

"WOMEN AND WORK: CONSIDERING NON-TRADITIONAL CAREER OPTIONS"



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Lengel Vocational Services

ABSTRACT

Women make up a large percentage of the customers we serve. They all are different: having varied personal goals and needs, interests and abilities. As workforce professionals we are challenged to balance “customer choice” with “learning about good career alternatives”. In reality, many women that we serve receive food stamps for their families. They enter training programs, find new work, and still receive food stamps. The goal of being “Self-Sufficient” often remains unachieved.

Career fields not normally chosen by women (non-traditional occupations) offer many the opportunity to earn wages that will result in financial independence. These career choices are not for everyone...but everyone should know about them as possibilities. As we consider how we can expand alternatives for women, we should be focusing on growth occupations, which should include looking at “green” jobs; filling skills gaps; and expanding our assessment techniques.

TRAINING OBJECTIVES:

Participants in this program will :

1. Define non-traditional employment and identify opportunities in the local area.
2. Separate fact from fiction to be able to create an environment conducive for women in nontraditional work.
3. Identify non-traditional employment recruitment and retention challenges and choose assessment techniques that will identify non-traditional candidates.
4. Evaluate “Green Jobs” as good sources for non-traditional opportunities.
5. Gain competence and confidence in the process.

BACKGROUND

Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) works nationally to build pathways to economic independence for America's families, women and girls. For more than 40 years, WOW has helped women learn to earn, with programs emphasizing literacy, technical and nontraditional skills, welfare-to-work transition, career development and retirement security. WOW is recognized nationally for its skills training models, technical assistance and advocacy for women workers.

Why the Six Strategies?

- Because women currently earn 74¢ for every dollar men earn.
- Because 60% of all minimum wage workers are women.
- Because most welfare recipients leaving the rolls for work earn very low wages.
- Because nearly one in three American households possesses zero or negative assets.
- [The Self-Sufficiency Standard](#)
- [Targeting Higher-Wage Employment](#)
- [Nontraditional Employment for Women](#)
- [Functional Context Education](#)
- [Microenterprise Training and Development](#)
- [Individual Development Accounts](#)

#1: What is the Self-Sufficiency Standard?

The Self-Sufficiency Standard calculates how much money working adults need to meet their basic needs without subsidies of any kind. Unlike the federal poverty standard, the Self-Sufficiency Standard accounts for the costs of living and working as they vary by family size and composition and by geographic location.

The Standard defines the amount of income necessary to meet basic needs (including paying taxes) in the regular "marketplace" without public subsidies—such as public housing, food stamps, Medicaid or child care—or private/informal subsidies—such as free babysitting by a relative or friend, food provided by churches or local food banks, or shared housing. The Standard, therefore, estimates the level of income necessary for a given family type—whether working now or making the transition to work—to be independent of welfare and/or other public and private subsidies.

The Standard provides important guidance for policymakers and program providers regarding how to target their education, job training, workforce development, and welfare-to-work resources. It helps individuals choose among occupations for work experience and educational training. It also shows policymakers how subsidizing child care, transportation or health care impacts the wages necessary for working families to make ends meet.

#2: Targeting Higher Wage Employment

A targeting high-wage job strategy, Sectoral Employment Intervention identifies well-paying jobs in growth sectors that lack trained workers, determines the wage needed by a worker to sustain her/his family (using the [Self-Sufficiency Standard](#)) and analyzes the job training and support services infrastructure necessary to move these individuals into these jobs.

Key components include engaging industry representatives, targeting training for specific jobs, and developing sensible outcome standards. Because this approach looks at labor market issues from both supply and demand perspectives, it helps communities strengthen their local economies while reinvesting in families and neighborhoods.

- Targeted training is necessary to help low-income clients access high-demand, high-wage jobs.
- Workforce development boards should establish and fund occupational information systems based on local- and regional-labor-market-specific data from which to select high-wage, high-demand jobs.
- By responding to business' specific labor needs, a high-wage job targeting strategy will improve a region's ability to attract and keep industries and to support a more thriving business climate.

#3: Non-Traditional Employment for Women

Increasing women's access to nontraditional jobs is a compelling strategy for family economic self-sufficiency for several reasons. Most importantly, compared to jobs that are traditional for women, nontraditional jobs can provide better wages and benefits than the traditionally female jobs. Unfortunately, most female job training participants and welfare clients are steered towards traditionally female occupations. The additional earnings associated with NTOs significantly improve the ability of women to take care of their families. Nontraditional jobs also frequently have greater career and training opportunities, and many women find greater job satisfaction that can result in longer-term employment. In addition, hiring women in nontraditional jobs is good for business and produces positive results for employers.

