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Building an Inclusive, Thriving Workforce: *Equity-Focused Career Counselors Open Doors*

Communities thrive when individuals can pursue careers that match their talents and interests. While many of the more obvious barriers and discrimination that have kept women and people of color from entering certain fields have been dismantled, occupational segregation persists. For example, women make up 48% of our workforce, and people of color make up 18%. But in the occupational group 'architecture and engineering,' which has the highest median earnings in Indiana, women and people of color make up just 14% and 15% of the workers, respectively. In fact, in Indiana, 12 of the 25 occupational groups tracked in the American Community Survey are so segregated as to be considered "non-traditional" for one gender.

"Ongoing occupational segregation not only affects the financial well-being of workers, it hampers progress and economic growth," said Erin Macey, Senior Policy Analyst at Indiana Institute for Working Families. "If individuals disregard or are steered away from jobs that may be a good fit for their talents or motivations, we all lose out on what they could offer our communities and our economy."

The Institute's policy brief, [Equity-Focused Career Counseling](#), is part of series focused on building an inclusive, thriving workforce and closing wage gaps. It suggests that career counselors have the potential to encourage and facilitate non-traditional career selection, but only if counselors are better supported through reduced caseloads, increased training, and carefully curated tools. Counselors, both in the K-12 setting and at job centers, can use evidence-based strategies like:

- Intervening early, before individuals make key decisions about qualifications they may need to pursue certain options;
- Explicitly acknowledging how socialization based on gender, race, ethnicity, or other factors can create biases that shape and restrict career choices;
- Providing clear, detailed information about both the benefits (pay, benefits, security, and social) and stresses of many types of jobs, as well as the typical on-the-job tasks;
- Linking individuals with mentors and other interventions like camps and programs that encourage exploration of non-traditional options;
- Selecting and using career assessments carefully, with recognition that these can lead to biased results; and,
- Facilitating equity-oriented school environments through analyses of culture and climate, curricular materials, and reflection on outcomes data.

Taking steps to better use career counseling opportunities as moments to interrupt bias and introduce non-traditional occupations for consideration would yield important benefits for families, communities, and our economy.

The next brief in the inclusive, thriving workforce series will focus on supports for pregnant workers, and is scheduled to be released October 10th.

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This policy brief and more information about the inclusive, thriving workforce policy series, including a downloadable one-pager of all five topics, can be found here: <http://incap.org/iifw/wagegap.html>



**WORKING TOWARD
EQUAL PAY:**
FIVE POLICIES TO BUILD A
THRIVING, INCLUSIVE
WORKFORCE

Workers should receive equal pay for equal work. However, pay discrimination is only part of the equal pay problem: many workers – disproportionately women and people of color – face structural barriers to accessing and persisting in high-quality career options. Removing these barriers would allow our families, communities, and economy to thrive.

**EQUITY FOCUSED
CAREER COUNSELING**
The roots of occupational segregation begin early, but equity-focused career counseling has the potential to broaden the range of career options workers consider and pursue.

**SUPPORTS FOR
PREGNANT WORKERS**
Workers shouldn't have to choose between a healthy pregnancy and their job. Reasonable accommodations and paid leave enable pregnant and parenting workers to persist safely in the workforce.

CHILDCARE
Childcare is essential for working parents, yet far too many cannot find affordable, high-quality options.

FAIR SCHEDULING
Just-in-time scheduling practices disproportionately harm single mothers. Conversely, notice and control promote the ability to plan childcare, obtain postsecondary credentials, and budget.

ONE FAIR WAGE
Sub-minimum wages disproportionately harm women, people of color, and people with disabilities. One fair wage sets a floor for all types of work.

LEARN MORE AT:
<http://incap.org/iifw/wagegap.html>

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