










# Clearing the Path:

Building a Sustainable  
and Inclusive Workforce  
for Alabama



THE WOMEN'S FUND  
*of* GREATER BIRMINGHAM

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# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

Strengthening economic opportunity for women is critical for the future success of our state.

In an effort to address the predicted shortage of 500,000 skilled workers by 2025, Alabama is rethinking state and local workforce development systems with the objective of creating a more integrated and cohesive system.<sup>1</sup> The ongoing reorganization of the state's workforce system presents state leaders, industry, educational institutions, and nonprofits with an opportunity to fill Alabama's labor gaps by focusing on an untapped resource: women. This requires thinking differently about how to find and support talent by addressing women's unique needs, especially women with children, and the needs of other targeted populations. Investing in families is investing in the economy.

*Clearing the Path: Building a Sustainable and Inclusive Workforce for Alabama*, a report by The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham and based on research by the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) examines the question of how the state's workforce development system serves women and their families and provides recommendations for building a workforce development system that truly works for women.

Two key findings emerged:

- **Women in Alabama are well-represented in workforce development programs, yet remain under-represented in the labor force.** Compared to men, Alabama women are employed at lower rates, more likely to be under-employed, and earn lower incomes. Women are also more likely than men to hold multiple jobs to make ends meet.
- **Raising Alabama's labor force participation rate to the national average could add an estimated 80,941 women to the workforce.**<sup>2</sup>

**Under-employed: not having the desired amount of work hours; or doing work that does not make full use of one's skills and abilities.**

**Labor Force Participation among Alabamians, 25 to 64 years<sup>3</sup>**

	Total	Male	Female
Total civilians between ages 25–64	2,484,064	1,199,515	1,284,548
In workforce	1,739,661	957,407	782,256
Not in labor force	731,067	230,478	500,589
Alabama labor force participation rate	70%	81%	61%
Number of percentage points U.S. labor force participation is higher than Alabama	7%	4%	10%
Number of additional individuals in the workforce if Alabama had U.S. rate of labor force participation	126,106	35,284	80,941

Alabama has the 6<sup>th</sup> highest poverty rate in the United States, and women are among the most likely to experience poverty.<sup>4</sup> Even in seemingly well-designed workforce development systems, women face additional barriers. This means a functioning and seamless workforce system is crucial for thriving families and a thriving economy.

Meeting Alabama's workforce attainment goals will require community leaders to intentionally engage with the workforce development system and advocate for targeted public policy solutions.

Women must be a targeted part of the solution to Alabama's workforce challenges. **A workforce development system that works for women works for Alabama.**





# About This Project

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Alabama stands at a critical turning point.

The state is successfully recruiting industry and proactively driving toward a brighter economic future, yet **Alabama has the nation's second lowest labor force participation rate in the country** and the needs of too many families are going unmet.<sup>5</sup>

The prevailing workforce development narrative presents job creation as the key to financial security for all Alabamians. While the availability of good jobs is certainly key to economic opportunity, other workforce structures and wraparound supports are essential to combating Alabama's high rates of economic insecurity, especially among families headed by women.

*Clearing the Path: Building a Sustainable and Inclusive Workforce for Alabama* begins to establish a common understanding of the state's workforce development structures as well as how public policy can create a workforce system that leaves no woman behind.

## Help Clear the Path for Women:

- **Design and Connect** women to workforce development programs that work for them and their children
- **Engage** workforce system leadership to design programs where women and their families can thrive.
- **Advocate** for the integration of social services with workforce development programs.

[Read more about these recommendations starting on Page 26.](#)

Leveraging research to illuminate the issues most impacting women to influence public dialogue and corporate decision-making is core to The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham's mission. Clearing the Path, our research platform, commissions and communicates sound evidence highlighting critical barriers to economic opportunity for women.

Previous *Clearing the Path* reports focused on barriers to employment facing single women with children and highlighted family-friendly workplace policies from 19 companies in the Greater Birmingham region effectively attracting and retaining diverse talent. This year *Clearing the Path* expands our conversation on women and workforce to include innovative public sector solutions. Long-lasting systemic change for women is not possible without scaling our philanthropic efforts to create access to post-secondary education, affordable child care, better jobs and sustainable employment for Alabama families.

The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham is proud to present *Clearing the Path*, our first comprehensive summary of Alabama's workforce development system and exploration of how the system can meet the unique needs of women and their families. We hope this report and the action it inspires will accelerate economic opportunity for women. **Because when women move forward, entire communities and the state of Alabama moves with them.**



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# Women and the Workforce

# Women and the Workforce

## Employment and Education

Women are well-represented in Alabama's workforce development programs. However, this does not mean the system is working well for women.<sup>6</sup> **Compared with men, women in Alabama and nationwide are under-represented in the labor force, employed at lower rates, and earn lower incomes.**

**Labor force participation rate:** the percentage of people employed or actively looking for employment.

In Alabama, the labor force participation rate for women aged 25 to 64 is 61%, which is 20 percentage points lower than Alabama men and 10 percentage points lower than the national average for women.<sup>7</sup> Though some women choose to pursue unpaid duties full-time, many women, especially single women with children who live below the Federal Poverty Level, desire employment to support and build opportunities for their families. Even measuring by the U.S. government's conservative definition, 48.5% of single women with children in Alabama experience poverty, demonstrating a great need for a workforce development system designed with women in mind.<sup>8</sup>

**Federal Poverty Level (FPL):** the minimum level of income considered adequate for living. For a single woman with two children, the threshold is an annual family income of \$20,231 or less.

## Almost half of all single women with dependent children experience poverty in Alabama.

Additionally, 36% of employed Alabama women are considered "low-income,"<sup>9</sup> or earning less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. This compares to 26% of employed men. In fact, even Alabama women who are employed in full-time wage and salaried work only earn 78 cents for every dollar earned by men.<sup>10</sup>

	Alabama Women	Alabama Men
<b>Educational attainment beyond high school</b>	57%	52%
<b>Labor force participation rate</b>	61%	71%
<b>Poverty rate</b>	48.5%	24.5%
<b>Low income workers</b>	36%	26%

When considering only educational attainment, women *should* be well-positioned moving into higher skilled employment. Girls outperform boys on statewide standardized tests.<sup>11</sup> Women in Alabama also exhibit higher rates and levels of higher educational attainment than men. Fifty-seven percent of women over the age of 18 have achieved some level of education beyond high school compared to 52% of men.<sup>12</sup> However, women still experience higher rates of economic insecurity.



