## Northwest Tennessee

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name of Entity | Northwest Tennessee Workforce Board |
| Featured Partners | 1. WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth 2. WIOA Title II Adult Education 3. WIOA Title III Wagner-Peyser 4. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) 5. Unemployment Insurance (UI) Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) |
| Highlighted Features of the Integrated System | 1. [Co-Location](#_Co-Location) 2. [Integrated Functions: Reception, Intake, Resource Room, and Workshops](#_Integrated_Functions:_Reception,) 3. [Co-Enrollment](#_Co-Enrollment) 4. [Unified Business Services](#_Unified_Business_Services) 5. [Cross-Functional Teams](#_Cross_Functional_Teams) 6. [Partially Integrated Data Systems](#_Partially_Integrated_Data) 7. [State Policies](#_State_Policies) 8. [The MOU and One-Stop Operator Contract](#_The_MOU_and) 9. [Cost Sharing](#_Cost_Sharing) |
| Point of Contact | Jennifer Bane, Executive Director at [jbane@nwtnworks.org](mailto:jbane@nwtnworks.org) |

The [Northwest Tennessee Workforce Board](https://www.nwtnjobs.org/) (NTWB) serves a large, rural, nine-county area that has pockets of high unemployment but also strong manufacturing, healthcare, transportation, and logistics sectors. The area has a history of co-location among many partners, but passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and development of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between partners sparked more service integration, new involvement from Adult Education, and creation of an independent one-stop operator (OSO) that took on some critical integration, coordination, and operational functions. Multiple partners contribute to shared costs, which include shared office space and other infrastructure costs as well as the costs of the OSO.

This case study will describe [major integrated design features](#_Northwest_Tennessee’s_Integrated) 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).

### Northwest Tennessee’s Integrated Service Design Features

#### Co-Location

Two counties — Dyer and Carroll — each house comprehensive American Job Centers (AJCs), while the remaining counties have specialized or affiliate centers offering WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth services; RESEA re-employment services for UI recipients; and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) services by appointment. TANF is co-located in the Dyer comprehensive AJC and an affiliate AJC in another county. The comprehensive AJCs bring together services from the following major programs:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Dyer and Carroll County Comprehensive AJCs: 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 |  | X |
| TANF (Dyer County only) | X |  |
| RESEA | X |  |
| Other: SNAP E&T, Veterans Services, TAA, Alien Labor Certification (Carroll County only) |  | X |

Staff offering WIOA Title I and Title III and RESEA services work out of the comprehensive AJCs full-time, while the rest of the partners have staff on-site on certain days and times. As Jennifer Bane, NWTN Executive Director describes it: “Co-location first and foremost is the best we can do to really lay the foundation for everything else.”

#### Integrated Functions: Reception, Intake, Resource Room, and Workshops

All AJCs have integrated their welcome area, resource room, and the initial intake process. The OSO staffs these functions in the six largest counties, with costs shared by all partners; Title I staff provide those services in the affiliate AJCs in the three smallest counties. The OSO coordinates with all the partners to work out a shared coverage schedule during lunch periods, extended hours, and days when OSO staff will be out. Because Title I and Title III staff are on site in the comprehensive center full-time, and Title I is in all AJCs, they provide most of the wrap-around coverage.

When a customer enters the AJC, a knowledgeable, cross-trained OSO staff person in the welcome area greets them and uses an integrated intake form to get to know their needs. Staff use the intake form to identify the kinds of services that will be most helpful to the client, and may provide additional services such as labor market information or job search assistance in the resource room or may make a referral – with a personal hand-off – for eligibility determination and individualized career services to the appropriate WIOA, SNAP E&T, RESEA, or TANF staff person in the AJC. (For partners not in the AJC, staff still attempt a warm hand-off by connecting the customer to the partner by phone while the customer is in the AJC.) For the most part, staff try to talk about services and not programs, and, while each may be funded by different programs, they all wear AJC badges and use AJC branding in the center and on materials.