- Recognizing the significant benefits of nontraditional employment for low-income women and their families, many women's community-based

- organizations began to offer nontraditional training 20 years ago. Their efforts were assisted by affirmative actions guidelines for employers and apprenticeship programs that opened the construction trades, in particular, to women.
- While most community-based nontraditional employment programs were successful, few of the strategies used to train and place women in higher-wage, nontraditional jobs were institutionalized into the mainstream job training and vocational education systems.
 - Institutionalizing nontraditional employment focuses the workforce development and welfare systems on what they should be doing—moving families out of poverty by training women for self-sufficiency wage jobs with a future.

#4: Functional Context Education

Functional Context Education (FCE) is an instructional strategy that integrates the teaching of literacy skills and job content to move learners more successfully and quickly toward their educational and employment goals. Programs that use the FCE model are more effective than traditional programs that teach basic skills and job skills in sequence because this innovative approach teaches literacy and basic skills in the context in which the learner will use them. Clients see clearly the role literacy skills play in moving them toward their goals. This strategy promotes better retention, encourages lifelong learning and supports the intergenerational transfer of knowledge.

- For adults who have already experienced school failure, enrollment in programs that use traditional approaches to teaching often reproduce that failure. Functional context education programs address this problem by using content related to adult goals to teach basic skills.
- Basic education and technical training must be relevant to the skills and education required by jobs if low-income persons are going to succeed in becoming economically self-sufficient. In addition, most adults do not have time to spend years in basic education programs learning skills that may seem unrelated to their educational and economic goals.
- Given welfare time limits and restrictions on education and training, it is more important than ever that individuals master basic and job-specific skills as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Despite this need, the number of FCE programs is small. Demonstration projects can help to institutionalize the FCE model. They can provide the opportunity for those interested in implementing functional context education programs to learn how the approach is translated into daily instruction.

- In addition, demonstration projects can be used to develop, pilot and refine classroom materials and lessons plans. Such projects can also result in a trained cadre of technical assistance providers. State funding

for FCE demonstration projects would allow researchers to evaluate FCE more comprehensively, resulting in improvement of practice.

#5: Microenterprise Training and Development

Microenterprise development is an income-generating strategy that helps low-income people start or expand very small businesses. Generally, the business is owned and operated by one person or family, has fewer than five employees and can start up with a loan of less than \$25,000. Microenterprise is an attractive option for low-income women who may have lacked opportunity but who are highly motivated and have skills in a particular craft or service.

Even in the current booming economy, pockets of unemployment and underemployment remain. The lack of quality employment options—especially for low-income, low-skilled women—makes microenterprise development a critical strategy for moving families out of poverty.

- Low-income women entrepreneurs, especially those living in rural or inner-city communities isolated from the economic mainstream, often lack the contacts and networks needed for business success.
- Peer networks (such as lending circles and program alumnae groups) help women learn to learn from each other, build self-esteem and organize around policy advocacy.
- Linkages between microentrepreneurs and more established women business owners provide program participants with role models, facilitate an ongoing transfer of skills, and expand networks.

#6: Individual Development Accounts

Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are dedicated savings accounts earmarked for purchasing a first home, for education and job training expenses or for capitalizing a small business. Contributions from eligible low-income participants are matched, using both private and public sources. IDAs are managed by community-based organizations and are held at local financial institutions. This innovative strategy is based on a fundamental truth that long-term economic security is achieved through savings and asset accumulation.

- IDA programs often require economic literacy training that shows participants how to improve their credit, and establish a savings and budget schedule. They learn the basics of money management and how to participate in the new global economy.
- Current welfare policy raises people only to the poverty line-leaving them one sickness, one accident or one divorce away from poverty. While ensuring that families have food, shelter and clothing is imperative, this will not produce a real escape from poverty. Supporting IDA legislation transforms welfare policy from one that is based on spending,

consumption and subsistence to one that is premised on increasing low-income families' ability to invest in their futures and achieve long-term economic independence.

