meet the needs of each class. Recommended strategies for delivering the curriculum include:

- Using technology to enhance learning and performance.
- Encouraging students to demonstrate their learning through multiple modalities (e.g. written, oral, graphic, or multimedia representations).
- Providing opportunities for students to collaborate.
- Giving students opportunities to complete “do-overs” based on feedback.

6. **Inquiries.** Questions regarding this guidance should be directed to the appropriate Employment and Training Administration (ETA) regional office, ETA’s Office of Workforce Investment, or ODEP. You can also send inquiries to softskills@dol.gov.