NWTN has also integrated workshop planning and delivery. Partners coordinate delivery of the various workshops, with Title I, III, and community partner workshops open to all customers. For instance, open workshops in the Dyersburg AJC include resume writing (provided by Wagner-Peyser staff), interviewing (provided by WIOA Title I staff), entrepreneurship (offered by the small business center), and financial literacy (offered by community partner Operation Hope).

#### Co-Enrollment

Customers are strategically co-enrolled in programs to better leverage funds. For example, WIOA Title I clients who are receiving Food Stamps are usually referred and co-enrolled in SNAP E&T to extend the reach of funds for both programs. And TANF pregnant and/or parenting youth are a significant referral source for the WIOA Title I youth program.

#### Unified Business Services

In NWTN, two business service representatives who work for the workforce board are the primary face of the job centers with business customers. They do most of the outreach and engagement and are part of the integrated Business Services Team that includes business services staff from WIOA Titles I-IV, TANF, Veterans programs, and TANF, as well as economic and community development partners. The team meets monthly to coordinate activities, develop shared outreach strategies, and make sure local businesses are not bombarded with multiple contacts and have just one point of contact for their service needs. The OSO manages the team and coordinates with partner programs to designate the team lead, who organizes the agendas and runs the monthly team meetings.

### Systems that Support Integrated Partner Service Delivery

#### Cross Functional Teams

Partner staff – depending on their roles – are part of one or more of three cross-functional teams covering (1) the Welcome Function, (2) Career Development, and (3) Business Services. Because staff are spread across a large geographical area, the teams meet by conference call monthly to share information, identify areas of shared strategic interest, and map out strategies to improve coordination, meet mutually beneficial goals, and streamline processes. These might be as simple as coordinating to host a job fair, or as complex as making a strategic decision to maximize co-enrollments between WIOA Title I Youth and Vocational Rehabilitation to give youth with disabilities more access to paid work experiences.

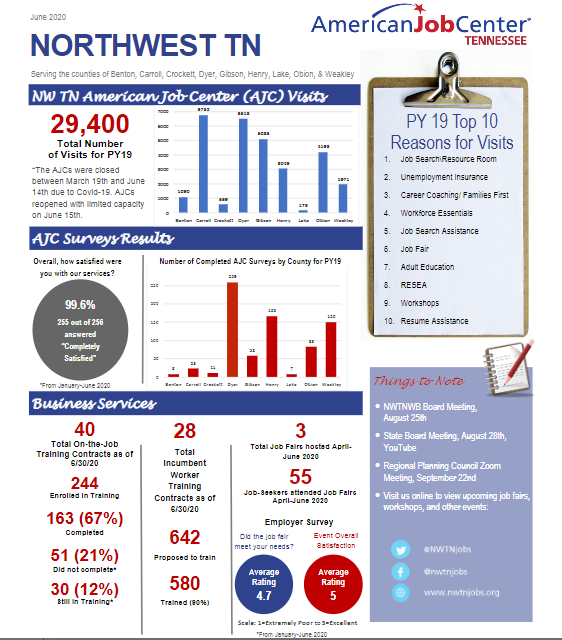
#### Partially Integrated Data Systems

Tennessee’s Jobs4TN case management system (Geographic Solutions’ Virtual OneStop) allows for data sharing among WIOA Title I, II, III, RESEA, and SNAP E&T. TANF and Vocational Rehabilitation use separate case management systems through the state Department of Human Services, which poses logistical challenges. NWTN outlined data sharing guidelines in the MOU and OSO contract to help partners track and share data, including the following work-arounds:

The OSO — which manages welcome and intake functions — makes and tracks referrals in the Jobs4TN system for WIOA Title I, II, III, RESEA, and SNAP E&T referrals. The OSO also tracks all referrals manually, which serves as a back-up, allows NWTN to track referrals to partners (e.g., TANF and Vocational Rehabilitation) that do not utilize Jobs4TN, and helps NWTN keep a true picture of all referrals since Jobs4TN system has limited capability to track multiple co-enrollments for an individual.

Clients sign a release of information on their referral form, allowing the OSO to share intake information with partner programs.

Information on outcomes and services for shared clients is pulled and shared among partners on a quarterly basis.



