## Anoka County Minnesota

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| Name of Entity | Anoka County Job Training Center |
| Partners Featured | 1. WIOA Title I Adults and Dislocated Workers 2. WIOA Title III Job Service 3. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) 4. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) |
| Highlighted Features of the Integrated System | 1. [Co-Location](#_Co-Location) 2. [Integrated Reception and Intake](#_Integrated_Reception_and) 3. [Coordinated Case Management](#_Coordinated_Case_Management) 4. [Unified Business Services](#_Unified_Business_Services) 5. [Common Branding](#_Common_Branding) 6. [Data Sharing](#_Data_Sharing) 7. [Integrated Assessments](#_Integrated_Assessments) 8. [Leadership](#_Leadership) 9. [Integrated Teams and Staff Training](#_Integrated_Teams_and) 10. [MOU and Cost Sharing Agreement](#_MOU_and_Cost) |
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The [Anoka County Job Training Center](https://www.anokacounty.us/1064/Job-Training-Center) (JTC) provides workforce development services to job seekers and employers in Anoka County – a large suburban county north of Minneapolis that is home to many small businesses and strong retail, manufacturing, healthcare, and food service sectors.

JTC partners have integrated reception and intake, and coordinated business services, case management, assessments, and data systems—enabling customers to view the JTC as one workforce system, not separate programs, and partners to achieve greater impact and cost savings.

This case study will describe major [integrated design features](#_Anoka’s_Integrated_Service) from the customers’ point of view, explore [key systems that support integrated services](#_Systems_that_Support), [how and why these came to be](#_Looking_Back:_How), [what difference they’re making](#_Impact), and provide some [advice for replication](#_Peer_Advice_for).

### Anoka’s Integrated Service Design Features

#### Co-Location

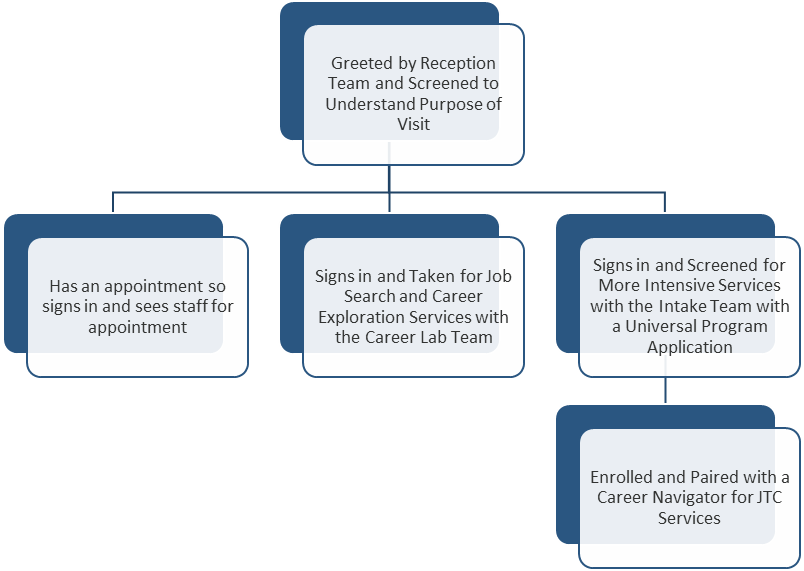
Since the early 1990s, the Anoka County Workforce Development Board has been committed to a customer-oriented and cost-saving one-stop workforce center model. Anoka has refined its model over the decades, and today, more than 20 programs are co-located in its comprehensive American Job Center — the Anoka County JTC, located in Blaine, Minnesota. The chart below shows the co-location status of the main partners in Anoka County JTC.

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| Anoka Country Job Training Center: Co-Located Partners | Full Time | Part Time |
| WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth | X |  |
| WIOA Title II Adult Education |  | X |
| WIOA Title III Job Service | X |  |
| WIOA Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) | X |  |
| TANF Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) |  | X |
| SNAP E&T |  | X |
| Other: SCSEP, Senior Emergency Services, Legal Aid, other Community Partners |  | X |

The JTC is located inside the Blaine Human Services Center building, where the second floor houses all job readiness and placement services funded by WIOA Title I, III, and IV, SNAP E&T, and the Minnesota Family Investment Program (TANF work program). Adult Basic Education and Anoka County Community Action (offering food, rent, and other emergency services) are on the third floor, and economic assistance programs like SNAP and TANF cash assistance are available on the fourth floor. Customers can access an on-site day care center, food pantry, legal aid, and many other community-based services that are independently run by non-profit organizations and are available to JTC clients while at the center. Clients from all programs are often referred to these services.

