



IOWA – One Door Many Paths: a WIOA Partners' Conference

The Challenge: Many job seekers with disabilities require services across different programs within the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to achieve a successful employment outcome. However, this targeted population often go through multiple doors to access the services of the different WIOA programs, sometimes resulting in customers feeling frustrated, lost and confused.

The Strategy: The Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grantee in Iowa is part of a state-level partnership that sought to address this challenge by utilizing a blending and braiding of funds to support "One Door Many Paths" WIOA Partners' Conferences. The central theme of such a conference would be that regardless of the "door" entered by customers, the services provided by all partners would be aligned to help achieve the goals of its customers. To support that objective, a conference would be convened for all WIOA core program partners and other key stakeholders including employers to have an opportunity to jointly network, learn, and share ideas on how to more effectively streamline workforce services for Iowans.

The Plan: The planning and facilitation for the first conference in 2015 was carried out by Iowa Workforce Development, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Iowa Department for the Blind, and the Association of Iowa Workforce Partners in partnership with several other key state agencies and community partners. The planning committee focused on establishing strategies and best practices surrounding: (1) Accessibility (Physical and Programmatic), (2) Career Pathways, (3) Collaboration and Sharing of Customers, (4) Integrated Education and Training, (5) Sector Partnerships, and (6) Service Design.

Across the different agencies, there was a strong spirit of inclusion to jointly plan and promote. Planning steps included ensuring there was representation from both frontline and management staff to learn from each other across different workforce agencies. In addition, there was inclusion of topic areas to be addressed, such as having sessions focused on understanding the needs of targeted populations. There was a strong focus on the disability population and accessibility during its 2018 conference, which included a keynote address by former Senator Tom Harkin, a key force behind the passage of the American with Disabilities Act. During that same year, the following narrative on the importance of the inclusion of hiring people with disabilities was included in its conference program:

Not only are individuals with disabilities a vital part of our economy, they also represent the greatest percentage of Iowa's available workforce. In other words, these individuals are Iowa's most untapped resource in meeting Future Ready Iowa business needs. It is because of these factors WIOA provides opportunities to leverage resources, strengthen partnerships, and close employment gaps through innovative and collaborative service delivery.
— Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services

System/Workforce/WIOA Outcomes: Iowa held three “One Door Many Paths” WIOA Partners’ Conferences (2015, 2016, and 2018). One consistent outcome from these conferences was that they helped the workforce system take steps to be more aligned to support the goals of WIOA in having a seamless customer service delivery experience, including for people with disabilities. The conference also became an opportunity to support the unique needs of employers in Iowa.

According to Brian Dennis, Iowa’s DEI state lead, the process of putting this conference together “promoted partners to work together making WIOA implementation successful for Iowa all across the board.” In 2016, Beth Townsend, Iowa’s Workforce Development Director, praised the ongoing collaboration, stating “These partnerships allow agencies to combine expertise and resources to address these issues in a holistic and meaningful way that provides the best we have to offer to Iowans who need help. And I’m pleased that hundreds of Iowans attended a job fair featuring more than 60 Iowa employers looking for talent to fill their employment needs.”

Because of the positive outcomes of these events, Iowa plans to continue to host these conferences. Partners who have been a part of the past conferences found this effort very valuable and agreed to invest in future events. The plan is to fund future conferences collaboratively across WIOA programs. The next conference is targeted to take place in 2020.

Key Career Pathway Elements:

- Build cross-agency partnerships and clarify roles.
- Identify sector or industry and engage employers.
- Align policies and programs.
- Measure system change and performance.

Additional Resources on this Topic:

- [WorkforceGPS Disability and Employment Community](#): An online resource destination for the American Job Center network, people with disabilities, and employers. In addition, this is a resource for all key stakeholders who partner with the workforce system to provide services and programs to people with disabilities and other barriers to employment.
- [WorkforceGPS Disability and Apprenticeship](#): The technical assistance tools linked here include resources, webinars, reports, and videos integrated in one location to help you connect the pieces between the disability population and the expanding apprenticeship initiative.
- [WorkforceGPS Career Pathways Community](#): An online resource that helps workforce development leaders, practitioners, and policymakers expand state and local career pathways efforts currently underway or being planned. The collection of resources will enhance knowledge, skills, and expertise in building effective career pathways systems.
- [American Job Center and Partners](#): Part of the LEAD Centers section on WIOA and Workforce Development. These resources are designed to assist American Job Centers in forming successful partnerships that benefit job seekers with disabilities.