## Lower Shore Maryland

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| Name of Entity | Lower Shore Workforce Alliance, Lower Shore Workforce Development Board  |
| Partners Featured   | 1. WIOA Title I Adults and Dislocated Workers
2. WIOA Title III Wagner - Peyser
3. WIOA Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation
4. Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers
5. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
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| Highlighted Features of the Integrated System  | 1. [Co-Location and Mobile Access](#_Co-Location_and_Mobile)
2. [Shared Services](#_Shared_Services)
3. [Unified Business Services](#_Unified_Business_Services)
4. [Common branding](#_Common_Branding)
5. [Coordinating Functions of the One-Stop Operator](#_Coordinating_Functions_of)
6. [Cost Sharing and Partner MOUs](#_Cost_Sharing_and)
7. [Staff Cross Training](#_Staff_cross_training)
8. [Discrete Projects that Build Staff Capacity, Service Integration, and Trust](#_Discrete_Projects_that)
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The Lower Shore Workforce Development Board and its staff, the Lower Shore Workforce Alliance (LSWA), serve a tri-county coastal region that includes Wicomico, Worchester, and Somerset counties. The region experiences high summer employment in hospitality, retail, and tourism occupations; higher unemployment and temporary or contract jobs in the colder months; and consistently strong growth in healthcare occupations.

Lower Shore’s history of co-location provided a good foundation to begin to collaborate more intentionally after passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Today, partners see the benefits of co-location, make in-kind contributions for the good of the system, enjoy common branding and coordinated business services, and work collaboratively on mutually beneficial projects like developing a new staff orientation package all partners use to train new hires across the system.

This case study will describe major [integrated design features](#_Lower_Shore_Maryland’s) from the customers’ point of view, then 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 some [advice for replication](#_Peer_Advice_for).

### Lower Shore Maryland’s Integrated Service Design Features

#### Co-Location and Mobile Access

LSWA oversees and manages one comprehensive AJC in Salisbury, Maryland, as well as one affiliate and one mobile office. LSWA notes that co-location in the comprehensive AJC is their biggest asset. For a few decades (since passage of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998), all required WIOA partners have been co-located (in some form) in one site, along with TANF. The following table shows extent of co-location across key partners:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Salisbury Comprehensive AJC: 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 Wagner-Peyser | X |  |
| WIOA Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) |  | X |
| Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) | X |  |
| Other: Trade Adjustment Assistance, Veterans Services, Unemployment Insurance, Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker, National Farmworker Jobs Program | X |  |

Regarding the part-time partners, Vocational Rehabilitation has a part-time satellite office at the AJC, and Adult Education uses conference rooms in the AJC for their classes.

A Mobile American Job Center travels to libraries, detention centers, and community centers throughout the three-county region on a regular schedule, expanding customer access to the same self-directed basic services that are available at the AJC, such as job search; resume assistance; career information and assessments; and information about job training, business services, and the fuller range of services available from the various partners at the comprehensive AJC.

#### Shared Services

In the Salisbury AJC, partners contribute unique parts of the service array available to all center clients.

WIOA Title I funds personnel costs including the facilities coordinator, welcome/triage staff, and the one stop operator. At the front desk, if the customer already knows what services they need, staff will sign them in and direct them to the appropriate suite. If the customer does not know what they need, the front desk staff will ask some initial questions and get them to the appropriate service/program in the center or make a formal referral, if necessary. Staff are equipped to make appropriate referrals thanks to cross training as well as a comprehensive resource book that provide answers to many customer questions. Because many partners are co-located, the welcome staff can usually walk the customer over and make an introduction.

WIOA Title I also funds the mobile office where customers can explore careers, search for jobs, and learn about other programs and services at LSWA.

WIOA Title I – Adult and Dislocated Worker funds infrastructure costs including: the phone line at the front desk where staff perform the welcome and customer triage functions, the facilities coordinator’s office, and the rent costs of the computer resource lab.

WIOA Title III funds most of the rent costs of the AJC as well as operational costs of the additional computer lab at the affiliate site.

State Unemployment Insurance funds costs for the data sharing MOU as well as partner training.

TANF funds a childcare center available for use by any client needing assistance in the AJC.

The Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Program funds the personnel for interpretation and translation services and funds the emergency food panty and clothing closet.

WIOA title IV Vocational Rehabilitation pays for iPads at the front desk to assist with sign language interpretation as needed.

All of these services are funded by one program but shared by customers of any program.

#### Unified Business Services

Representatives from all partners that serve businesses meet quarterly as a business services team, coordinated by the one-stop operator (OSO). The team’s purpose is to streamline communication and outreach so that employers do not receive duplicate calls and visits. Each quarter, team members discuss who will be doing outreach to which employers and any history with that employer from the various partners. They also plan joint outreach strategies. For instance, in 2019, the business services team coordinated its first [local business summit](https://sbybiz.org/eastern-shore-business-summit/), and team members are now hosting a virtual business summit every month through March 2021. All partners are involved, with Vocational Rehabilitation playing a significant role in planning and staffing these events to ensure they are accessible for people with disabilities and employers can get help with connecting with job seekers with disabilities and making accommodations. The team is also developing a matrix of all business services that all partners can use as a reference document during employer outreach, so that everyone has the information they need to do a warm hand-off to the right person for any workforce challenges the employer may be encountering.