## Barriers to Success

Women face considerable barriers to completing workforce training programs, entering the workforce, and staying employed. Among the leading challenges remain transportation, health care, child care, and wage disparities.

The federal government allocates funds to states for transit systems and health care benefits. In both cases, these funds must be matched or added to with state money. Currently, the state of Alabama is weighing the decision to expand Medicaid which would provide health insurance for an additional 340,000 plus Alabamians<sup>13</sup>—152,000 of which are women.<sup>14</sup> This means smarter and increased state funding for public transportation and access to health care is vital for workforce success in Alabama.

### Barriers for women include:

- **Transportation**
- **Health care**
- **Child care**
- **Wage disparities**

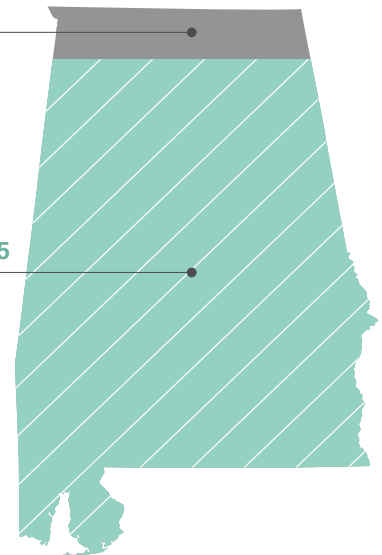
Child care is one of the greatest barriers for higher education completion and sustainable employment for women, especially single women with children. Women head a disproportionate amount of single-parent households. In Alabama, there are 84,985 female-headed households with children who live below the poverty line. This is compared to 10,051 male-headed households with children who currently experience poverty.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, compared to men, women have a higher need for access to child care in order to complete workforce training and sustain employment.

Child care is expensive. The average annual cost of child care in Alabama is between \$4,800 and \$6,000 depending on the age of the child.<sup>16</sup>

### Alabama families in poverty headed by single men and women:

Single men - 10,051

Single women - 84,985



In Greater Birmingham, employed women making less than \$30,000/year spend an average of 39% of their income on child care.<sup>17</sup> Stagnant and inconsistent wages force too many Alabama families to rely on government benefits to provide basic necessities. Without social networks or access to affordable quality child care, women are unable to complete workforce development programs and move into employment with a sustainable wage. Without intentional focus on building an accessible and affordable child care system, Alabama will not reach its workforce goals.

**In Greater Birmingham, employed women making less than \$30,000/year spend an average of 39% of their income on child care.<sup>17</sup>**

Finally, equitable wages are a barrier to economic opportunity for women. **Alabama has the eighth worst gender wage gap in the country.**<sup>18</sup> Alabama women earn 78 cents for every dollar earned by a man.<sup>19</sup> Studies have shown that only about half of the gender wage gap can be explained by number of years in the labor market, differences in education and training, and chosen field of work. Jobs traditionally held by men, including construction and manufacturing, pay higher wages. There are opportunities to increase enrollment of women in fields where there is high demand, but in which enrollment in career technical education courses is predominately male (see chart below).

**If employed single women were paid the same as comparable men, the poverty rate for women would be cut by nearly half.**<sup>20</sup>

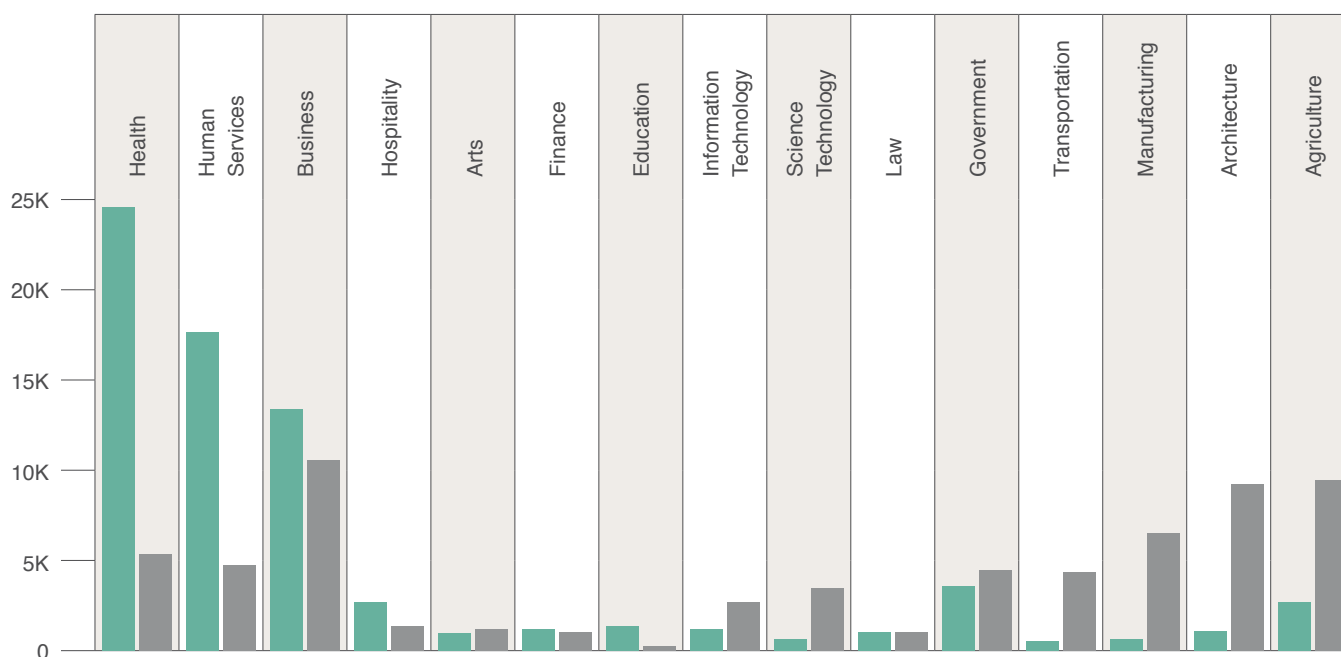
Closing Alabama's wage gap would cover the equivalent of an additional 30.3 months of child care, 8 months of health insurance premiums, 1.2 years of tuition at a four-year public university.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the wage gap adds up to \$13.3 billion a year—money that could be invested back into Alabama's economy.<sup>22</sup> Lost wages mean women and their families have less money to save and invest for the future, and spend on goods and services. Families, businesses, and the economy suffer as a result.

