**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Moving Forward: Innovative Disability and Employment Service Delivery**

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JON VEHLOW: Your questions or comments at any time. Welcome to "Moving Forward: Innovative Disability and Employment Service Delivery." So without further ado, I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, David Jones, workforce analyst, employment and training administration, U.S. Department of Labor. David?

DAVID JONES: Great. Thank you, Jon. And good afternoon, everyone. Welcome. As Jon mentioned, my name is David Jones and I'm a Workforce Analyst here at ETA. Today I will be joined with Laura Gleneck from the National Disability Institute as my co-moderator.

Laura supports ETA through our technical assistance contract with Maher & Maher. Laura wears many hats, but the leading one is being our technical assistant project manager for the Disability Employment Initiative supporting 12 grantees across the country. As background, Laura had been supporting ETA since 2001 and we continue to benefit from her historical knowledge and expertise. Thanks, Laura, for being my copilot today. Laura.

LAURA GLENECK: Thanks, David. It's great to be here and an honor to be your co-pilot. My NDI colleagues and I have the pleasure of co-facilitating these cohorts with our Maher team colleagues. And I know we would all agree that it was exciting to learn from the field about their successes, challenges, and innovative ideas to help to continue to build the capacity as American Job Centers to serve all customers.

So I'd like to share a little bit about today's presenters. Today's presenters were selected because of the leadership role they each took for their respective teams to support the cohort.

I'm going to begin with Ashley Clark. She's representing the accessibility team. Ashley serves as the state disability resource coordinator for California's Employment Development Department's Disability Employment Initiative grants. And in her role, Ashley has traveled throughout California to deliver disability related training. She trained workforce area on WIOA Section 188 and implementing universal access, both physical and programmatic.

Representing the customer service team is Keri Osterhaus and Jodi Yanda. Keri serves as the vocational rehabilitation program administrator for the Iowa Department for the Blind, and Keri will share that the growth and successes that she sees in the vocational rehabilitation clients every day is one of the things that motivates her to want to make their experience of working with the Iowa Workforce System a positive one.

Jodi services as the disability services integration manager with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and she has worked in vocational rehabilitation from 25 years. Jodi enjoys her job to strengthen the capacity of the workforce system to more effectively serve people with disabilities and really feels fortunate to work with many people who have a strong desire to improve our system for individuals with disabilities.

And finally, Lance Kaldor, who is representing the employer engagement team. He is a workforce senior consultant for the Iowa Department of Labor. Lance serves as both a disability resource coordinator under the Idaho Disability Employment Initiative and the state coordinator for the Ticket to Work Program.

Once of Lance's philosophies is that we cannot complain about the way things are done if we are not willing to aid in finding their solution and implementation. And I believe Lance's motto reflects the sentiment for each of the teams we will soon highlight.

So David, I'm going to turn it back to you.

MR. JONES: Great. Thanks, Laura. And each of the presenters you described are really helping move things forward in the workforce system and I'm really grateful that they can join us today. And so I'd like to take a brief moment to go over today's webinar objective that will largely correspond with the flow that we will follow.

First, Laura and I will provide historical context about the cohort.

Second, we want you to hear from the cohort team members themselves as they highlight team activities and key outcomes, and identify strengths in barriers that surfaced during their team discussions. And that's really important because that gives us a baseline as we continue to move forward and also they are going to share tools and resources developed by the team through a directive systemic challenge.

Third, we'll make sure we take time to hear from you to engage in Q&A for dialogue.

And finally, as we wrap up, we want to make sure you are informed about WorkforceGPS resources support you in your everyday work. So let's get started.

A common question I'm often asked is why develop a cohort? And on this slide you will note a visual of people being populated to form the map of the United States. And that image really speaks to the spirit of our cohort process of having inclusive peer-to-peer exchanges to jointly address issues. This is not a top-down approach coming from Washington, DC.

This is the sixth time ETA hosted a cohort. The strategies we have applied in our cohort project have continued to evolve over time and how we continue to tackle systemic issues. ETA recognized the importance of using this format again to broaden the national dialogue on disability employment to help further build momentum stemming from WIOA.

Laura will briefly describe the process that was taken for this cohort.

MS. GLENECK: So the process including both cross state collaboration, which was confined to our virtual sessions. And team time, which was confined to the reflection and action activity. It combined team meetings within one's own state or region with cross state collaboration with other state teams within the cohort.

The use of technology was a significant component to help bridge connections. Cohort members used virtual session to collaborate within their state and across states. They also use an online platform to engage in peer discussion and share information and resources stemming from team assignments. Overall, the cohorts serve as an innovation lab.

The cohort provided a chance to step back from the daily grind to identify systemic challenges, think innovatively, and develop resources as a means to improve service delivery within the 2,400 American jobs centers. Basically, it served as an innovation lab for ideas that drive integration, for both improved efficiencies and help foster a national peer-to-peer network addressing disability employment issues.

MR. JONES: That's right Laura. From the very beginning, this process was all built on the foundation stemming from three guiding challenge questions established by ETA. We're addressing accessibility - Our challenge question was how might we further maximize physical and programmatic assets for customers with disabilities using the server trees of American Job Center?

For customer service, how might we insure individuals with disabilities experience seamless customer service across WIOA programs. And for employer engagement, how might we more effectively engage employers with recruiting, hiring, and training job seekers with disabilities as an integrative strategy of the American Job Center service delivery?

Last year when ETA began designing this framework of the cohort, we really weren't sure if states would be able to commit staff resources to engage in this national initiative. But throughout the pre-planning process, I kept thinking of a quote from Field of Dreams, the baseball movie, and it went like "if you build it, they will come."

And the good news is that many applications were submitted. Overall, the national interest was strong. This map highlights the cross section of 18 states that joined the workforce innovation cohort on disability and employment.

MS. GLENECK: That's right, David. ETA built it and they did come. The following the states that represent each of the three teams of the cohort. The Accessibility Team was comprised of representatives from five states, Alabama, California, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Virginia.