GROUP ACTIVITY: TRADITIONAL VS. NON-TRADITIONAL

3 Traditional (Common) Employment/Training Goals for Your Women:

Title	Type of Training	Length of Time	Starting Wage

3 Non-Traditional Employment/Training Goals for Your Women:

Title	Type of Training	Length of Time	Starting Wage

Notes:

Quick Facts on Nontraditional Occupations for Women

- A nontraditional occupation for women is one in which women comprise 25 percent or less of total employment.
- Nontraditional occupations span all major occupational groups and provide many employment options for women.
- First, growth in the economy is projected to expand employment in many of these occupations and secondly, there will be strong demand for workers in these fields due to projected retirements or transfers of current workers to other occupations.
- Nontraditional jobs are attractive to women because they generally offer higher entry-level wages and a career ladder with pay between \$20 and \$30 per hour.
- Here are some examples of nontraditional jobs for women: detectives, architects, chefs, barbers, clergy, computer and office machine repairers, construction and building inspectors, railroad conductors, machinists, truck drivers, fire fighters, aircraft pilots, construction occupations, and small engine mechanics.
- Women continue to make inroads into nontraditional occupations. As more women enter jobs that were once dominated by men, many jobs that were nontraditional for women in the 1986 were no longer nontraditional for women in 2006. Some of these occupations are physicians and surgeons, chemists, judges and magistrates, announcers, lawyers, athletes, coaches, umpires, and postal service mail carriers.

Benefits

- **Higher Wages**—Women are concentrated in a few lower-paying traditionally female jobs, while men are concentrated in jobs that pay higher wages. Nontraditional jobs pay 20 to 30 percent more on average than traditionally female occupations. This additional income can make the difference between family well-being and family poverty.

A national study of five nontraditional training programs by Women Unlimited in Maine revealed that the average wage at placement for welfare recipients trained by these programs was \$9.54/hour. The average wage at placement for participants in federally-funded employment programs nationwide was \$6.15/hour.

- **Better Benefits**—Nontraditional jobs in the trades and technical fields tend to be unionized, with greater health benefits, sick leave, life insurance, pension/retirement plans and paid vacation time than traditionally female jobs. Some employers also offer transportation assistance and educational subsidies that pay for work-related training or education.
- **Opportunity for Advancement**—Nontraditional occupations tend to have more established career ladders than traditionally female jobs, which translates directly into salary and job upgrades as a worker achieves higher skill levels on the job. Often, NTOs offer paid, on-the-job training. In contrast, many traditionally female occupations lack significant opportunities for career advancement or require additional education outside of work for promotions and salary increases. For example, a copy-machine repair technician can earn \$17 an hour as a trainee and then advance to \$22 as a field technician after completing a training period.
- **Job Satisfaction**—Women's interests and abilities are diverse. Some women simply may be less content working in traditionally female occupations, and may be unaware of their alternatives. By expanding the number of jobs women enter, women are more likely to find a closer "occupational fit" with their skills, interests and personalities. In turn, the more a woman enjoys her work, the more likely she is to stick with it and the more likely her family, her community and her employers will benefit from it.

Challenges

There are many real challenges remain for women working in nontraditional occupations. Women may be exposed to discrimination and/or harassment in nontraditional jobs. Nontraditional workplaces can be hazardous, requiring safety protocols, special equipment and protective clothing to prevent harm from accidents, extreme weather and work-related injuries. Sometimes the only woman on the job, women can experience isolation in a nontraditional workplace. Family and friends may not be supportive of a woman who is breaking their stereotypes about women and work. Transportation and childcare can also be significant challenges for women seeking and entering nontraditional jobs.

Presenting High-Wage Nontraditional Employment as a Career Option to Women and Girls

Work4Women offers strategies and tools to help employment and apprenticeship training providers, counselors, career developers and educators effectively present high-wage nontraditional employment as a way to help women move towards economic self-sufficiency

**Wider Opportunities for Women
Nontraditional Employment for Women
CAREER ASSESSMENT SURVEY**

What is a Nontraditional Job?

Nontraditional jobs for women are any jobs that we most often see men doing, for example, carpenter, auto technician, welder, heavy equipment operator, utility worker, landscaper, plumber, electrician, laborer, printer, maintenance mechanic, computer repair technician, cable installer, pest controller and truck driver.

These jobs usually offer higher wages, good benefits and career ladders.

WOMEN CAN DO THESE JOBS, TOO!

Would You be Interested?

(Circle 3 if you like to do these activities, 2 if you are willing to do them although not very interested in them, and 1 if you don't like to do them.)

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1) Work with your hands? | 1 2 3 |
| 2) Make repairs around the house? | 1 2 3 |
| 3) Fix outlets, radios, stereos? | 1 2 3 |
| 4) Work outdoors? | 1 2 3 |
| 5) Drive cars, vans, farm equipment? | 1 2 3 |
| 6) See concrete results from your work? | 1 2 3 |
| 7) Solve technical problems/puzzles? | 1 2 3 |
| 8) Work from a pattern, blueprint, or diagram to construct or make things? | 1 2 3 |
| 9) Paint, wallpaper, fill in holes in the walls? | 1 2 3 |

TOTAL YOUR INTEREST SCORE:

If your total score is more than 15, a nontraditional job may be for you!