**NW Tennessee Performance Dashboard**

All partners report any additional referrals they make to the OSO each month, so the OSO can keep track of all referrals within the system.

With assistance from the OSO, the Board incorporates all data into a partner dashboard summarizing AJC visits, top reasons for visits, job seeker and employer customer satisfaction, business services (total OJT contracts, incumbent worker contracts, and job fairs), and the unemployment rate.

#### State Policies

While WIOA’s shared performance measures promote service integration among WIOA Titles I – IV, the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development recently took a step to further encourage coordination by establishing enrollment and co-enrollment goals for target programs and populations. For example, the State set a 2020 goal for Northwest Tennessee to co-enroll 50 percent of individuals receiving Trade Adjustment Assistance in the WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker Program. The State also set a 2020 goal for Northwest to serve 309 justice-involved individuals across all programs, and intends to roll out similar goals for other populations with significant barriers in the near future (such as people with disabilities, those who are older than 55, and those who are homeless). Meeting these goals is not the responsibility of any one program, but a shared effort among all the partners (including WIOA Title I, II, III, and IV, RESEA, TANF, and SNAP E&T). This, according to Executive Director Jennifer Bane, gives the partners something specific to strive for and reinforces the collaboration already in place in Northwest Tennessee.

Tennessee also put out other policies that encouraged system integration: a [one-stop system design policy](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/workforce/documents/wfs/WFSPolicyOne-StopSystemDesign.pdf) that outlines the functional teams and their responsibilities, as well as an [MOU policy](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/workforce/documents/ProgramManagement/WFS%20MOU-IFA%20guidance%20updated%2012-1-17-2.pdf) that identifies the required partners, sets expectations for partners to contribute to shared costs, and provides a template for development of the local MOU.

#### The MOU and One-Stop Operator Contract

NTWB’s [MOU](https://www.nwtnjobs.org/images/Policies_Agreements/FINAL_NWTN_MOU_July_2020_signed.pdf) and one-stop operator contract specify roles and responsibilities for each partner as well as the OSO. The OSO coordinating role is new and viewed by the board as “essential eyes and ears” in the center to coordinate and facilitate service integration, make sure the partners are living up to expectations in the MOU, and keep the board apprised of progress and challenges. Prior to selection of the independent OSO in 2017, a trio of partners managed the AJC and handled the welcome/triage roles (WIOA Title I, Wagner-Peyser, and another partner that varied). Today, the OSO has taken on a larger role, responsible for managing and staffing the welcome/screening/intake and initial referral process and acting as the office manager in the comprehensive centers; as well as coordinating monthly cross-functional team meetings, quarterly all staff training sessions, data tracking and sharing, and the performance dashboard for the system.

#### Cost Sharing

All onsite partners contribute to shared costs, including $225,000 in 2020 for the one-stop operator (one coordinator who makes up about half this cost and six part-time staff who handle the welcome/intake process and make up the other half of the cost); shared space (rent, utilities, technology, Wi-Fi/internet) and facility maintenance costs (supplies, cleaning, security); and a portion of the salaries and benefits of two staff to the board that support the entire system (an IT manager and marketing and social media coordinator). The infrastructure funding agreement can be found as an attachment to the [MOU](https://www.nwtnjobs.org/images/Policies_Agreements/FINAL_NWTN_MOU_July_2020_signed.pdf).

Program contributions are determined by full-time equivalent staff (FTEs), except in the comprehensive centers, where contributions are determined by a combination of square footage used and FTEs. Shared costs across the entire NTWB system are currently split among programs as follows:

WIOA Title I staff are in all nine AJCs full time, and WIOA Title III staff make up the majority of staff in the two more expensive comprehensive centers, so those programs contribute to the lion’s share of the shared costs, while the others are in fewer centers and on just certain days and times, so they contribute less. State DOL programs (Wagner-Peyser, Veterans, etc.) also contribute the most because they cover the costs of an AJC in a relatively expensive state-owned building. The three smallest centers are staffed by a single staff person who splits time charged between WIOA Title I and RESEA.