### *One Step Closer to Accessible, Quality Child Care for All*


In May 2018, members of the Alabama Legislature adopted and Governor Ivey signed into law the Child Care Safety Act, representing a bold step in building a strong child care system in Alabama. The new law requires that by August 2019 more child care providers be licensed and inspected for basic health and safety standards, including those that receive state or federal funds or that operate a for profit child care. The law maintains license exempt status for some faith-based child care facilities. Child care is essential to adequately supporting the state's workforce, and this bold move by state officials suggests a clearer understanding of the value child care.

**Career Technical Education Cluster Participation by Sex<sup>23</sup>**

**Key:** ■ Female ■ Male





A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black graduation gown over a red dress and white heels, is walking away from the camera on a brick-paved path. She is holding a black graduation cap with a gold tassel in her right hand. The background shows a modern building with large glass windows and a street lamp. A large red rectangular box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title text.

# Alabama's Workforce Development System

# Alabama's Workforce Development System

*Workforce development*, as a term, is not always well understood, and meanings can often differ.

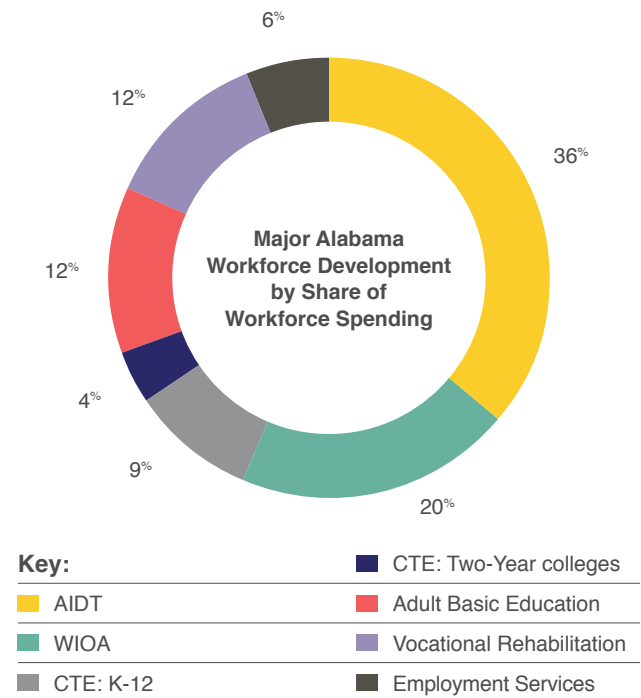
For this report, **the workforce development system includes public education, technical education, government or employer sponsored skills training programs, and the social services that support retention, completion, and sustained employment.**

## Current Structure

**Alabama currently spends more than \$150 million annually to support workforce development**, not including funds available for Pell Grants, subsidized education loans, or funding for K-12, community college, and state universities. The Appendix: Workforce Programs and Funding Sources provides a breakdown of this spending and other information, including female participation rates.

**This report outlines seven main components of the workforce development system:**

- K-12 Career and Technical Education (CTE)
- Postsecondary CTE at Alabama Community College System (ACCS)
- Adult Basic Education (ABE), predominately delivered by ACCS
- Vocational rehabilitation (Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services)
- Employment and career-services (Alabama Department of Labor)
- General skills training (WIOA Programs)
- Industry-specific skills training (Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT))



### *Opportunity at a Glance: Community College Partnerships*

The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham has partnered with community colleges to connect low-income mothers to career certificate programs for in-demand jobs while addressing their needs, including child care, transportation, and career coaching. As of December 2018, we have funded and facilitated 26 of these programs that have enrolled 311 women.



# Education

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Early education programs and public education play an essential role in workforce development. Both are the foundation of the workforce system, but also provide a much broader role for poverty alleviation and social well-being.

## ***Early Education Programs***

Early childhood education programs, including child care, Pre-K, Head Start, Early Head Start, and home visitation programs sustain the economic security of families and support women who want or need to work outside the home or further their education. They also create critical and necessary learning opportunities for children during the formative years of brain development.

Sixty-five percent of children under the age of six have all available parents in the workforce,<sup>24</sup> making accessible, flexible, and affordable child care a mandatory component of any strategy to grow and strengthen Alabama's workforce.<sup>25</sup>

The total estimated number of young children served in early childhood education programs is as follows:

- **Home Visiting:** 2,477
- **Early Head Start/Head Start:** 15,574
- **Child Care-Day and Night Centers:** 81,159
- **First Class Pre-K:** 18,159
- **Nursery School:** 51,186
- **Kindergarten:** 54,985

The above totals include duplicates since some programs overlap.

Alabama's First Class Pre-K governed by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education is a top priority for state decision makers.<sup>26</sup> Beginning in 2005, the state appropriated \$4.3 million for 57 classrooms and 1,206 four-year-olds. By the 2018-2019 school year, this funding expanded to \$95.5 million for 1,045 classrooms and 18,810 four-year-olds.

Research shows that this investment produces significant results in academic success, K-12 attendance rates, and behavior outcomes. However, even with this rapid increase in funding, only 32% of four-year-olds have access to public Pre-K statewide.

## ***K-12 and Community College Career Technical Education (CTE)***

Though Alabama's high school graduation rates are improving, a high school diploma no longer ensures a stable, well-paying job. Some form of post-secondary education is typically essential for economic stability.

The second half of the 20th century heavily emphasized college preparation as the goal of K-12 education and diminished emphasis on skills training. However, there is a renewed interest in career and technical education (CTE) in high school—and Alabama has recently increased state funding for this workforce-connected education.<sup>27</sup> The renewed emphasis provides opportunities for career paths outside of traditional higher education before high school graduation.