Having the Requisites:

While many nontraditional jobs require skills, these skills can be gained in a wide variety of ways.

For example, did you know:

- Following a sewing pattern employs the same skills as reading a blueprint welders must use, or reading a schematic drawing for building a house?
- A driver's license may be the first step toward an exciting career in the transportation field or heavy equipment operation?
- Following a recipe for a meal is similar to following instructions for repairing a copy machine or mixing cement?

The following activities utilize skills that are transferrable to nontraditional jobs.

(Check things you may have done that help toward success in nontraditional jobs.)

- Worked in a nontraditional job before as a paid worker, volunteer, or as a hobby.
- Received a high school diploma or GED.
- Obtained your driver's license.
- Traveled and enjoyed going from place to place.
- Used hand or power tools.
- Worked on your car or someone else's.
- Done handiwork such as knitting, embroidery or other crafts.
- Followed a pattern in sewing.
- Regularly participated in a sport or worked-out.
- Planted and maintained a successful garden.
- Fixed a broken television, radio or computer. Or used a manual to figure out what's wrong with an appliance.
- Entered/completed a trade school program for a vocational skill.
- Driven/fixd farm machinery or a school bus.
- Built or repaired items in your home or apartment (built a bookcase, fixed a leaky faucet).
- Followed a recipe.
- Worked independently, with little supervision.
- Served in the military.
- Worked outdoors for long periods of time.
- Assembled a child's toy or furniture.

TOTAL NUMBER OF ANSWERS CHECKED: _____

If you have checked 3 or more of the above items, a nontraditional job may be for you. If you have checked 4 or more, you're already on your way! Your counselor or case manager can provide you with more details on how other skills you may possess transfer to a nontraditional job.

Describe Yourself:

Are you: (Check those that are true for you.)

- a person who likes to take on challenges?
- in good physical health or fitness?
- a person who needs to earn more than \$7.00 per hour to support yourself and your family?
- a person who needs to have access to health care and other benefits?
- willing to explore new things, new places, new people?
- interested in a career, not just a job?

TOTAL NUMBER OF ANSWERS CHECKED: _____

If you have checked 2 or more of these qualities, nontraditional employment may be for you!

Some women are unhappy doing work that other women enjoy.

Do you dislike: (Check those you don't like to do.)

- Working at a desk all day.
- Working with groups of children or sick people.
- Dealing regularly with the public in a store or restaurant.
- Helping others solve their personal or family problems.
- Working indoors.
- Working in one place all day.
- Answering questions and referring people to other sources of information.
- Completing written products.
- Using the same equipment all the time.
- Work in which you rarely use your physical strength.
- Receiving lots of supervision and feedback on your work.

TOTAL NUMBER OF ANSWERS CHECKED:

If you have checked 2 or more of these activities, a nontraditional job may be for you!

Nontraditional Jobs:

Check those jobs which sound most interesting to you:

- computer repair technician plumber
- cable installer welder
- household appliance bricklayer or concrete/stone
- installer/repairer mason
- printer truck driver
- cabinet maker carpenter
- heavy equipment operator (bulldozer operator, crane operator, etc.)
- pest control
- heating, ventilation and refrigeration mechanic
- machine tooler
- electrician painter
- irrigation technician
- auto/heavy equipment repair technician machinist
- boiler mechanic environmental technician
- landscaper utility worker
- construction laborer flagger

What are other nontraditional jobs you are interested in? _____

When you hear or read about a woman who has taken a job that is not traditional for women, what is your reaction?

Very Positive Somewhat Positive Somewhat Negative Very Negative

Briefly explain your answer: _____

NONTRADITIONAL RETENTION STRATEGIES

- Activities such as tutoring and mentoring are provided in areas in which nontraditional students have deficiencies.
- Review all curriculum and instructional materials to determine if all materials are inclusive, represent diversity and are gender fair.
- An on-site person is designated to assist nontraditional students in accessing the services they need to continue and complete their education.
- An ongoing support system for nontraditional students is provided that includes a drop-in counseling program, time spent with appropriate female or male role model/mentors from various nontraditional jobs, and job shadowing with employees in nontraditional occupations.
- Opportunities are provided for nontraditional students to strategize on how to succeed in an occupation dominated by the other gender.
- Linkages are developed with employers to ensure all students have equal access to jobs.
- Articulation agreements have provisions for traditionally underrepresented populations to ensure equity in transition.
- Employers will be provided with information on nontraditional employment including opportunities and potential barriers.
- Posters, brochures, flyers and other promotional materials include nontraditional occupations, which feature photos and testimonials of women working in these occupations.
- Women-owned businesses will be involved in all phases of planning and implementation of work-based learning experiences.
- Training provided for workplace mentors will include awareness of gender issues and how to mentor women interested in nontraditional occupations.
- Advisory committees will involve female business, industry and labor representatives and advocacy groups for girls and women.