The customer service team was comprised of representatives from six states, predominantly from the Midwest and included Iowa, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma; and the employer engagement team including representatives from southern states, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Idaho, Maryland, New York, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

MR. JONES: The makeup of the cohort team has probably what makes this process so unique and dynamic. We had representation from all WIOA core program partners and other key

stakeholders. This really speaks to the vision of WIOA in working together as one. The breakdown of the 124 participants were the following: We have 30 participants from WIOA Title I program; 21 participants from the WIOA Title II program.

There are 14 participants from the WIOA Title III Program. There were 42 participants from WIOA Title IV, two individuals representing equal employment opportunity offices, and finally 15 individuals representing economic development and other disability partners. You know, Laura, when I see these 124 people working together as one, it does remind me of a quote from American industrialist, Henry Ford who once said “coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress; working together is success”. And I think that really captured the essence of how the programs work together in this cohort.

MS. GLENECK: I love that David, and I think all of us who have the opportunities to co-facilitate it would definitely agree with you. So earlier I alluded to the cohort process of being an innovation lab. And I love innovation. That's very cool. To help bring those innovative ideas to fruition, this slide highlights the different stages each of the three cohorts talk to address their challenge question established by ETA. The process was modeled after the human centric design approach to better understand the needs of the customers who are certain.

It was really a customer-centric focus. So this slide gives you a snapshot of our timeline. Between November and January we research together, we started by listening to each other to get new ideas. In February we began to synthesize the material to identify patterns. In March, from the knowing information collected, we brainstorm new ways to serve our customers. In April we began prototyping and testing the project to get feedback from others and this month we are here to share and disseminate our capstone products.

MR. JONES: Throughout the six-month process beyond the great support of the NDI and Maher of Consulting, we had a team of DOL folk to guide each of the cohort teams. They became known as our DOL champions. And if we were to apply baseball terminology again, they were our umpires to help observe, monitor, and provide support to each of the teams on behalf of DOL.

Monitoring the Accessibility Team with Kirk Lew from ODEP. Kirk shared that the opportunity to work with and guide the accessibility cohort was a great opportunity to better understand the innovation and creative solution that the states are using to address their state accessibility challenges. Monitoring the customer service team was Laura Tremontana and Patrick Dennis from ETA and monitoring the employer engagement team were ETA leaders, Heather Graham and Steve Rietzke from ETA.

I want to personally thank each of them for their leadership and support in this process. We were a great team. And at this point I would like to transition it to Ashley Clark whose is representing the accessibility team. Ashley?

ASHLEY CLARK: Thank you, David. Hello everyone. Again, my name is Ashley Clark from the sunny state of California and I will be summarizing some of the work covered by the collective team for the accessibility cohort. In the beginning of the project, we were tasked with addressing the questions of how we might further maximize physical and programmatic access for customers with disabilities using the services of the American Jobs Center.

However, our questions start to change when we discover that each state has a different view and perspective on universal access and how we might go about using physical and programmatic accessibility to achieve it. After a lot of discussion, we discovered that in order for universal access to be realized, we have to ensure that all individuals walking into the American Job Centers are able to access services regardless of whether or not they disclose a disability or any other barrier to employment.

In the end, we agreed upon changing our challenge question to how might we increase inclusivity of a diverse population of individuals in the workforce system and in the workforce through universal access training and inclusive program support.

For our team activities, we look to identify issues that either have supported or have hindered reaching greater access – accessibility within the job centers. By taking a deeper look at some of these barriers, we were able to define a common understanding of universal accessibility and formalize it into our state specific purpose statement.

For example, one of Oregon's purposes is to develop and operationalize universal access training activities, resources and tools for Worksource Oregon staff using the implementation science framework. In order to achieve these trains of thought as a collective, we decided to use the implementation science framework, which is used to inform systemic change and we were able to use the three drivers of change to identify existing strengths and barriers for our states and as a collective.

The three drivers of change were capacity, leadership, and organization. The cap- – capacity driver is defined as the strategies that can help improve and sustain an intervention that will help produce the desired results. This could include factors such as training approaches, coaching methods that are used to actively support the change in the behaviors of the system.

The leadership driver focuses on how to provide the right leadership strategy for the types of challenges that arise from the change in management process. So we want to look at who is needed to make the decisions, provide guidance and support the organizational functioning.

The organizational driver involves mechanisms to create and sustain a hospitable organization and system environment for effective services. These factors can include using data to determine action, applying technology in a deliberate way that adds value, and vigorous attention to reducing barriers and increasing alignment across all levels of an organization.

And then in the end we came up with our outcomes of sharing our capstone plans and developing strategies to expand our go teams beyond the cohort membership. And this is going to vary from state to state depending on who is needed to be brought to take the table in order for the capstone projects for each state to be approved, developed, and implemented. Let's go over some of the strengths that were identified for our cohort.

The first strength identified was bridging knowledge. Bridging knowledge is the participation and cross inter agency system work groups and for a few states this was identified as a major strength. For example, in Virginia this was a strength because they currently have a task force that includes multiple agencies that come together to look at accessibility throughout the state.

The next strength is co-location. Co-location is the successful impact of co-location in the American Jobs Center and for states such as Oregon and Massachusetts, this – these were areas where they excelled.

Then there's communication, messaging from mid-level management and other state and local leaders. For Alabama, this was definitely a strength of theirs where they informed us of how they have built relationships and are able to take ideas for changes and growth directly to the governor. And then we have utilizing data. States that conduct surveys and are able to use the data to inform continuous improvements.

For California, this was identified as one of our strengths because we constantly run and collect data regarding how many individuals with disabilities are being served in the job center systems and from this data we're able to identify what some of the barriers and what changes need to happen in order to eliminate those challenges.

Next we'll cover the barriers identified. For the barriers that were identified, a few of us realize shortly into the process that it is very necessary to gain buy in from all levels of state leadership and this goes across – against – across all states. We realized that some states have state level leadership at the table, but there's also local and regional leadership that needs to be involved in moving some of these projects forward.

Next is collecting information. Many states they that they weren't exactly surveying and gathering data on training needs and customer service satisfaction. For Oregon and Virginia, these were areas that they pointed out wanting to work on and for Virginia specifically, they're currently working on moving forward a survey and looking at surveying their customers.