The opportunity for CTE continues in the Alabama Community College System. The two-year college system provides a wide array of CTE opportunities leading to certificates, credentials, and associate's degrees. Federal Pell Grants and subsidized loans can help pay for higher education, but these funds are often not available for use in CTE that does not pursue an associate's degree. Therefore tuition cost can often be another barrier to participation—especially if a family is already struggling to provide basic necessities.

### **Robust cross-agency collaboration is vital to success in the workforce development system.**

#### ***Career Centers***

Traditionally known as employment or unemployment offices, Alabama Career Centers offer counseling, support, and placement into work, training, and educational opportunities.<sup>28</sup>

Although the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) added the TANF program as one of the required partners, Alabama opted not to co-locate Department of Human Resources (DHR) staff in the one-stop career centers. Instead, a virtual system has been established to connect DHR case managers with career center participants. In its current state, the system is fragmented. System inoperability and streamlining employability assessments continue to be a challenge. Robust cross-agency collaboration is vital to success in the workforce development system.



#### ***Industry-Specific Training***

Alabama Industrial Development and Training (AIDT), funded by the Alabama Department of Commerce, provides another opportunity for workforce development. AIDT works with industries and employers to identify, train, and place workers in specific jobs that directly align with workforce demands. However, AIDT programs currently do not track data based on the gender and/or race of its participants. Enhancing AIDT data collection and analysis would offer crucial insights into the barriers subgroups face in accessing and completing this training.

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## Federal Investments

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### *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*

In 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law. This was the first legislative reform of the public workforce system in 15 years.<sup>29</sup> WIOA envisions a fully integrated system of federal and state workforce systems providing education, training, and support services.

Ideally, data would be shared across agencies to prevent duplication and allow for improvements based on its analysis. The ideal system would also account for the needs of business and industry so education and training align with high-demand jobs. WIOA funds individual training accounts to pursue training and skills development. These funds can be used for tuition, books, fees, transportation, and child care.

### *Workforce Development Tax Credits*

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a federal tax credit that allows employers to claim between \$2,400 to \$9,600 for hiring workers in one of nine groups that face employment challenges, including veterans, people with felony convictions, vocational rehabilitation clients, long-term unemployed, and SNAP, SSI, and TANF recipients.<sup>30</sup> However, the Alabama Department of Labor's average processing time is significantly longer than other states and could be a barrier to employers taking advantage of this credit. **If Alabama employers expanded their use of WOTC, more individuals who face added barriers to employment could find gainful employment.**

**New state tax credits could provide the incentive for employers to help the state meet its goals for increased employment of women, minorities, and recipients of SNAP, TANF, and vocational rehabilitation.**

#### *Opportunity at a Glance: Expanded State Tax Credits*

Many states offer state tax credits that mirror the federal state tax credits provided by WOTC. While Alabama offers a state tax credit for hiring veterans, it does not provide credits for hiring from other groups who face barriers to employment. New state tax credits could provide the incentive for employers to help the state meet its goals for increased employment of women, minorities, and recipients of SNAP, TANF, and vocational rehabilitation.

# Governance Structure of Workforce in Alabama

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**Prompted by WIOA, Alabama is redesigning its workforce development system** in order to create a seamless, unified system. In order to impact the system, one must understand the number of players and decision-makers involved.

## *State Workforce Oversight*

**Governor Kay Ivey** leads Alabama's workforce development system. To coordinate this interagency work, Gov. Ivey formed the **Governor's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation (GOEWT)**, which will also lead the design of an aligned performance measurement system.<sup>31</sup> The governor is advised and assisted in workforce matters by two separate boards: the Alabama Workforce Council (AWC) and the Alabama Workforce Development Board (AWDB)

The **Alabama Workforce Council (AWC)** brings together business, education, and community leaders from across the state appointed by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker Pro-Tem of the Senate, and Speaker of the House. There are 42 members with each member serving a 4-year term. The majority of members represent the business community.<sup>32</sup> AWC's goal is to ensure the workforce development system is closely aligned with the emerging needs of the economy.

The **Alabama Workforce Development Board (AWDB)** allocates federal workforce training dollars and monitors program performance. The Governor, President Pro-Tem of the Senate, and Speaker of the House appoint members. AWDB is composed of 46 members representing business, labor, cities, and community groups, with some membership overlap with the AWC.<sup>33</sup> Like the AWC, the majority of members represent the business community.

The **Alabama Department of Commerce**, which is responsible for carrying out workforce strategies, supports both bodies.

## *Regional Councils and Local Boards*

Below the state level, there are seven workforce regions. Dividing the state this way is meant to recognize the unique economies of different parts of the state and to give local leaders increased flexibility. Each region has a regional workforce council and a regional workforce board, mirroring the state-level roles of each. Both the regional councils and the local boards receive support from the Alabama Department of Commerce's Workforce Division. They also receive labor market data from the Alabama Department of Labor to inform their decision-making.

Regional workforce councils promote career and technical education outreach to schools. Each regional workforce council hires a small staff that supports the convening of the council, gathering information, and connecting education and training providers.

Local workforce development boards oversee the operation of Alabama Career Centers and local WIOA fund allocation. They interact with local education and workforce training providers, cataloging the training and education needs of the local workforce.





A woman with long brown hair, wearing a denim jacket over a white top, is smiling and looking towards a professional video camera. The camera is mounted on a tripod and has various attachments, including a microphone and a light. A yellow cable is plugged into the camera. The background is a blurred red and blue pattern.

# Making Workforce Development Work for Women



# Making Workforce Development Work for Women

## Alignment with the Social Services System

To access the education, training, and employment services available in the workforce system, low-income individuals and families often need support services beyond those provided through WIOA programs. The fundamental basis of WIOA and one of the stated goals of GOEWT is to “braid” services and funding streams so that participants can access a full suite of supports. Siloed services cause undue confusion and complication for both participants and agencies.

Furthermore, as Alabama revisits its budget each year, the community needs to remind legislators that if social services integrate with workforce development efforts, funding social benefits actually increases the success of the workforce development system. **When women can take care of their families, they can thrive in the workforce.**

This section examines the specific social services that most support women entering and staying in the workforce.