#### Integrated Reception and Intake

The JTC has one reception area on the second floor for customers who come into the building seeking general assistance. If a customer has an appointment, someone on the reception (triage) team helps them sign in and get to the right staff person. If customers do not know what program or service they need, the reception team member asks them a few questions about their needs and background to identify appropriate services and then directs them to the proper location or person. Wagner-Peyser Job Service staff (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title III staff) typically perform the reception function, though the JTC has developed written responsibilities and procedures that allow anyone who might be covering the reception area (during a lunch period or day off, for instance) to perform the job.



**JTC Customer Flow**

If a client needs help with basic services like developing a resume or conducting a job search, the reception team member brings the customer to the career lab where staff from the *career lab team* (mostly Job Service staff) can offer support. While most career lab services are charged to Wagner-Peyser, other programs contribute to shared costs in proportion to usage by participants who are ultimately enrolled in one or more of the partner programs.

If a client appears to need more intensive assistance, the reception team member brings the client to JTC’s *intake team* with staff who specialize in various populations such as youth, adults, and dislocated workers. The intake team uses one of two universal program applications (one for youth, one for adults) to review eligibility for all possible workforce programs and identify those programs that may help clients meet their employment and training goals. The universal program application and co-enrollment allow JTC staff to provide the fullest possible array of services to meet clients’ needs, minimize duplication of services, and streamline costs to the system as a whole. The intake team also tracks client engagement from beginning to end, assists with internal and external monitoring, records retention review, grant close outs, quality case management, and fielding calls from customers with general questions about programs and services.

The intake team members are County employees who charge their time to various programs based on the clients they work with, as determined using quarterly time studies. For example, if one staff member spends 50 percent of her time working with clients who are enrolled in the WIOA Title I Adult program, 50 percent of her time is charged to that program. The state is discussing how to broaden this universal intake and application process across the state.

#### Coordinated Case Management

Once a client completes intake, the intake staff member makes an introduction to the client’s system *navigator*. Like intake staff, all system navigators are County employees whose time is charged to various programs depending on caseload as determined through quarterly time studies. Some navigators are generalists, but others specialize in a particular type of client like re-entering citizens, for instance.

Clients may have multiple case managers and varying obligations for multiple programs, but their navigator is their main point of contact and the person who — as the name suggests — helps clients navigate the system. For example, if a client can benefit from WIOA Title I services and SNAP, the navigator understands that completing the SNAP application first will help with eligibility for WIOA Title I services.

Navigators also help by accompanying clients to referrals and giving a soft handoff (which has the added benefit of increasing successful referrals, as often clients do not follow up on their own). Navigators also help clients understand the rules that can seem complex and intimidating, like providing eligibility documentation or mandated check-ins with case managers. The navigator also coordinates services with case managers within the JTC to share costs, which makes the overall system funding go further (e.g., if they make sure partners are rotating costs of weekly bus cards) and ensures someone has the “big picture” on each client and can connect the dots as needed to help them meet their goals.

Most case management efforts are tracked through Minnesota’s Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) [Workforce One (WF1) case management system](https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/workforceone/). Navigators encourage program participants to sign releases to make data and information sharing easier behind the scenes. (See more details in the Data Sharing section below.)

#### Coordinated Business Services

The Anoka County JTC has one Business Liaison who works directly with all employers to understand their hiring needs (current and trends) and share information on services available through the workforce system like job postings, job fairs, employee screenings, incumbent worker training, on-the-job training, and more. The Business Liaison coordinates hiring and industry-sector events, and connects employers to Job Services or WIOA Title I staff who can help them meet their particular employment needs.

Employers may post jobs through an online *CareerForce* portal. Local WIOA Title I workforce development staff and Title III job services staff serve businesses in the local area through managing the job bank, working with system navigators to screen and identify possible referrals, and doing all advertising for employer-centered events and resources. These staff meet regularly to discuss and strategize ways to streamline business services activities.

#### Common Branding

Over the last five years, Minnesota developed [*CareerForce*](https://www.careerforcemn.com/about-us)—a statewide online platform that serves as the “virtual front door” for the workforce system. CareerForce offers web-based, customer-friendly, streamlined information and access to services for job seekers and employers. Minnesota also rebranded all its AJCs as *CareerForce* followed by the city location. Minnesota has nearly 50 *CareerForce* locations throughout the state, and the Anoka County Job Training Center is located within *CareerForce Blaine*. The *CareerForce* brand, along with the “proud partner of the AJC network” identifier, is on all documentation, websites, partner materials, etc. and furthers the perception that customers are dealing with one system, not a range of separate programs.

