

Arkansas Workforce & Safety Net: Program Coordination Study

Prepared for Arkansas Bureau of Legislative Research
By Georgia Center for Opportunity & Alliance for Opportunity
September 2, 2025

Overview

Objectives

1. To inform the ALC-Hospital, Medicaid, and Developmental Disabilities Study Subcommittee of self-reported program inputs and outcomes for certain public assistance and workforce development programs in the state.
2. To identify areas for improved coordination and outcomes among certain public assistance and workforce development programs.

Contacts

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Background

Act 145 of 2025 assigned the ALC-Hospital, Medicaid, and Developmental Disabilities Study Subcommittee to study Arkansas's workforce and safety-net system to recommend reforms. Early discussion emphasized the need for a performance and coordination audit, replicating successful efforts by Utah in the 1990s and, more recently, the Louisiana performance audit that was critical for the state moving forward with its plan to adopt integration and coordination of services. Therefore, legislative leaders sought a solution and asked the Alliance for Opportunity (A4O), housed at the Georgia Center of Opportunity (GCO), to conduct the study. The Georgia Center for Opportunity (GCO) is uniquely

qualified to perform an Arkansas Workforce and Social Services study due to a unique combination of policy expertise and practical experience assisting states with restructuring and reform. GCO is a co-founder of the Alliance for Opportunity, a multi-state nonprofit coalition that evaluates the effectiveness of state-administered public assistance and workforce programs. GCO's work includes assessing state pilot projects, identifying successful models of workforce and social services delivery, and adapting evidence-based approaches for implementation in other states. This specialized expertise, combined with its established cross-state network, provides capabilities that are not available from any other vendor.

It was agreed that GCO/A4O would undertake a study that evaluates the current strengths and weaknesses of Arkansas's government structure with workforce service (WS) programs and key safety-net (SN) programs. The study will guide the ALC-Hospital, Medicaid, and Developmental Disabilities Study Subcommittee in its consideration of better program outcomes, integration, and coordination toward creating "One Door" for Arkansas. To meet the limited timeframe requested, this study will concentrate on what the committee needs to know to make informed recommendations.

Components of Study

The study will provide an overview of Arkansas's system by examining the following topics:

- In general, the study will look at how sites are set up, how services are being administered, how coordination is implemented, how integrated programs and services are, how referrals are made, and how employment activities are incorporated across programs.

More specifically:

- Governance and administrative structure and interconnections
- List of programs involved with workforce services and major safety-net programs.
- Available program data for target programs giving:
 - Fiscal data by state, federal, other, for current and past two years, including appropriated amounts, obligated balances, and accrued expenditures, including unexpended funding, including funds returned to federal or state governments
 - Amounts spent on benefits, training, other indirect benefits, administrative costs
 - Number of participants per fiscal year and other key output data

ATTACHMENT A

- Available performance data for the most recent three years for which reports and data exists actively utilized by administrators for outcome assessments
- Define the workflow from funding sources to benefit delivery for each program
- Obtain the State Plan for each program, where relevant
- Meet with select stakeholders who participate in the delivery of services through these programs, such as Adult Education providers and Local Workforce Development Boards
- Physical locations of offices for each program, coverage areas, maps, and descriptions of services provided
- Coordination and referral operational procedures for other WS and SN programs
- IT integration for eligibility of services and benefits
- Relative ease for clients to navigate system
- Emphasis of work-related activities, resources, and services offered
- Role of case managers and case workers
- Procedures for assessing needs, including mental health, substance abuse, and familial relationships, and deferral/referral of services to outside organizations
- Cross-program data coordination and streamlining of application and redetermination processes, including forms for each program
- Service integration plans that may include the braiding of federal program funding
- Data collection and reporting requirements to federal and state governments

Assumptions

- Overall and individual program cost, participation, and outcome data are readily available for all programs.
- Custom data extractions will not be required to obtain participation, cost, and outcome information.
- All data will be self-reported by agencies and not audited for accuracy.
- State agency directors and staff will be available for interviews and cooperate by responding to requests for data and information to support the project.
- Access to interview voluntary clients who agree to the interviews, and conditioned on confidentiality of personal information.
- Support from key legislators and legislative staff.
- Any delays in required data, reports, information, or staffing available may result in an extension of the delivery and/or cost of the study.