### Child Care Subsidies

#### *What is it?*

The federal Child Care and Development Block Grant passed in 1990 provides low-income families access to subsidized child care. The program supports parents or guardians who work or are looking for work.

#### *How does it work?*

In Alabama, federal dollars are allocated to the Department of Human Resources (DHR) who then administers child care subsidies. DHR reimburses approved centers at a rate considering the child's age and comparable child care rates.

#### *Who is eligible?*

The majority of recipients in Alabama are single mothers. To qualify, the maximum annual income for a family of three is \$27,012, the third lowest in the U.S. The state also allows working parents a continued subsidy for incomes up to \$47,304 until eligibility ends. Depending on income, parents contribute a co-pay between \$0 and \$53 per week.<sup>34</sup>

In 2018, DHR eliminated the wait list for subsidies and provided support for 38,489 children with \$98 million of federal dollars. That is \$212 per child per month, much lower than the average cost of child care.<sup>35</sup>

## ***Opportunity at a Glance: Child Care and Post-Secondary***

The U.S. Department of Education's Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program offers competitive grants to support campus-based child care for low-income students. Over 25% of all women in college are mothers.<sup>36</sup> In Alabama, only the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Northwest-Shoals Community College have received CCAMPIS funds. However, based on the grant requirements, all of Alabama's 14 public four-year institutions and 24 public two-year institutions qualify for the grant. Successfully braiding CCAMPIS with other funds would significantly reduce the child care barrier experienced by mothers seeking post-secondary education.

## **TANF**

### ***What is it?***

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is time-limited financial assistance for parents with children who cannot provide the family's basic needs.<sup>37</sup>

### ***How does it work?***

Funds come from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Individual states design the program and decide on amount of assistance payments, the range of other services provided, and eligibility rules.

### ***Who is eligible?***

To be eligible a family's income must be 13% of the federal poverty level. For a family of three, 13% of the federal poverty level is \$2,630. In Alabama, only about 3,500 adults receive funds. Of all the families in Alabama living below the poverty line, only 9% receive these funds. Benefits for a family of 3 are capped at \$215/month.

**Raising the income eligibility level or increasing the benefits could provide significant support to people attempting to enter the workforce.**

**Child Care Tax Credits: Alabama parents and guardians can also qualify for a federal tax credit of up to 35% of qualifying child care expenses. Alabama does not, however, offer an additional state child care tax credit.**

## **The JOBS Program**

All adults receiving basic assistance (3,386 in 2018) are required to participate in the JOBS program. JOBS is a program administered by Department of Human Resources (DHR) that helps recipients find and retain employment. Funded by both state and federal dollars, services include employability assessments, job readiness, job skills training, disability assessments, and adult education. Recipients can receive non-cash assistance through the JOBS Program beyond the 5-year cap and up to 12 months after securing employment. Alabama has stringent work requirements for TANF recipients, yet the state reports spending only 2% of TANF on work activities and work supports—compared to the national average of 13%.<sup>38</sup>

## SNAP

### *What is it?*

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides financial support for food access. It is designed to address food insecurity and improve health outcomes for low-income households.

### *How does it work?*

SNAP funds are provided from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and administered in Alabama by the Department of Human Resources (DHR).

### *Who is eligible?*

To qualify, an applicant's net income must not exceed the poverty threshold, which is \$21,300 for a family of three.<sup>39</sup> The maximum monthly benefit for a family of three is \$505, almost twice that of TANF.<sup>40</sup> In 2017, an average of 804,000 Alabamians received SNAP benefits every month. Forty-five percent of these were children. Able-bodied adults must work at least 20 hours/week to receive benefits.

### *Opportunity at a Glance: SNAP Waiver*

Alabama's SNAP program may be leaving money on the table. States may apply for a limit waiver for counties with high unemployment—when jobs are few and the willingness to work is high. In Alabama, over a dozen counties qualify for this waiver, however the state has declined to pursue this waiver, which could bring additional federal dollars into the state and the economies of local counties.

## A-RESET

To facilitate the transition to work, Alabama created the Alabama Resources for the Enrichment, Self-Sufficiency, and Employability Training program (A-RESET). A-RESET allows a community provider under contract to DHR to provide education and skills training to eligible SNAP recipients, drawing a 1:1 federal match.





## Medicaid

### What is it?

Medicaid is a federal program administered and partially funded by states to provide health insurance to low-income families.

### How does it work?

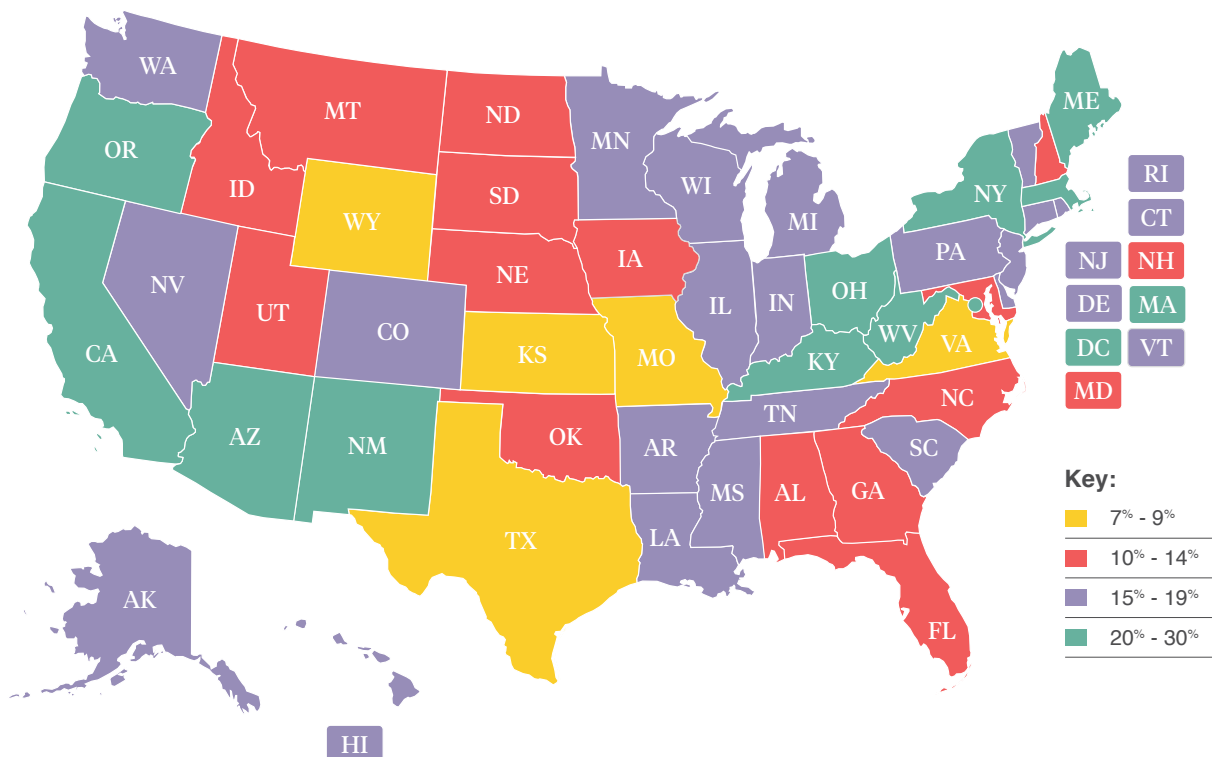
States have tremendous leeway in how Medicaid is funded and structured. Medicaid provides several different programs, each serving different populations, including children, parents and caretakers, pregnant women, nursing home residents, elderly and disabled persons, and certain breast and cervical cancer patients.