### Systems that Support Integrated Partner Service Delivery

#### Data Sharing

The JTC uses multiple data collection programs with varied integration and data sharing capabilities. However, WIOA Titles I, III, and IV, along with the TANF Families First Program use the DEED WF1 case management system, which makes sharing information among many partners of the Anoka JTC relatively simple. Staff have different levels of access into the system where some are strictly for data entry, some just for file review, and others have high levels of access to read or approve case notes. Leadership routinely reviews the access levels of each program area and each staff, and staff receive regular training on the system.

The system navigators play a key role in case management, data entry, and data sharing. Because they check in with clients on their services as a whole and with all case managers, the case notes navigators enter into WF1 provide a fuller (if imperfect) picture of services, including those provided by outside agencies that don’t use WF1. System navigators also encourage program participants to sign a waiver to allow them to share information from WF1 with outside agencies if needed. During the customer application process, Anoka uses the release of information form from WF1 to secure information to determine eligibility, allow access to wage records for performance reporting, and communicate using electronic communications. Once enrolled, an additional release of information form developed by Anoka County and approved by the County Attorney’s office allows partners to share training progress reports, co-case management information, and so on. Anoka leaders continue to have conversations amongst themselves and with state level programs and stakeholders on how to maximize data sharing.

#### Integrated Assessments

No matter the program(s) customers are enrolled into, all partners at the Anoka JTC use an agreed-upon set of assessments. This way, if customers are later enrolled in another program, they will not have to go through a bureaucratic process of re-taking a similar assessment. For example, for skill gain assessments, Anoka County Job Training center uses a variety of tools including the McGraw Hill/CTB Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), Accuplacer scores from local college partners, and the Wonderlic General Assessment of Instructional Needs (GAIN) pre- and post-tests. Partners rely on the O\*NET Interest Profiler and the Self-Directed Search (SDS) for career aptitude and interest testing.

#### Leadership

Local workforce development board and partner leaders have played vital roles in integrating service delivery since the 1990s, when workforce, education, and welfare program leaders began to build a co-located, cost-saving, and customer-driven approach to service delivery. Today, partners hold quarterly meetings, led by a different partner on a rotating basis, to address cross-cutting issues and strategies. For example, to address costs and gaps in services from state-funded programs, the partners formed a collaborative grant writing team that applies for grant funding.

In addition, Anoka’s leaders have made a conscious and deliberate effort to be well represented on state boards and committees including the Anoka Technical College Advisory Board, Anoka County Community Action Project, Metro North Adult Basic Education, Anoka Ramsey Community College Advisory Board, Anoka-Hennepin Advisory Board, and the Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards. These positions provide opportunities to influence state and local policy, as well as to share information among partners and build trust. In addition, they are backed by a very supportive Board of Commissioners and have a close working relationship with local Chamber of Commerce groups.

#### Integrated Teams and Staff Training

Cross-functional teams are responsible for much of the work in the AJC. Teams include the reception team, career lab team, intake team, and business services team. These teams are overseen by a JTC supervisor or manager who reports to the JTC Director.

Cross training occurs frequently throughout the year. Whereas partners used to send one another information and hope they would share it, now onsite partners at the center attend each other’s team meetings on a regular schedule and present updates on their respective programs. Each partner is also responsible for providing cross-training to the other partners on an annual basis.

The JTC partners have also developed a CareerForce Partnership Guide located on a shared platform that outlines the services and responsibilities of each partner. This is given to any new employee during orientation to ensure a consistent level of understanding from the beginning.

#### MOU and Cost Sharing Agreement

Anoka County Job Training Center operates under an integrated memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the workforce development board and partners. Included are the WIOA mandatory partners as well as all public assistance partners including TANF and SNAP E&T. The MOU outlines all the partner roles and responsibilities, the levels of integration, and how information is shared both internally and with public partners including describing the permission levels and data sharing.

The one-stop operating budget is managed by the Director of the Job Training Center. Several programs contribute to shared costs and are also co-located in the space including WIOA Titles I, II, III and IV, TANF, SNAP E&T, SCSEP, and MSFW.

WIOA Titles I, III, and IV cover the costs of the shared space using a formula based on customer use of that space. Shared space includes the joint reception area, the Career Lab, classroom space, and the employer hiring event space.

WIOA Title II Adult Basic Education (ABE) is co-located in the building, which is unusual in Minnesota as most ABE providers are located in a separate building from job centers. ABE makes and takes client referrals, contributes to the shared costs of the reception and career lab, and pays a lease for its space that works within its administrative cost limitations.