As a group, we also looked at co-location as a barrier as it's not a regular practice in a lot of states. And what we came to realize is that because some of the barriers in accessing the job centers, whether it's physical accessibility or programmatic, there aren't as many individuals with disabilities accessing the job centers. Instead, they're utilizing other resources such as local voc rehab agencies and other partners. And we wanted to try and identify where some of those gaps in the services may be coming from.

Next we identify training as a barrier for a few states as there is not a standardized statewide training. And in many of our discussions we talked about how we could create a training that is accepted throughout the state and could be rolled out in whatever shape or form to assist frontline staff and delivering services.

For example, in California, we currently deliver in person trainings but they're part of our Disability Employment Initiative and we haven't really taken off or gained momentum throughout the states and for other states like Alabama, they're also looking into how they can develop a statewide training and possibly include it as part of the of their AJC certification process.

And the last barrier addressed was disability expertise. Since we are all trying to serve a wide range of people with disabilities, the question came to light of how do we provide assistive technology for everyone to ensure that everyone has equal access to the job centers. And then how do we maintain that assistive technology with all the updates and changes in providers, changes in customers, and changes in staff that occur on a regular basis.

The moving into our capstone tools and resources section, here is where we worked on developing our capstone project and trying to identify which areas where there were barriers for our state that we wanted to address and try to identify resources to tackle these issues. As mentioned before, first we wanted to collectively define universal accessibility.

So moving into our capstone tools and resources, we were able to define universal accessibility as ensuring the AJCs are ADA and WIOA Section 188-compliant and welcoming to all people, including people with disabilities. We also want to ensure that there's signage and symbols throughout the job centers to meet communication and learning styles for all customers that access the services.

Next we want to look at programming staff and ensure that they have the training needed to help increase comfort with a diversity of customers, including people with disabilities. We also wanted to look at streamlining processes and this could be policies, procedures, any – for anything that we have in place when individuals enter our center and we want to make sure that everyone is receiving the same level of customer service. And finally, we want to make sure that the job centers have an understanding of both physical and programmatic accessibility including communication access.

So as we moved into our capstone resource, we dive deeper into the implementation science framework. And we use the framework to guide our cohort – the team discussions to help facilitate self-examination of our strengths and challenges, and to help inform our action oriented planning. So after the states were able to decide on their state specific capstone projects, they were – developed their concrete action planning steps.

The first step we have the capacity driver approach. For the capacity driver approach, Massachusetts chose this as their priority driver and for their action steps Massachusetts has decided to develop a technical assistance plan to help support input and help them with the implementation of the seven principles of universal design as well as survey career centers to understand capacity and their level of awareness related to universal accessibility.

For the next priority driver, Oregon chose leadership. For Oregon, they just have decided to meet with the Oregon Workforce Partnership and the Worksource Executive Team to present and discuss project goals and actionable items for the co – from the cohort. And from here the leadership team will identify subject matter experts in order to form a universal access work group from Worksource Oregon core partners.

And last but not least, for the organizational driver, Alabama, California, and Virginia all chose this as their priority driver. For Alabama, they have identified training as one of their priority action steps and they will be utilizing findings from their statewide survey to inform design and staff needs and they will also be engaging the state workforce board to share concepts and training goals to regional and local workforce boards.

Next we have Virginia and they've decided to also develop and deliver universal access trainings and curriculums surrounding some of the identified concepts that were necessary for true universal accessibility, which included Section 188, equal opportunity, assistive technology, program accessibility, and customer service.

And then California has decided to identify upper level management that needed to develop and implement training and will create a town hall meeting in order to gain the buy in from the regional and local levels as well as other stakeholders. So that is all for the accessibility cohort. I will be handing it over to Jodi Yanda and Keri Osterhaus.

JODI YANDA: Good afternoon. This is Jodi Yanda. And Keri and I will be taking turns just reviewing what we learned in the customer service cohort group and the tools and the tools that we developed. The customer service group challenge question was how might we insure individuals with disabilities experience seamless customer service across WIOA core program.

We looked at team activities and outcomes. We looked at the thinking outside the box for inspiration for effective customer service. We talked with our different states and we connected to identify top successes and challenges.

We've brainstormed innovative approaches to identify collective challenges and solutions. We reviewed existing training materials that we had. We identified what was common. We looked at gaps and we have – and our – we had opportunities to build out and provide recommendations for Moving Forward.

Doing this, we were always mindful that whatever we did it would be beneficial to the customers that we served. The key outcome of our customer service cohort group was that we developed a workforce innovative self-assessment tool and a customer service training claims plan framework to support the workforce system. And Keri's going to talk a little bit about our strengths and barriers that we identified.

KERI OSTERHAUS: Thank you, Jodi. As part of the work that we did, we really wanted to focus in on the strengths of each of our programs and found some really wonderful things happening around the country. For example, several states are working to develop common processes across partners.

In Nebraska, they are focusing on building strong partnerships across their WIOA partner programs and as a part of that work, they are building a common intake that includes all of the WIOA programs. Several of our cohorts were extremely interested in this and some have actually been reaching out to Nebraska already to learn about the process that they've been going through and the product that is being developed.

Many of our cohorts are also working on ways to build staff capacity and increasing access for individuals with disabilities. As an example in Iowa, our WIOA programs and the state workforce board established the State Disability Access Committee.

Local area Disability Access Committees were also established. The committee's goals are focused on the physical and programmatic access of the American Job Centers. In addition to providing training and resources to staff to increase knowledge and comfort with technology, providing accommodations, and ultimately serving Iowans with disabilities.

This effort is allowing programs to find ways to align services and leverage resources to better serve all customers. In Nebraska, they've done a lot of work through their access for all initiative in which they have assessed the physical accessibility and technology needs of every American Job Center. They also created a certificate program for American Jobs Center staff that includes the nine module curriculum and focuses on access for participants.

All of our cohorts have several examples of ways to build cross agency partnerships, but one that stuck out was in Indiana where they decided to be more proactive in having staff of partner agencies to recognize in helping staff partner agencies to recognize the need and benefits of working together to support all individuals including those with disabilities. They realized that they needed to start by understanding each other and how each program worked.

Through this, they have started a train the trainer project to develop staff capacity across all of the programs as they work to build partnerships. Missouri has been really focused on partnership across programs and looking at how to leverage resources to develop effective strategies in connecting with businesses.

