

CareerSource Okaloosa Walton

PY2026 WIOA Rural Initiatives Implementation Plan

CareerSource Okaloosa Walton (CSOW) appreciates the opportunity to continue serving the rural communities of Walton County and Northeast Okaloosa County through the WIOA Rural Initiative funding. As a workforce board serving communities within Florida's Rural Area of Opportunity, we understand the unique challenges rural residents and employers face, including limited access to training opportunities, transportation barriers, workforce shortages, and geographic distances that can impact workforce participation.

Previous Rural Initiative funding has allowed CSOW to successfully connect rural residents to education, training, supportive services, and employment opportunities. Participants completed occupational skills training, earned industry-recognized credentials, and secured employment in high-demand sectors including healthcare, manufacturing, transportation, and skilled trades. These successes have demonstrated the value of investing workforce resources directly into rural communities and have helped shape our strategy for PY2026.

Building on these accomplishments, CSOW will utilize PY2026 Rural Initiative funding to expand workforce services, increase training participation, strengthen employer engagement, and improve employment outcomes throughout Walton County and Northeast Okaloosa County.

A primary focus of this initiative will be increasing access to workforce training opportunities that lead to industry-recognized credentials and employment in high-demand occupations. Funding will support eligible participants pursuing training in healthcare, skilled trades, manufacturing, transportation and logistics, information technology, aerospace and defense, and other occupations identified through labor market demand.

CSOW will continue utilizing Rural Initiative funds to provide supportive services that help participants overcome barriers to training and employment. Assistance with transportation, tools, uniforms, licensing fees, testing costs, and other allowable supportive services will be available to ensure participants can successfully engage in workforce activities and complete their training goals. Career Advisors will utilize the Florida CLIFF Dashboard and, when appropriate, co-enroll participants in WIOA and partner-funded initiatives to maximize resources and improve outcomes.

CareerSource Okaloosa Walton will review local workforce policies related to participant eligibility, training investments, supportive services, work-based learning, and barrier reduction. Policy updates will be implemented where appropriate.

Recognizing that successful workforce development in rural communities requires direct engagement, CSOW will continue conducting outreach throughout Walton County and Northeast Okaloosa County. Staff will participate in community meetings, economic development activities, and partner collaborations to increase awareness of available workforce services and connect residents with training and employment opportunities. CareerSource Okaloosa Walton will also host an annual community resource and job fair, designed to connect employers with qualified talent and workforce resources.

CSOW will continue working with populations that face significant barriers to employment. Through partnerships with the Walton County Jail, workforce staff will provide employability skills workshops and workforce program information to individuals preparing to re-enter the workforce. Similar workshops and career services will be offered through partnerships with organizations serving Section 8 housing residents and other underserved populations throughout the region.

Expanding WorkforceNOW!, our WIOA Youth program, will remain an important component of our rural strategy. CSOW will continue providing career exploration activities, employability skills workshops, labor market information, and training presentations within rural high schools. In addition, CSOW plans to build upon the success of the *Building the Rural Workforce of Tomorrow* summer youth program by continuing to expose rural youth to career pathways, work-based learning opportunities, industry-recognized certifications, financial literacy education, and employer engagement activities that prepare them for future workforce success.

Employer engagement will remain a key priority throughout PY2026. Through partnerships with local chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, educational institutions, and community stakeholders, CSOW will continue identifying workforce needs and connecting employers with workforce solutions. Business Services staff will actively promote workforce programs, work-based learning opportunities, and training resources that support local business growth while helping employers address workforce shortages.

CSOW will also continue expanding work-based learning opportunities that provide direct connections between job seekers and employers. Rural Initiative funding will support increased utilization of on-the-job training, work experience opportunities, employed worker training, and apprenticeship-related activities that help employers develop talent while providing participants with valuable workplace experience.

Business Services staff will respond to employer inquiries within two business days whenever possible. CSOW will actively participate in statewide Rural Initiative meetings and technical assistance coordinated by FloridaCommerce and CareerSource Florida.

Through this initiative, CSOW expects to increase participant enrollment, expand access to training and supportive services, strengthen employer partnerships, increase credential attainment, and improve employment outcomes throughout rural Walton and Northeast Okaloosa Counties. By building upon proven strategies and strengthening community partnerships, CSOW will continue expanding economic opportunity and workforce participation throughout the rural communities we serve.

PY2026 Performance Goals

Set Aside Initiative:		
WIOA Rural Initiative		
Program Output/Outcomes	Target / Baseline PY2025	PY2026
Participant:		
Enrollment	12	15
Placed in ITA Funded Training	6	6
Placed in Work Based Training	1	1
Received Supportive Services*	7	8
Obtained Credentials**	10	10
Employed***	10	10
Employers:		
Employers contacted through the Rural Initiative	154	160
Active OJTs being funded	0	1