### Who is eligible?

Children make up the largest share of Medicaid enrollees in Alabama at 52%.<sup>41</sup> Children living in families earning up to 141% of the Federal Poverty Level are eligible for Medicaid. For the parents of covered children to also qualify, annual family income cannot be more than 18% of the poverty threshold, or \$3,840 for a family of three. Pregnant women earning up to 141% of the Federal Poverty Level are also eligible. Childless adults are not eligible unless they meet another qualification, such as blindness or disability.<sup>42</sup> Ten percent - 14% of Alabama women are currently covered by Medicaid, yet 48% of female-headed households live below the poverty line.<sup>43</sup> Alabama has the third lowest spending per enrollee in the U.S.<sup>44</sup>

**To date, Alabama has elected not to expand Medicaid. If state leaders expanded the program, coverage would extend to an estimated 235,000 to 340,000 Alabamians.<sup>45</sup>**

Medicaid Coverage Varies Considerably by State: Share of women ages 19-64 on Medicaid, 2015 <sup>46</sup>



## What's Not Working

**While often described as a workforce development system, the array of agencies and constituencies involved are difficult to synchronize.** There is no single agency responsible for workforce development at the federal, state, or local level. Each department and agency uses its own definitions and reporting structures, and experience significant overlap in services and participants.

### *Delivery*

Let's consider an example. Claudia is an underemployed single woman without a high school degree. She has a young child and wants to find a job that can better provide for her family. She can enter an Alabama Career Center, be assessed, and referred to adult basic education services at a community college or non-profit GED program where she will be assessed again. If she qualifies, she might be referred to AIDT where she will be reassessed and trained for an expanding industry. She might also be referred to DHR where she will again be assessed and put on waiting lists for a child care subsidy and other benefits. In this scenario, Claudia is a client of the Career Center, WIOA, a community college, DHR, and additional social services and benefits. She has been referred and assessed that many different times, in different ways, and through different doors.



She must arrange child care and transportation to each agency—all before she even begins workforce training. This is not only confusing and exhausting for Claudia, but also a wasteful and inefficient system for all.

**Regardless of good intentions and skilled people, the siloed nature of the system creates a complicated pathway and confusing eligibility standards.** Participants like Claudia may not even realize what supports are available to them to improve their opportunity for success. Furthermore, for employers, who are also customers of the workforce development system, it is confusing to understand which state or federally supported benefits would be most responsive to their employees' needs.

## ***Measurement, Reporting, and Analysis***

Workforce development programs currently lack a common measurement system and reporting standards. This makes analyzing data for success and areas for improvement difficult. Which in turn, makes it tough for policymakers to judge whether programs are effective.

Let's think about Claudia again. Assuming she completes the confusing maze, mountains of data have been collected on her. However, this data is not shared across a uniform system. Not only has she had to tell her story as many times as the doors she has been through, each agency takes precious time and energy to record data that has likely already been recorded.

### **There are 3 main purposes for program data:**

- Reporting
- Assessment
- Influencing policy decision

Agencies must report outcomes for federal, state, and even most private dollars used to support workforce development programs. In the best-case scenarios, state and federal departments use reports to assess system efficacy and appropriateness of fund allocation. Individual agencies use reports to improve their delivery of services.

Advocates also use program data to measure success and influence policy decisions.

Without aligned data collection, “success” is difficult to measure. Additionally, it’s hard to identify needed improvements and the process becomes tedious for all involved.



**Without aligned data collection, successes are difficult to measure and gaps and needed improvements are hard to identify.**



## Obstacles to Redesign

While the workforce development system is still early in the redesign process, state leaders are pro-actively working toward solutions to the challenges outlined in this report.

The Governor's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation (GOEWT) is a promising start. Because this office leads goal-setting and performance measurement design, the community must consistently hold it accountable. It will take a persistent and empowered GOEWT to coordinate the workforce efforts from the Alabama Department of Commerce, the Department of Labor, the Department of Education, the Alabama Community College System, the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, and the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR). The design and execution of an integrated system will also be difficult considering the additional regional and local workforce boards and programs. There are many players and decision-makers involved. The particular needs of subgroups that disproportionately experience poverty, like women, must be heard at every turn.

## Hope for the Future

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Despite the difficulties facing workforce development redesign, the state expects employment growth. Among the top forty occupations expected to be in high demand from 2018 – 2024, medium-skilled occupations will have the most openings—an estimated 32,000.<sup>47</sup> We must ensure that women have opportunity pathways to enter these jobs. Without them, their families suffer as well as the state's economy.