Through the nexus group, they have businesses, partner program staff, and providers working together to meet the needs of businesses and job seekers. They created a system in which there are one point connection so employers aren't overwhelmed and are more willing to partner. They found this approach to be helpful in that the programs can be explained to the business thus avoiding confusion and as a result have assisted many people in finding employment.

In looking at some of the barriers across our cohort, we recognized that we really needed to have a comprehensive and ongoing disability focus training strategy. We realized that we were all interested and saw a need for a common intake process to assist in developing a more seamless approach to serving persons with disabilities and most importantly that all of our efforts needed to be focused on ensuring that the work that we are doing increases the customer experience and outcomes across all programs.

Our cohort agreed that we first needed to understand where our staff was that in their knowledge and comfort around serving individuals with disabilities and turned our capstone project to focus on two tools, a customer service self-assessment tool and a training plan framework.

We developed a self-assessment tool to assist programs in recognizing how their current customer service delivery system was working as it related to serving individuals with disabilities. We wanted to program staff to be able to understand not only the individual strengths of their team but also where the workforce staff felt they might need some additional support in training. We felt it was important to also incorporate feedback from customer service surveys and focus groups as a part of this process.

Our intent is that the tool itself should be completed by both state and regional or local area WIOA partners but also that each state could include others they felt would add information and value to the assessment. The questions are focused around knowledge of serving individuals with disabilities, disability awareness and etiquette, service delivery and training needs of partner staff.

For example, within the survey it asked staff to self-identify knowledge in serving program participants with different types of disabilities and accommodation needs. It also asks questions focused on knowledge of universal access and familiarity with assistive technology devices available in the local One-Stop or American Jobs Center. The assessment itself is meant to be customized within each state.

Participants in the survey would complete the survey individually and we really wanted to stress that it is important that the survey be completed across all partner programs and that representatives included individuals from all levels, including those who are directly serving the customers there in the field up through management and leadership teams.

A leadership group of cross agency representatives should also be formed to review the information but then provided through the self-assessment tool to inform the development of the next step, which would include a cross partner training so that we can more effectively serve individuals with disabilities as they work to pursue their employment goal. And I'm going going to turn it back over to Jodi to discuss then the training plan framework.

MR. JONES: And Jodi, you might be on mute right now if you're speaking. You might need to unmute your phone.

JODI YANDA: Sorry about that, you guys. As the core work group worked, we were limited by the timeline and how far we could develop the resources. So we ultimately presented this all right for two audiences. The first is for state tuition develop craft training, partner training to improve services, models, and strategies to better serve individuals with disabilities and then to ETA champions who can view the resources as the guide to what future technical assistance products and tools are needed by the field.

In order to ensure that people with disabilities experience seamless customer services across the partners and programs, we felt that all staff understand the importance of knowing and understanding how to interact and provide services to customers who have a disability. Well, the framework that we outlined was looking at the objectives, needs, strategies, and curriculum considerations and needs to be addressed when training the WIOA partner programs to provide seamless customer service.

We looked at a framework and the framework that we want to be considered is needed to – that we need to support, sorry. The development of training materials, evaluation of staff knowledges, planning for training needs, creating training outlines, and other training related tasks.

When we looked at some of the topics that felt were important, we felt that it was important to review the WIOA Titles I, II, III, and IV and now also our other partners such as jobs corps and YouthBuild. We felt it was important to look at an answer and provide training on the ADA Section 188 of the WIOA. And then look at what universal access is. We also felt that we need to review resources such as the Job Accommodations Network.

We felt that we really needed to focus on specific disability training such as deaf and hard of hearing, mental health, and cognitive disabilities to name a few. We're hoping that this will be used as a framework for people to go forward and develop the training or if we can get additional assistance, technical assistance, maybe it'll actually help develop the curriculum. David, I'm going to hand it over to you now.

MR. JONES: Great. Thank you, Jodi. And this has been very insightful. And before we go into the polling question, I'd just like to make an observation. You know, as we listened to these presenters, we realized that there was really no one size fits all approach. You know, every team really took a unique perspective in evaluating the challenge question.

Like for instance, with accessibility, they look very much inward and they were trying to figure out which are the drivers would be best for them. Would it be the capacity? Would it be leadership? Would it be organizational? And for the customer service team, they took a more outward approach.

They kind of looked at their strengths and barriers, but they developed a framework that could be useful for the broader workforce system including the self-assessment tool and a training plan framework. And I think that's very insightful in terms of there's no one size fits all approach. And so I think that's really commendable.

So what we'd like to do it, we'd like to transition with a commercial break and having a polling question. And the polling question is the following. What barriers have you experienced when it comes to employer engagement?

And we have four options and you can choose more than one. You can choose all four if you'd like to. But the options are A, providing employers with relevant tools and resources; B, growing and maintaining relationship with employers; C, measuring the success of engagement with employers; and D, getting the conversation started with employers. So take a moment and choose one or all and we'd like to see the results. So we'll be quiet for a moment here.

Thank you for continuing to respond. We're still seeing more responses. So we'll just give it a few more seconds. Well, at this point, let's stop the polls and Laura and I will take a look at this together. Laura, looks like our leading one is letter C, which is measuring the success of engagement with employers. And I believe that is around 89 respondents.

And then we had letter D as runner up, Laura, getting the conversation started with employers. And third, very close, growing and maintaining relationships with employers and very close to letter A, providing employers with development tools and resources.

So it does seem, Laura, like letter C, measuring – seeing the results. It's something that is important for the field in terms of knowing what the outcomes are. So for measuring the success of engagement with employers. Laura, do you have any thoughts on that further or anything that surprised you about the poll?

MS. GLENECK: Yeah. Well, I will say, being part of the training and technical assistance at the national level, all of these we have seen in the field and I particularly like that they chose C because it shows how much the workforce that really cares. It's not just a service. They want to ensure that when they're engaging employers they're receptive. So I think I'm surprised by it, but in a really good way and that says a lot about the workforce group.

MR. JONES: Great. Thank you, Laura. I agree. So at this point we would like to transition it to the employer engagement portion of the Webinar and Lance, at this time. I will transition it to you. Lance?