***adapted from the Gender Equity Advisory Committee of the Illinois State Board of Education and Statewide Nontraditional Leadership Team of the Illinois Workforce Investment Board**

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING NONTRADITIONAL ENROLLMENT

*Adapted from Institute for Women in Trades, Technology & Science (IWITTS)

Recruitment Strategies

- Issue a personal invitation to a girl to attend a nontraditional class or activity in the class. Let her know you think she has what it takes to be successful.
- Create invitations for young women to attend the class or activity and hand them out in the hallway randomly. Invite them to bring a friend.
- Make homeroom presentations indicating you are seeking young women who are interested in a nontraditional class.
- Put up bulletin board displays in a conspicuous area recruiting young women for the class.
- Print flyers recruiting young women to industrial education classes.
- Talk with counselors and ask them for recommendations for your class.
- Require all middle school students to take a mini-course through the technical education areas.

Peer Pressure Strategies

- Recruit popular young women and others will follow.
- Recruit young women in friendship groups or from a school club.
- Invite young women to explore the technical education area in pairs.
- Have young women who are interested recruit their girlfriends.
- Give an award to the girl who recruits the most friends.

Successful Role Model Strategies

- Presentations by successful female alumni and senior female students.
- Presentations by women in the community in the targeted occupational area.
- Student newspaper article with information on the upcoming class that includes an interview with successful female alumni.
- Assessment after career exploration.
- Job Shadowing.
- Tours of labs/technology classes.
- Career days/orientation.

*Adapted from Institute for Women in Trades, Technology & Science (IWITTS)



HOW ABOUT THINKING GREEN:

When we discuss “Green” options, that normally includes two different sectors: **Renewal Energy (RE)** and **Energy Efficiency (EE)**.

Many of these jobs are traditional “blue collar” jobs that may become “green collar” if new skills are acquired.

Green jobs are found in a wide range of occupations. The NC Solar Center has identified six sectors for us to consider:

- Construction
- Biofuels
- Renewable Energy Technologies
- Manufacturing
- Transportation
- Energy Efficiency

A few suggested “Green Job Boards” for you to “google”:

- Green Career Central
- Green Jobs Network
- Green Gigs
- Green Dream Jobs
- Green Career Center
- EcoEmploy.com
- Care2.com
- Clean Edge Jobs

NOW YOU KNOW THE SCOOP!! What can you do locally to promote non-traditional career opportunities?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Resources:

Wider Opportunities for Women:

<http://www.wowonline.org/>

<http://www.sixstrategies.org/homepage.cfm>

Work For Women:

<http://www.wowonline.org/ourprograms/wawit/index.asp>

<http://www.work4women.org/multimedia/videosonline.cfm>

IWITTS Clip Art Gallery

<http://www.iwitts.com/html/clipart.htm>

An excellent collection of clip art (approximately 10) for classroom displays and recruitment posters and flyers. Images depict women working in construction, service, information technology and telecommunications industries.



Beth Lengel, M.Ed., CWDP

YOUR FACILITATOR. Beth Lengel, CWDP, has more than thirty-five (35+) years of directly related experience in workforce development. She started her career in North Carolina, working as a vocational evaluator with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. She served on the faculty at Auburn University, operating the assessment lab, and later worked with the state of South Carolina, as the statewide coordinator for evaluation and assessment services. Since 1989, she has been a chief partner in Lengel Vocational Services, providing workforce development services, training, and consultation for local areas in JTPA, WtW, and WIA. She serves the Director of Services for Lengel Vocational Services.

Beth and her husband Frank are national instructors for the Career Development Facilitator curriculum developed by the National Career Development Association (NCDA) as well as popular national conference and retreat presenters. Beth is also an Adjunct Instructor with the College of Charleston and Midlands Technical College, both in South Carolina.

When Beth is not at work with the Lengel organizations, she serves as Site Coordinator for Christian Women's Job Corps (CWJC) of the Midlands. The organization was cited in President Bush's book *A Charge to Keep* as a sterling example of what is possible with faith-based partnerships. Beth also has served on the Governor's Advisory Committee for Faith-Based and Community-Based Partnerships in South Carolina.

LENGEL VOCATIONAL SERVICES has been in workforce development since 1989. Our customers and clients include both workforce development organizations and large, international corporations. The Lengel team pioneered secret shopping for America's one-stops and has just developed the Business and Employer Services Professional (BESP) certification program.

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