The NTWB hosts quarterly meetings where all partners who are sharing costs discuss progress and any necessary budget changes.

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

Many partners were co-located in the comprehensive AJC prior to WIOA and shared supplies and costs based on FTEs and square footage used. This was nothing new. A consortium of partners shared responsibility for the welcome/intake/triage role.

WIOA’s requirement for an MOU, along with policy and encouragement from the State to contract with an independent OSO, spurred NTWB to take their co-located partnerships to the next level. The partners identified the value-added role of the OSO, including staffing the welcome/intake/referral process, managing data and referral tracking, and overseeing cross-functional teams — a much more robust and defined role than the consortium of partners had previously played. With formal contracts in place, the service expectations of the OSO were also formalized. The authority of the OSO, in particular as the functional supervisor of AJC partners, was also more defined and formalized.

Getting agreement to share the additional costs of the one-stop operator was not difficult in Northwest Tennessee. State policy urged an independent OSO and, for the most part, partners understood the benefits, so the challenge was to develop a shared vision and understanding of its role and ways the OSO would benefit each partner. Prior to selection of an independent OSO, WIOA Title I, Wagner-Peyser, and TANF were already sharing costs of Title I staff who provided the welcome function in several locations. As those welcome staff are a large portion of the cost of NWTN’s OSO contract, there was not a significant change in costs for those partners (though those Title I staff positions were eliminated). The biggest change was the addition of the cost of the OSO coordinator position dedicated to overseeing the roles and duties of the partners.

Partners saw the value so the trick was making it work within the particular program budget. Since NWTN was not increasing costs to the system much, shared costs were only really an issue for the Adult Education partner due to its five percent cap on administrative costs. NTWB had to be flexible, look for ways to make cost-sharing work within Adult Education’s regulations, and work to keep shared costs down (e.g., by adding more tenants to the buildings). NTWB ultimately made cost sharing work within Adult Education’s statutory limits (and brought in Adult Education as a new partner in the comprehensive centers) by charging it for “space by the hour” for time spent in the comprehensive AJCs and relying on Adult Education’s in-kind donation of TABE testing for all partners as a portion of their contribution.

### Impact

For employer and job seeker customers, the steps NTWB has taken toward service integration have streamlined access to services. Co-location makes accessing services easier for the clients, which is especially important in a large rural area with little transportation infrastructure. Co-location does not stigmatize TANF or other clients who may face multiple barriers or lack job experience; it provides them access to a full array of career services and opportunities to interact in a professional environment with other all other job seekers and employers.

For program staff, the office manager and shared welcome/intake functions managed and staffed by the OSO are a relief, one that allows them to focus on delivering services more efficiently for their programs. Focusing on the shared customer base brings in more foot traffic and broadens the customer pool for all partners, while co-enrollment extends the impact of each program’s funds. Fewer customers are lost because any handoffs are usually within the same building.

From the NTWB perspective, the OSO is invaluable — a dedicated entity to make sure items planned in the MOU are happening and to support the partners’ work toward their stated goals.

However, adding the costs of the new OSO did pose a problem for the TANF partner as it faced shrinking budgets in recent years. TANF was co-located in all AJCs prior to the establishment of the OSO, but adding in new shared OSO costs made it more difficult for the partner to remain co-located. As a result, today TANF is co-located in the Dyer county AJC and one affiliate AJC, but has moved into “free” space in county buildings in the remaining seven counties.

### Peer Advice for Replication

Be aware of real partner program obstacles (e.g., do not just perceive Adult Education as “being difficult”), and be as flexible as you can to achieve the bigger benefit.

*Focus on what we want to achieve — not the things getting in our way and not the things we have to do just because we have to do them, but “what do we want the AJCs to look like and how can we work together to make that happen?” then have a “we’re going to make it work” mindset.*

~ Jennifer Bane, Executive Director, NWTN

Use the OSO contract to establish an independent coordinator who is responsible for managing and driving the integration agenda. Delegate decision making authority to the cross-functional teams and subject-matter experts as much as possible, so that you get full participation and buy-in to the evolving integration strategies.

*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.*