LANCE KALDOR: Thank you, David. Good afternoon everyone. I'm hopeful that you're beginning to see how these capstone projects are creating a web of security and support for an individual with a disability barrier. The employment engagement group had a challenge question of how might we more effectively engage employers with recruiting, hiring, and training job seekers with disabilities as an integrated strategy of the American job service delivery.

It's rather interesting that our group had this simply because our group made up from Idaho, Hawaii, New York, Tennessee, Maryland, South Carolina, and DC are both urban and rural states with large spaces in between. And so we all kind of had a different perspective as to how to engage employers in every state. The employer engagement cohort met as a group and as subgroups in the cohort classroom settings via emails and conference calls.

One of our first tasks was to find the common ground in all of our thinking. We did this by connecting two states at a time to discuss best practices and barriers. One of the first barriers was unilaterally across all of the states was not knowing what the other agencies and organizations were doing when contacting a business or employer.

We discovered that many employers were being accessed two to three times a week by different agencies and organizations and the employer's needs were still not being met. We discovered many employers have skill gaps that a person with disability candidate cannot meet, not because they can't, but because the job coaches, performance evaluators, and trainers were not aware of specific skills needed because job descriptions do not get an accurate description of the position. We realized early on that in order to find specific job desires we needed to create better understanding of business needs and in this course that would lead to better relationships.

We discussed lengthily the strengths and barriers that a person with disability agencies and businesses go through in trying to create rewarding career positions and pathways. I want to share some of the strengths that the cohort identified. In the discussion we had in the very beginning, it was evident that we were a group that has a strong passion for inclusion and career development in the workplace.

We also realized that because of our diversity within the group, we had a wealth of cross agency information and could leverage that to make stronger working relationships with business employers and assisting a person with a disability together than as separate entities. We realized that businesses needed to be approached to singularly and not as a whole because no two jobs are the same and just as no two businesses are exactly alike. Thus, we were all using similar yet different customer centric approaches.

If we looked at them as a whole, we could take the best of all the designs away for all to keep the customer centric approach. With an all agency concept of introduction, specific employer question so the agencies/organizations are all asking the same or nearly the same question only once. We identified that the cohort states are conducting active research on employer/businesses to gain insight into specific job tasks that are not readily available in the first time meeting.

The cohort members discovered that we had vast knowledge of the benefits of hiring a person with a disability and the abilities to focus and highlight on the individual's skills, talents, and abilities. Because our group was made up of such diverse states, there have a large consideration on the tools specific states that were using as well as the tools available at the national level. Because the state specific items, states had a huge success with the tool where readily supplying the information to other states. This was very apparent in New York where they have a lot of memos of understanding with other agencies to share that information.

This informational strength is what really guided us to our capstone project that I will share in just a few moments, but first I want to share some of the barriers we ran into. The cohort discovered we had some common barriers we were running into. Some I have mentioned earlier and will specify some of those now.

The first barrier we hit upon was the employer's misconception of hiring a person with disabilities. Issues such as the employer's fearful of the liabilities connected to the business in hiring a person with disabilities, i.e., what if they get hurt or what if someone else gets hurt with a connection to the employment of the person with disability?

On the same front, one of the biggest difficulties we discovered was getting past the gatekeepers of a business to share our tool and the resources with employers that could help in these situations.

Here, again, we struggled with the fragmented work histories of candidates and seeing new approaches to these like apprenticeships, but the cohort states lacked all the necessary information to get up to date knowledge to help make an apprenticeship with an employer or business possible and useful for a person with disability.

We stumbled a bit on states differences in rural states at versus metro states. There was definitely a need to step out of our silos and see the states as different and may work, may not work there with one and not the other and thus the centric approach to all of our different concepts.

With this siloing, we discovered that it also applied to our own agencies and the need for advancement across cross agency collaboration and knowing where we might all in varying processes discussed and explode in the cohort process. The siloing is causing a lack of shared messaging and the employer and organizations have become frustrated that they are being confronted by numerous agencies all selling the same concepts, just in different wrapping paper.

We discovered these barriers could all be composed in some basic questions with varying answers based upon the employer's response. Thus, allow me to move us along to the employer engagement capstone. When we began this process, we actually divided into subgroups that were going in the same direction but on two completely different pathways. It was rather interesting to see. When we discovered that we brought everybody back together and found that merging the path, we came to one conclusion.

What all saw needed to happen with a transparent tool for communication. So no matter what agency/organization or how long in the field the initial approach to an employer would lead the resources and tools provided on the national, state, and local levels. The cohort wanted the tool to be readily available to the new person with disability employment practitioner as well as the returning to the field practitioner and a seasoned practitioner.

The cohort created a tool that can easily address building a successful relationship with tips from around the cohort states. The cohort created and approved a standardized script that only requires a fill in the blank with the practitioners information, no matter how new or seasoned the practitioner is, the tool allows for the continuing evolution of the relationship to turn into a full partnership that creates a continuous pipeline of capable and qualified individuals that all share some type of a disability.

To give you an example of the tool, let's say you're entering a new business and you hope to have hire one of your people with disabilities. You have negotiated your way to the decision maker in the organization and you begin to ask a series of questions. Based upon the answers, the practitioner can follow an easy pipeline to follow up questions to meet the employer's needs.

These follow-up questions then lead down through the pipeline so the practitioner can minimize the set of available resources to those that meet that particular employee's business needs. The practitioner can find easy sites on a national, state, and local level. As the tool allows for the state and local customization so you would follow the pipeline down and if you were looking at a national level, you could give them those resources. If you are looking at state, those resources would be there as well as on a local level, as well.

One of the other concepts that came out of this cohort is the need for integrated agency in organizational teams. This concept actually developed organically out of how we are going to measure success of the tool. Because practitioners come in all shapes and all sizes, we will need to connect to gathering information on the tool's success.

Success will be measured by the increased number of employment opportunities for people with disabilities and thus a listing of those unemployment and seeking assistance from VR to get to work and other employment based organizations. Because we all need to communicate to find the successes, we will more readily be sharing success stories and discovering employment prospects.