**We must ensure that women have opportunity pathways to enter these jobs. Without them, their families suffer as well as the state's economy.**

Additionally, there is a persistent tension between the need to enroll, train, and support prospective workers and the desire to limit the number of participants in social benefit programs. However, unless a potential worker is already self-sufficient, additional benefits are crucial for her success in the workforce development system. Without these supports, participants may dropout and re-enter a number of times, paradoxically having to remain on government benefits and non-profit services for a longer period of time.

**There is a persistent tension between the need to enroll, train, and support prospective workers and the desire to limit the number of participants in social benefit programs.**





Let's Get  
to Work

# Recommendations for Action

## Recommendation #1: Design and Connect

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**In order for women to succeed, Alabama must design the workforce development system with women and other targeted groups in mind.** This means addressing the significant barriers many women face completing training programs and entering the workforce.



### Questions to ask:

- Are training sites located on public transportation routes?
- How can community partners creatively address transportation barriers in rural communities?
- Are workforce development participants connected with all available wraparound services, including child care and transportation to boost their success?

**This also means continually examining workforce barriers through a gender lens.**

Because single women are 846% more likely than their male counterparts to be the sole caregivers of children, access to quality affordable child care must be addressed in order for women to succeed in workforce development programs.<sup>48</sup> Traditionally male-dominated industries like construction, manufacturing, and tech typically pay higher wages. Scaling proven models that connect women to in-demand jobs could build pathways for women into currently male-dominated fields.



### Questions to ask:

- Are we actively engaging voices of women and families experiencing economic insecurity?
- How is the workforce development system including funds for and access to quality child care and aftercare?
- When family support is not available how does shift work affect the needs of children?
- How can industries change organization's cultures so women can advance and thrive?



## Opportunity at a Glance: Two-Generation (2Gen) Solutions

2Gen programs and policies create opportunities that allow adults and the children in their lives to build on each other's successes. Also known as the **2Gen approach**, this is one of the most researched and successful ways to achieve economic stability for families.

Since 2013, The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham has invested more than \$1.1 million in two-generation (2Gen) workforce collaboratives aimed at interrupting the cycle of generational poverty.

**2Gen solutions create the opportunity for entire families to access support systems and build social capital.** They ensure the success of the child by ensuring the success of the mother and vice versa. This approach brings women and their families beyond short-term success and into generational economic security moving forward.

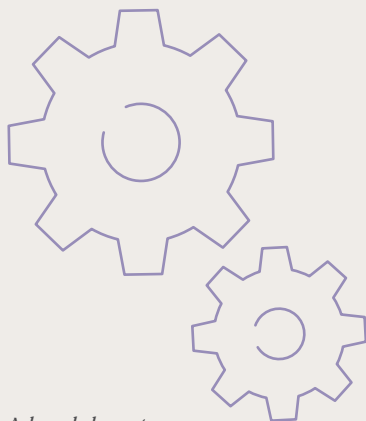
While a better workforce development system is under construction, we must connect women to these opportunities. The system, even when working at its best, can be complicated and confusing. Many may not know all the services that are available.



### Questions to ask:

- Are traditional state-sponsored advertising campaigns to promote women entering workforce development programs working?
- Can the community lead more effective grassroots efforts to get the word out?
- With the current confusing and disjointed entry points, where do women go to get information they trust?

## The 5 Gears of the 2Gen Approach



*Acknowledgment:  
Ascend, The Aspen Institute*

**Early Childhood Development** - Head Start, Early Head Start child care partnerships, Pre-K, and home visiting

**Economic Assets** - asset-building, housing and public supports, financial capacity, transportation

**Health and Well-Being** - mental, physical, and behavioral health, coverage and access to care, adverse childhood experiences, toxic stress

**Post-Secondary and Employment Pathways** - community college, training and certification, workforce partnerships

**Social Capital** - peer and family networks, coaching, and cohort strategies

## Recommendation #2: Engage

### *Workforce Leadership*

Because state and local workforce councils and boards set the goals and priorities of the workforce system, community leaders must continue to engage the councils and boards to improve prospects for women.

Council and board meetings are generally open to the public. Community members need to show up and voice the needs of working women.

The law requires workforce boards to have diverse representation. Community members must hold state leaders accountable for this to ensure that the gender, racial, and ethnic makeup of the workforce development system is representative of the regions they serve.



### *Employers*

Employers also have a major role ensuring that Alabama's workforce system truly works and works for women. Employers will benefit from a redesigned workforce development system that is more responsive to employees' needs. This ensures supply, quality, and retention.

### **In order for employers to thrive, their employees must thrive.**

However, a redesigned workforce development system will present a learning curve for all involved, including employers. This may mean accepting changes in workforce composition and providing additional support for those who face the barriers to employment outlined in this report. In order for employers to thrive, their employees must thrive.



Visit The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham's website to read previous Clearing the Path reports to see how some of Birmingham's largest employers are leading the way in these efforts.

## Recommendation #3: Advocate

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### *Clearing the Path through Public Policy*

The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham is the state's first and only philanthropic foundation investing with a gender lens. Since our founding in 1996, we have invested over \$5 million in innovative solutions that accelerate economic opportunities for women, transforming the lives of thousands of women and their children. Yet too many women continue to experience complex social conditions that philanthropy alone cannot address.

In order to have a more holistic impact, The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham made the deliberate decision to formally engage in state-level advocacy and intentionally pursue public policies that create long-lasting, systemic change for women.

In April 2019, we produced our inaugural, comprehensive public policy agenda that includes common-sense solutions that optimize economic potential for all Alabama women.

### **Top Priorities: The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham's 2019 Agenda for Women**

#### **Make Work Work:**

**Alabama has the nation's second lowest labor participation rate in the country.**<sup>49</sup> The state cannot maximize its economic growth without full participation of numerous targeted groups, including women. We advocate alignment of the state's workforce development structures and public investment and scaling of proven models—including education, training, and critical wraparound supports—that propel more women into in-demand jobs. Such opportunities both bolster economic stability for families and simultaneously address Alabama's workforce challenges. Additionally, we advocate for equitable wages for women and all Alabamians. Closing the gender wage gap alone could cut the poverty rate for Alabama women in half. We continue to champion family-friendly workplace policies that provide child care and flexible hours, which put women squarely in the drivers' seat of their own economic success.