Human Resources

In-House Resources

- Project Manager: Rachel Barkley
- Project Leader: Erik Randolph
- Eligibility and Operations Expert: Ray Packer
- WIOA Consultant: Mason Bishop
- Research Data Analyst: Jason Gaby
- Content, Legal and Policy Reviewers: Les Ford, Eric Cochling
- Interview Team: Erik, Ray, Mason, Rachel, Les and others as needed
- Publication Production and Design: Rebecca Primis

Arkansas Resources

- Primary legislator contacts: to be determined by Arkansas
- Legislative staff assigned to project: to be determined by Arkansas
- Program office management and staff, including case work staff and contracted entities

Contracted Resources

- Georgia Tech 180° Consulting: Flow chart of Arkansas's current system
- Publication Production: TBD by Publication Production and Design Director

WS & SN Programs Studied:

- Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult Program (Title I)
- WIOA Dislocated Program (Title I)
- WIOA Youth Program (Title I)
- WIOA Adult Education Program (Title II)
- WIOA Wagner-Peyser Employment Services (Title III)
- WIOA Vocational Rehabilitation (Title IV)
- Unemployment Insurance (UI)
- Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) monthly food benefits
- SNAP Education and Training (E&T)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Transitional Employment Assistance (TEA)

- TANF Child Care
- Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)
- Medicaid work requirements

Timeline

Broad timeline

September: Planning phase; preliminary collection of online data and information to answer questions needed for planning the study, framework for what the report will look like, general steps to complete the framework. Determination of benchmarks and framework for inquiries. Formal requests for data and information that includes what was already collected, assembly of preliminary information into a framework for study, determination of missing pieces. By the end of September, a working plan plus data and information requested from agencies.

October: Online interviews as needed for additional information; internal discussion of preliminary assessment. By the end of October, we will have a preliminary rough draft structure of the report with placeholders for additional information that needs to be collected or inserted. Identify gaps in data and process, and set up a plan to obtain information. Site visits begin during the last week of October. Exercise site visits to key offices and staff. Speak to key directors but also line staff. Document operational processes for online and in-person applications, redeterminations, and coordination with other services at physical locations during site visits.

November: Analysis of fact-finding missions and information requests and incorporation of findings into draft language of report. By the end of November, initial rough draft of report.

December: Verification of report information, fill-in missing pieces into document. Last-minute interviews and data requests. Completed first draft. Content editing. By the end of December, first draft is completed and passed to the document preparation team for copy editing, design, and proofing.

January: Copy editing and proofing by publication production team and reviewed by primary authors. Final publication production. Preparation of slide deck and testimony for presentation before the legislature. By the end of January delivery of report to Arkansas Legislature. Slide deck and testimony will be completed.

Method

- Set a vision of best practice as benchmarks for a study that uses internal experiences and studies.
- Scrape Arkansas websites and federal websites for information on Arkansas governance structure, program data, performance data, eligibility systems, reporting requirements, and other information. Information gathered from online sources should be able to provide a basis upon which to build the report.
- Request program and performance data from Arkansas agencies. Be sure to include in the request any customer survey data they might collect.
- Request governance structure and staffing of agencies related to the programs in the study, including physical locations, services provided at each location, coverage area for locations, staffing levels, and staffing responsibilities.
- Use findings of online information in comparison to benchmarks to form rough draft of report with placeholders for needed information. Prepare questions needed to complete report, interviews needed, sites to be visited either physical or virtual.
- Interview online agency heads and other principal individuals to clarify points of governance, operational procedures, integration, and coordination.
- Site visits of major locations to get a feel for how sites are set up, how services are being administered, how coordination is implemented, how integrated they are, how referrals are made, how employment activities are incorporated, and how they compare to vision. Document operational processes for online and in-person applications and redeterminations at physical locations during site visits.
- Use findings of site visits and interviews and additional documentation gathered to fill in placeholders and write first draft of report.
- Review first draft by principal researchers and content reviewers for verification of information and flow of presentation, including improvement of graphics. Search for any missing data points and request information from Arkansas entities or interview select individuals to add to study.
- Finalize draft and pass off to Publication Production team for copy editing, design, and proofing.
- Final document formatting and preparation for distribution.
- Prepare slide deck and testimony for presentation to Arkansas Legislature.

Staff Time

	Expected Hours	Hourly Rate	Total
Rachel Barkley, Project Manager	65	\$90	\$5,850
Erik Randolph, Project Leader	270	\$80	\$21,600
Ray Packer, Eligibility and Operations Expert	220	\$70	\$15,400
Mason Bishop, WIOA Consultant	20	\$60	\$1,200
Les Ford, Content Policy Reviewer	40	\$60	\$2,400
Eric Cochling, Content & Legal Reviewer	10	\$80	\$800
Jason Gaby, Research Data Analyst	40	\$30	\$1,200
Graphic Design	10	\$40	\$400
TOTAL			\$43,000

Estimated Travel Costs

\$12,000 Total Cost. Assuming:

- Five staff travel to Little Rock to interview agency officials and staff in October or November.
- 2 staff travel to present findings to committee in January or February.
- \$700-\$1000 airline tickets per person
- \$50/day in-state per diem (food, travel) per person, per day.
- \$200/night for 3 nights.

TOTAL COST: \$55,000