Plus one agency will be sharing what they know about the employer and thus decreasing the number of time agencies and organizations call upon a single employer. It will be encouraged that the agencies create partnership plans, create specific data gathering sites, and MOUs for data sharing. Some states have excellent examples like I already mentioned with New York; processing those MOUs and data sharing.

That concludes my portion of the employer engagement. I'm now going to hand the presentation back over to David.

MR. JONES: Great. Thanks, Lance. And you and your team have done a fantastic job and I think the key take away from listening to your remarks and as well as listening to the other remarks is how all the tools are very customizable. You can really kind of – another state can maybe use this tool and adapt it to their own needs within the state. I think that's really something neat about the tools that you have developed as it relates to employer engagement.

Laura, any other questions or comments for Lance before we go into the general Q&A Session?

MS. GLENECK: No. I think it's the best place to move forward.

MR. JONES: Okay. Great. And at this point I would like to – I'm going to transition it to Laura Gleneck. She's going to facilitate the Q&A. We have been receiving questions that have been coming in and so we will begin that process now. So Laura, would you like to ask the first question?

MS. GLENECK: Certainly. So we do have some questions coming in, but I'm going to start with all of the cohort representatives. And I'm going to ask you, each of you, what was your greatest aha learning moment for you personally or the teams during the cohort experience? I love when we go to meetings and they go around at the end and ask what the a-ha learning moment is.

So I'm going to start with Ashley Accessibility Team. Ashley, you can say what your a-ha moment was or something that was shared during your cohort.

MS. CLARK: Okay. So I think one of the greatest aha moments that I truly enjoyed during our conversations was when we talked about Universal Accessibility and someone brought up the fact that Universal Accessibility truly is not just about individuals with disabilities. When they made that comment and stated that Universal Accessibility should be about providing services to anyone who enters the job centers system and ensuring that they have the tools and resources in order to receive services, it was great.

I thought it was a great turning point for our conversation and it helped everyone to shift their little microscope and turn it away from this group, this population that we have come to focus on so whole heartedly and think about what would make the job center system as a whole greater. So that was my a-ha moment.

MS. GLENECK: I love that, Ashley. And I'm going to mix things up again. We had a question around that. So David, I'm going to look – turn to you. The question was, is there a standardized definition for Universal Accessibility?

MR. JONES: Well, one of the things that WIOA had done is compared to WIA is really emphasize programmatic and physical accessibility. And the regulations are very clear that – at least at the state level, the state board establishes the standard for what universal access is for the American Job Center. And if it's the local board that then kind of monitors and evaluates based on those state standards. But in terms of one national across the board, universal access standard, there is not because it's very much state driven.

Yet at the national level, we do have great tools that can be very useful to you. The Office of Disability Employment Policy - they established the Section 188 guide on accessibility and this is something that was released about a month or two ago. And I definitely recommend that you access that resource because it really can not only help define but also provide a lot of applications.

And so that is largely the guidance from WIOA in terms of the state board largely establishing the accessibility standards at the state level.

MS. GLENECK: Great. So great question, Ashley. And that led into one of our participant questions. Now I'm going to take it back and I'm going to look to the customer service team. And Jodi, I'm going to start with you. What was your greatest aha learning moment or one that the team might've thought up?

MS. YANDA: I think my greatest moment was listening to all the tapes that were part of the cohort group and listening to the great things that they've done. And I know that things are happening out there, but I think feeling about it makes a big difference. And also really realizing that there are people willing to support individuals with disabilities and other people, other WIOA programs or partner program are willing to step up and help. So that was my greatest moment.

MS. GLENECK: Great. Thank you for that Jodi, and Keri, I'll look to you.

MS. OSTERHAUS: I really have to agree with Jodi. One of the, I think biggest out of being a participant in this cohort was through those peer-to-peer connections that we've had with all of our cohort team members hearing not only the barriers that were happening, but also the successes, being able to learn from each other and helping each other really find ways to address some of the challenges.

And not only addressing the challenges that we were focused on, but also looking at day to day work and through a lot of the conversations we were having at the cohort level, we found so many resources for areas that I guess we're really important to me for so many new things going on and just always trying to find resources. So I guess, again, just that recognition that we are all looking for support and resources and that we just have to reach out to each other and ask for it.

MS. GLENECK: Thank you for that, Keri. And that's my a-ha moment, too. I really love how some successes touched challenges and some challenges connected with successes. So that was really cool.

So Lance, your Employer Engagement – (inaudible) – last, but that's not always a bad thing. So Lance, what was your a-ha learning moment?

MR. KALDOR: I think for me personally, it comes back to that silo concept. And it – and I feel fairly confident when I talk about if it may have been an a-ha moment for probably all of our states was that we try to work very hard at not being siloing.

But when I was hearing some of the other states share some of their information and some of their tools and some of their barriers, there were a number of times that I had to step back and go, wow, I didn't know that. I have myself trapped in my own little Idaho bubble. And I sometimes forget that there a big wide world out there.

And that became an overarching mission of our tool was to, again, national state, local levels to put those things out there, to know that we have those resources out there, that we have those people we can go to.

For instance, Hawaii did a reverse job fair in their capitol building and to hear Hawaii talk about it, it is really, truly an inspiring concept. And that was another one for me because I had never really thought of that. And since the end of the cohort, I've been in contact with Hawaii to talk to them with like how do I make that happen in Idaho?

MR. JONES: Great. Thank you, Lance. And we got a question or actually a comment from Cornell University and I'll go ahead and read it. Hello. I just wanted to make you aware of a 21 module curriculum we have developed at Cornell Yang Tan Institute with NIDILLR. And they're part of HHS with NIDILLR funding.

At this point in time, it is free to use and incorporate most of the training needs are identified by these cohort and that website is the following: www.buildingdiversitypartners.org again, www.buildingdiversitypartners.org and a shout out to Cornell for that feedback and glad we could share it with the workforce system. Thank you.

MS. GLENECK: Great. Thank you for that, David. Thank you Cornell for sharing this. So all of the cohorts have been talking about kind of the cross state cohort experience and all of us, the co-facilitators who are part of that. That's just a tremendous outcome of it. So I want to now look to all of you again and ask you, are there any additional strategies that your state or local area plan to implement that's coming from – stemming from the cross state cohort experience.