#### **Elevate Quality Child Care:**

**Sixty-five percent of children under the age of six have all available parents in the workforce,**<sup>50</sup> making access to quality child care essential for women's full participation in the labor market. Advancing policy priorities such as family-forward tax credits that put money back in the pockets of businesses, child care providers, and parents helps elevate quality child care, putting it in reach for working families.

#### **Expand Affordable Healthcare:**

**Physical and mental health greatly impact a family's ability to thrive.**<sup>51</sup> Better health outcomes for women lead to better health outcomes for their children. Protecting and expanding Medicaid would provide health insurance for an additional 152,000 Alabama women and stimulate economic and job growth for our state.<sup>51</sup>



In addition to our 2019 Agenda for Women, the following are additional innovative recommendations and bright ideas from The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham to remove barriers to employment for women in Alabama:

- **Target women in lower-paid manufacturing jobs for additional training to move into higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs.** Alabama industry and workforce development leaders should work together to recruit women who have demonstrated the skills and reliability for manufacturing and increase opportunities for these workers to train for higher-skilled, higher-paying manufacturing jobs, including AIDT courses, high-quality credentials, and apprenticeships.
- **Use flexible TANF funds to strengthen job training, post-secondary education, and work supports such as transportation assistance for low-income women.** While The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham supports TANF dollars benefiting the families with children experiencing poverty, each year Alabama spends less and less of its federal TANF block grant on direct cash assistance. Yet 48.5% of female-headed households with children remain in poverty, most of whom do not access TANF. One model for using flexible TANF dollars is from the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative (CPI), which help low-income parents earn in-demand credentials while providing critical supports such as intensive case management, child care, and transportation assistance.
- **Use federal child care increase to expand availability of child care during nontraditional hours. Many jobs in manufacturing and health care require workers to arrive before 7 a.m. or work past 5 p.m.** Shifts of 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. or 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. are common. Child care availability has not kept pace. Additionally, many training programs and post-secondary courses are available during evening hours, enabling people who work during the day to take classes at night. Without evening child care, underemployed parents cannot access the training to move into better jobs.
- **Provide child care assistance for community college student-parents.** The Tennessee Department of Human Resources partnered with Pellissippi Community College in 2016 to launch the Leg-Up Child Care Assistance Program, which provides free child care to qualifying single parents at the East Tennessee college. Parents must be enrolled at least 6 hours, earn a 2.0 or better GPA, and be working toward a certificate or associates degree.

**Your voice matters. We must ensure we get right, and we get it right for women and their families.**



A woman with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt and a black and white floral skirt, is looking down at a book she is holding. She is standing in a library or bookstore, with bookshelves filled with books visible in the background. The background is slightly blurred, showing warm lighting and other shelves. A semi-transparent grey box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text "Appendix and References".

# Appendix and References

# Appendix: Workforce Programs and Funding Sources

Workforce Program	Target Population	State Agency / Agencies in Charge	Description	Funding Source
<b>Career Technical Education (secondary)</b>	Students in 9 – 12 grade	Alabama Department of Education	Transferable and industry-specific training and credentialing	Federal Perkins Funds, augmented with state and local funds
<b>Career Technical Education (postsecondary)</b>	Community college students	Alabama Community College System	Federal Perkins Funds, augmented with state and local funds	Federal Perkins Funds, augmented with state and local funds
<b>Adult Basic Education</b>	Adults without a high school diploma	Alabama Community College System	Completion of high school, transition to employment or higher education	Federal and State
<b>Alabama Career Centers</b>	Adults looking for a job	Alabama Department of Labor	Match individuals seeking employment with employers seeking workers. Job search, counseling, and placement.	Federal
<b>WIOA Skills training programs</b>	Out of school youth, adults, dislocated works	Alabama Department of Commerce	Evaluates needs of individuals who need improved skills and sets up Individual Training Accounts, which support education and training, including on the job training	Federal
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation</b>	Adults with mental or physical disabilities	Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services	Offers disabled individuals evaluation and counseling, educational and job training and placement services	Federal and State
<b>AIDT</b>	Industry	Alabama Department of Commerce	Training programs and other services aimed at fulfilling the commitments the state has made to incentivized industries	State



Workforce Program	Funding	Participants	Funding per Participant	Percent Female	Percent Non-White
<b>Career Technical Education (secondary)</b>	\$14,141,607 - 70% of Federal Perkins Fund dollars	163,631 - 76% of all CTE students	\$86	49%	44%
<b>Career Technical Education (postsecondary)</b>	\$6,056,403 - 30% of Federal Perkins Fund dollars	50,589 24% of all CTE students	\$119	56%	33%
<b>Adult Basic Education</b>	\$18,183,573	28,525	\$637	53%	60%
<b>Alabama Career Centers</b>	\$8,908,780	82,418	\$108	48%	61%
<b>WIOA Skills training programs</b>	\$30,823,447	5,689	\$5,418	56%	55%
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation</b>	\$22,921,674	38,065	\$602	44%	56%
<b>AIDT</b>	\$55,124,479	45,700	\$1,206	N.A.	N.A.
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$156,149,963</b>	<b>414,617</b>	<b>\$376.61 (average)</b>		

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*The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham would like to thank the following for their contributions that have made this report possible:*

Published by  
[The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham](#)  
Melanie R. Bridgeforth, MSW, President & CEO

Statistical Research and Analysis by  
[Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama](#)  
Ryan Hankins, Executive Director  
Thomas Spencer, Senior Research Associate

Prepared by  
Mary Page Wilson-Lyons  
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Wright Wiggins Rouse

Project Management by  
[The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham](#)  
Jacob L. Smith, MPA, Grants & Research Director

Graphic Design and Art Direction by  
Tori LaConsay

Financial Support from  
[Women's Funding Network](#)  
Cynthia Nimmo, President & CEO  
Marcia Coné, Chief Strategist



THE WOMEN'S FUND  
of GREATER BIRMINGHAM





## THE WOMEN'S FUND

*of GREATER BIRMINGHAM*

### **Mission**

The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham accelerates economic opportunity for women and their families through philanthropy, research, and advocacy.

### **Vision**

We envision a society where power and possibility are not limited by gender.

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