The Anoka County Economic Assistance Department that provides TANF economic services serves as the One-Stop Operator (OSO). The Director of the Job Training Center serves as the coordinator for the building and oversees the building budget and costs.

Program managers and Anoka JTC leadership have weekly meetings to review and discuss partners’ challenges, concerns, and updates; and to review the One-Stop operating budget and adjust, if needed.

### Looking Back: How and Why Did Local Partners Come Together?

As noted previously, the JTC is housed in the Blaine Human Services Building, which was built in the early 1990s with funding from the county and the United Way. Integration talks between the Job Service, TANF, Title I (then JTPA and WIA), and Vocational Rehabilitation began at this time. County and workforce board leaders saw the value of being co-located in one space and pushed program managers and staff to engage in conversations around how to better communicate, avoid duplication, and save costs.

When WIA transitioned to WIOA, Anoka already had a baseline level of co-location, partner communication, and some cost sharing in place. However, the co-located programs were mostly siloed and independent, so partners struggled to really understand their new joint goals and program requirements under WIOA.

Leadership was committed to take co-location to the next level, though, and established standing partner meetings at the manager and staff level. Out of conversations during these standing partner meetings came an understanding that many partners shared customers that have multiple barriers, and that people entering the system might come in for one service but benefit from understanding other services available that can help equip them for success. It took Anoka three to four years to work through these conversations and go from “living” together to “linking” together. In that time, they defined and organized shared processes like reception, data sharing, and use of the career lab; the roles of the intake staff and system navigators; the physical reception and career lab spaces; and procedures to more closely weave together funds to cover more shared costs.

*“We always focus on customer service and providing services to the public, trying to keep costs down for everyone so we get the best ROI we possibly can.”*

*~* Nicole Swanson, Director, Job Training Center

As the partner meetings and conversations have continued, so the system continues to evolve to better meet customer needs. For instance, the reception team noticed a line would sometimes form if they were caught up with a more complex client who required a longer conversation. To address this challenge, Anoka is adjusting the process to improve customer flow in two ways: 1) by adopting the Apple Store model and creating an “inquiry kiosk” that can provide some immediate virtual assistance and 2) by assigning one system navigator each day who will work alongside the reception team to perform triage with the more complex clients.

### Impact

Efficiencies from sharing the costs of integrated space within the center allow each partner to increase funding and services for customers. Partners working together at unprecedented levels has also led to improved services, funding, and customer satisfaction. For example, integrated mailing lists and coordinated employer outreach increase employer customer satisfaction. The collaborative development of a reference guide with basic program information assists with cross agency referrals, enhanced partnerships, and better customer experiences with faster responses to inquiries. And, instead of simply writing letters of support for each other, partners now co-apply for outside grants, which has successfully brought more outside grant resources into the JTC. The additional grants help provide a continuum of services when occasionally one fund may be restrictive or limited.

A career pathways grant demonstrates some of the value that comes from an integrated workforce system. When a two-year career pathways grant was coming to an end, a number of participants were still in the middle of their training and education programs. The Anoka team was quickly able to go into their universal applications on record and find other co-enrollment opportunities within WIOA Adult and Youth and TANF for all 36 of the individuals to be able to continue their training services uninterrupted. The client never knew, and the staff were able to complete this on the back end and continue the services to the customers.

### Peer Advice for Replication

*Maintain strong, open communication.* At the board level, leaders have met frequently over the years to establish clear and open communication, discuss each other’s needs, and develop and maintain a shared vision. As a result, staff gets consistent messaging, which has a cascading effect of building trust and integration among staff. At the JTC level, leaders meet with their teams every other week to push out and collect information on what team members need. Two-way communication is essential, stresses JTC Director Nicole Swanson, as good ideas come from any level. The meetings provide opportunities for staff to share information on how they help customers and challenges they are facing, which can spur new ideas. At the customer level, communication includes transparency, responsiveness, and delivering on promises.

*“Keep talking. Good ideas come from all over. Little tweaks can have a huge impact.”*

*~* Nicole Swanson, Director, Job Training Center

*Be very policy conscious* while trying to increase flexibility and integration to ensure changes will be beneficial for all partners.

*Stay focused on your mission* – working with people to improve lives and make a difference in the community. Focusing on the shared mission can help partners rethink services so the system can serve more customers with better outcomes.

*This case study is part of a larger series developed for the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration’s Chicago Regional Office, which explores how and why local workforce partners came together in six local workforce areas and the difference it is making in those areas. See this ION Community of Practice* [*Resource page*](https://ion.workforcegps.org/resources/2021/04/21/20/58/OneStopPartnershipCaseStudies) *for more information and the full set of case studies.*