And it could be some of the things that you touched on and you can talk each about your own respective states. So this time, Lance, I'm going to start with you. You know, are there any additional strategies based on what you want – that you're going to be implementing in Idaho?

MR. KALDOR: So one of the things that I took from the cohort process that I'm going to give it the old college try to implement is to try to bring all our agencies together. When I speak with all the different agencies, it – WIOA – the concept of WIOA is that we all work together, but yet we don't really come all together to talk about this is what we're doing, this is – hey, I approached this business and I got this. So I would like to see Idaho create a group of individuals that are in the field working with employers to come together and say that and I think I can pull that together. So that would be mine.

MS. GLENECK: Okay, great. Thank you for that, Lance. So I'm going to look to you, Jodi in Minnesota. Are there strategies that Minnesota is going to implement coming from the cohort?

MS. YANDA: There's a couple of different strategies that we're looking at implementing and one is really related to the disability training. We're going to set up a formal training for all individuals that work in our AGCs.

And then the other thing that we're piloting in one of our AGCs starting in June is that all the counselors in that AGC that through all the title programs and partner programs are going to meet once a month and they're going to talk about – they're going to go – they're actually going to have some training session regarding relapse – relevant topics.

So I think the first one coming up is they're going to talk about autism and how to work with individuals with autism. And then they're also going to bring – doing case studies. So they're going to bring a difficult case and just kind of strategize what that case looks like.

And then the other thing that we're in the planning stages with and where we formed a committee is to – one of the things that we talked about, the customer service cohort group is to look at a common application or common intake form for – as a way that we can do kind soft handoffs for individuals that are walking into the AGCs.

So we've been meeting with and talking with Nebraska and Iowa and we have a couple other states to go to that have been – that have already implemented it. So that's been extremely helpful.

MS. GLENECK: Great. Thank you for that, Jodi. And I'll look to you, Keri. What about in Iowa?

MS. OSTERHAUS: Sure. So some of the things we're currently doing as part of – a large part, really, of our disability access committees across the state have been to look at customers and bringing customers in to essentially do some focus groups around the customer service – their needs in receiving employment related services and how we're doing as a workforce system in providing those services. So we were looking at that.

We have also done surveys of our partner staff, our workforce staff to really start looking at what are the areas of need you have in either knowledge in serving customers with disabilities, in just accessing Assistive Technology or other accommodations as you're moving forward. And then we're also starting – or we've developed a series of trainings that have been created by several of our core partners that we're getting ready to share.

And then I think the last piece is we are also just trying to find a way. I guess the piece that we're working towards is finding that way to have a more – oh, seamless I guess process for referring customers back and forth including that feedback loop and following up on how those services are going. So I guess that's kind of where we're at right now – what we're doing.

MS. GLENECK: Great. Thanks for that, Keri. I think that's cool. So you're also giving some additional strategies to the field. So Ashley, let's to you and in terms of California, what additional strategies are you looking at?

MS. CLARK: Well, one of the strategies that kept coming up during this cohort were the work groups, task forces, technical assistance, and all of those groups that could come together in order to implement change.

And for California, it was kind of like a light bulb that went off where we realize we have a lot more resources available for serving people with disabilities and trying to create some of the policy changes and enforcing the trainings that we're thinking about that we didn't realize or never thought to engage before. So that's going to be one of our strategies moving forward, trying to tap into resources like voc rehab that does physical accessibility training.

And we have the California Committee for Employment of People with Disabilities where they are a policy driven group that connects with the governor to implement and drive changes for serving people with disabilities. So we really want to try to get that moving and get all of that started and I believe that's going to be part of our action plan where we bring together our town hall meeting of the individuals who need to be at the table in order to make that happen. So that will be our first step.

MS. GLENECK: Great. Ashley, now I'm going to turn it to David you for a question that came in. So yeah.

MR. JONES: The question is the following, when you say measuring success, do you mean having the employment be a win/win situation for both employers and employees? The short answer is yes. But I'm going to give you a longer answer just to give you some context as it relates to WIOA.

With employees, one of the things that really significant about customers with disabilities measuring under WIOA, we’re able to be much more granular in knowing about the different disability types that are being served and the outcome from that disability population. That has really been a game changer since WIOA. And one of the things that we've done in ETA and we've been able to highlight that in an infographic on the WIOA reportings that have come from the state on the customers being served.

And later on we'll highlight that report that we have on the Disability and Employment Community of Practice. So that relates to the employee.

As it relates to the employer, I've not been on the performance work group while I did serve on state plan of One-Stop, I'll share with you what I know from where I stand on the performance from what I understand. There is a factor that is working through right now in terms of effectiveness of serving employers and that is a variable that is still being worked through.

And perhaps if you reach out to me after this webinar, I can make sure I inform you where that has landed, but at this point I don't have an affirmative answer on that, but overall it is much more focused on measuring impact against serving the employee and the employer. Thank you.

MS. GLENECK: Great. David, I want to turn now to this is a WIOA Disability and Employment cohort, so I'm going to charge you to ask each of the team a specific question regarding WIOA.

MR. JONES: Sure. Thank you, Laura, for that opportunity. And this is going to be for the customer service team and this relates to WIOA.

The mission of WIOA is to really maximize the seamless experience for the customers using the servitude of an American Job Center and based on your team discussion, you're doing innovative activity, not previously identified that you believe really captured the essence of a seamless customer service in the American Job Center. Because often time people may be questioning what do we mean by seamless customer service? And perhaps maybe there's something that you can identify for the larger group here.

MS. GLENECK: Jodi and Keri, which one of you or both want to respond? And you may just be waiting for the other. But –

MS. YANDA: This is Jodi. I'll start. I think that when we talked about the seamless system, it's really – well, we – and I'm going to kind of speak to about Minnesota a little bit. So in Minnesota somebody will walk into our AJC and they may go to work at the computers in our resource room.

And in that situation the person – our resource staff people may notice that they're really struggling at the computer. What – in a seamless system, we'd be able to ask them questions to figure out what's the reason for that struggling? Is it just they're lacking computer skills where we need to send them to one of our training programs? Or is it maybe disability related? Maybe it has to do with their reading ability or their comprehension.