#### Common Branding

Maryland does not have a statewide brand, so local workforce areas have adopted their own branding. In Lower Shore, for many years, partners kept their own branding, but all used the same AJC tag line in their materials. However, in 2018, LSWA received a branding grant from the State and partners agreed to use the funding to create and implement common branding. From this effort, partners began to all affiliate with the Lower Shore Workforce Alliance, with staff identifying themselves now as “with LSWA, located at the AJC.” They produced new signage, refreshed the interior of the AJC, started a LSWA [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/LowerShoreAJC) that all partners can use, and hired a part-time communications person to manage this work. While this is still a work in progress, they have made significant strides to present as a unified system.

### Systems that Support Integrated Partner Service Delivery

#### Coordinating Functions of the One-Stop Operator

LSWA contracted with a neutral OSO after passage of WIOA and gave the OSO critical new coordinating roles and responsibilities, such as scheduling, convening, and facilitating the quarterly partner meetings and quarterly business services team meetings; helping the teams identify and track goals and follow through on action items; and working with the partners to develop and provide cross training for all staff. Partners have come to see the value of the OSO and its work to support the entire workforce system.

#### Cost Sharing and Partner MOUs

LSWA has not developed significant cost sharing arrangements, though partners contribute services that are available for the benefit of the entire system, as described earlier in this case study. Lower Shore’s comprehensive MOU captures these in-kind contributions. Facility costs are not addressed in the cost sharing conversations as each on-site partner pays rent for their space to the third-party landlord. If there is a cost that comes up that cannot be directly charged to a program, it comes to LSWA to discuss and partners have shown a willingness to contribute when needed. Percentages of total AJC costs by program are shown in the chart below.

#### Staff Cross Training

Cross training is extremely important to the effective functioning of the AJC. In 2018, the OSO coordinated with partners to develop and provide cross training, so all staff — especially those at the welcome desk — have knowledge to make appropriate and helpful referrals and can step in to assist with the welcome function when needed. The training identified services each program offers, a basic overview of program eligibility, and ways that co-enrollment and coordination can provide a wider range of benefits to clients. Since there has been some staff turnover, Lower Shore is preparing to conduct this training again soon.

#### Discrete Projects that Build Staff Capacity, Service Integration, and Trust

Lower Shore’s partners have successfully collaborated on several discrete and mutually-beneficial projects to improve staff capacity and service integration.

Partners agreed on one assessment instrument that is acceptable to all, which streamlines services and helps co-enrolled job seekers avoid frustrating requirement to complete multiple program-specific assessments.

TANF and WIOA staff streamlined referrals of TANF recipients to WIOA by eliminating the need to sign up for and attend an orientation before they could talk to a WIOA counselor about employment and training options.

LSWA is currently coordinating with partners to develop a new staff orientation training module for shared use by all partners, which will help ensure a uniform and high level of understanding of partner programs throughout the system.

The small “wins” in these areas help build trust and willingness to engage in deeper forms of collaboration. For example, LSWA is planning next to tackle formal processes around referrals, co-enrollments, and data sharing.

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

After passage of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, LSWA benefitted from a strong Executive Director who was passionate about bringing partners together into one location. He succeeded, and all partners in the AJC today came together by 2002. While co-location made accessing services from multiple partners easier on clients, the partners did not initially coordinate services.

Passage of the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) didn’t necessitate any new partnerships in LSWA, but it did spark a strategic shift in conversations from the logistics of sharing space to ways of offering services more effectively. From these conversations, partners created the AJC-wide welcome function, staff cross training, and the OSO coordinator role. State-level support for this level of integration and coordination helped. A challenge is getting partners to see the value of contributing to shared infrastructure costs; however, partners are happy to identify in-kind support they can provide for the benefit of the entire system, as described above. LSWA Workforce Director Becca Webster has not pushed further on this issue but notes the significance of the shift in thinking about how each partner fits into and supports the larger system. And ongoing small wins, like adopting a shared assessment instrument, continue to build trust in partners and the value of collaboration.

*“You have to have the right person who could pull people together. You need an Executive Director who is passionate and a good communicator who could get buy in from all partners.”*

~ Becca Webster,
Workforce Director

Data sharing remains a challenge, with Wagner-Peyser, WIOA Title I, and Trade programs using one system, and TANF and Vocational Rehabilitation using other systems entirely. Data sharing is discussed regularly in the partner meetings and the partners plan to make it a large focus in 2021. Lower Shore has been working with state level leadership to help the entire system understand the efficiencies and benefits that can be gained from a shared case management system.

### Impact

For customers, being able to access so many services under one roof or closer to home through the mobile office is critical, especially since limited transportation is the number one barrier to accessing services in the region. The availability of the childcare on site makes services more accessible for those with small children or childcare challenges.

For staff, the cross training has boosted their knowledge, efficiency, and confidence in their ability to help their customers. At the leadership level, the small steps have boosted trust and willingness to take on larger issues like data sharing.

### Peer Advice for Replication

LSWA shows that partners can take small steps beyond co-location to improve staff capacity and customer satisfaction and build trust in one another. While cost sharing can be a barrier, partners often have services they can make available for the benefit of the entire system, as the LSWA partners have done. Do not get overwhelmed by the barriers, stresses Workforce Director Becca Webster, but take the steps, big or small, that are doable in your area and will move you further on your integration journey. And as you think outside the box, shift the mindset from “no, we cannot do that” to consider what is possible.

*“Baby steps are better than no steps.”*

~ Becca Webster, Workforce Director

*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.*