So really getting that seamless system where we can kind of then have a conversation with that individual and then figure out where – what the next step is with them instead of just kind of living them hang. So I think that's one of the things that we talked about a lot in the cohort group is how do we connect individuals with the services that they need? Keri, is there anything you want to add or discuss?

MS. OSTERHAUS: Yeah. I think – I've just been thinking about strategies related to that customer – that seamless customer service. I think one of the strategies I always look at or think about is the integrated resource team model, in which it's really about involving a diverse group of individuals who are working around as a job seeker who has a disability and finding ways to leverage funding, create or find resources, to assist that individual in moving forward.

And I think when I see the integrated resource team strategy, I guess in the works it's often not about the different programs and now which requirements and whatnot, but it's really about the individual and everybody working together to meet a need.

MR. JONES: Great. Thank you. And I'm going to step in again, Laura, and ask the question. And this can be for the larger group in general. It's not necessarily WIOA-specific, but it could be something that was an aha moment in your group discussions.

And based on your observation, what strategy would you be – would you say is a low hanging fruit that you believe that is often overlooked by state in addressing coordination on disability employment issue? Was there something that maybe of surface where it seems so simple for one state but like overlooked by another that you can identify?

MS. GLENECK: So we're just throwing that out there.

MS. CLARK: There is Ashley. So one of the strategies that we talked about across states were the partners that are in place. For some of the other states, they have the partners from the visually impaired community, from the deaf community, they had a lot of partners already in place. So those partners helped with outreach and bringing people into the job center system and filling some of those gaps in services that were occurring. For other states, this was a challenge.

For some of the other states, they didn't have those key players involved and those tools and resources that were necessary to serve some of these individuals weren't readily available. And so one of the strategies we talked about was how can we share resources across the board and outreach methods across the board so that everybody is able to tap into the same partners and resources that were out there?

And that was one of the greatest helps for us because it kind of gave us an a-ha moment of, OK, well, if we want to outreach to the visually impaired community, then we need to reach out to the society of the blind. We need to reach out to voc rehab. We need to talk to them about the tools they have in place, their resources in order to better serve these individuals. And I think that really occurred across the board where we took a step back and really evaluated what we have in place and where we can make improvements.

MS. GLENECK: I love that Ashley. And I'll tell you something, the community, that's – there's so many resources within the community that the AJCs can tap and likewise there are – the AJCs can be a resource to the community based organization. So I love that you're looking outside to support not only the AJC but you as well.

So let's look to Lance, Keri, or Jodi. Do you want to talk about a loathing sort of strategies that you believe was that's often overlooked by states that you've learned in your cohort? And maybe –

MR. KALDOR: I'll – I'll jump in.

MS. GLENECK: Okay. Great.

MR. KALDOR: So I'll just jump in and I will echo what Ashley said. We need to have – a lot of states, a lot of organizations have workforce development concepts going in their states. But what, in my opinion, what we need to see also is a ground level concept of that so that we're coming together.

Because a lot of times, you'll be at an event and you'll all run into somebody from a vocational rehabilitation association and I'm like, oh, and suddenly we're talking and we're talking about the same things that we don't know what the other side is doing that we don't have that conceptualization of knowing that when I direct somebody to voc rehab or if somebody comes to me and says, hey, I was working with voc rehab and this all broke apart.

That there's no way for us to be able to support one another because those concepts aren't in place. And so just as Ashley said, if we can find a way that we can work together. And again, I think that comes down to just somebody taking the bull by the horn and making it happen.

MS. GLENECK: So Jodi or Keri? Do you want to add?

MS. YANDA: I think as we look at just low hanging fruit or what is something or an easy place to start in addressing all of this for me is really around that self-assessment tool that we talked about earlier. Because it's really about understanding where our staff are today in their knowledge of serving individuals with disabilities and providing accommodations.

And I really think that by just knowing where our staff are at, in respect to serving individuals with disabilities and I mean, staff across all partner agencies, that we can really start to understand where do we need to – kind of that, where do we need to start piece? So and help us to look at what are the training needs we need to look at? What are the assistive technology that we need to bring in? What type of committees or groups or task force do we need to develop? So I guess that's where I would almost start.

MS. GLENECK: Okay. Great. Thank you. I want to really thank all of you for engaging in the questions and the questions that you submitted. Hopefully these are discussions are going to continue and that learned a lot from this. So David, I'm going to turn it back to you.

MR. JONES: Great. Laura, thank you so much for co-moderating. And one of the things that we wanted to do if we can show the slide? Just a moment. Here we go. And so as we wrap up, we wanted to share with you about technical assistance resources on our WorkforceGPS Disability and Community page.

You know, this is a screenshot of our website and you will note the image of two pieces of the puzzle coming together and that image really does reflect the mission of this resource page to help you connect the pieces on resources available. And this site can really support American Job Centers, staff, employers, and individuals with disabilities.

And for those not members of our community, join us so you can stay in the loop about new technical assistance resources we have. And in the second paragraph on this top page, you'll see a hyperlink. So feel free to join our community and 30 other communities within ETA.

This is just one example of a type of resource that we have currently posted. Over the past few months, we posted resources from different federal agencies including SAMHSA, ACL, RSA, ODEP, FEMA just to name a few. And at ETA we recognize that it may not always be clear outside of the DC bubble in which federal agencies have which resources.

So we actually developed a directory as you see on this slide and we took the information previously posted from all those individual agency posting and integrated into one list. And the great thing about technology nowadays that we have GIS software. And this directory largely captured that technology tool and helps you find federal resources in your local area and we believe that is a tool that can really help seamless service delivery.

We also want to make you aware of another resource page and this is the Workforce Innovation Cohort on Disability and Employment. And this is a screenshot of that page. This site is very content rich and I hope you can utilize it. It includes the research resources utilized by each of the teams during the past six months and just this morning we posted the capstone tools and resources at the site, as well, developed by the cohort for your continued reference.

Tomorrow, the Department of Labor will actually be hosting technology day and the theme this year is “Unleash the Digital Workforce” and at ETA we recognize technology and organizational learning can be an effective tool when integrated together. So in the spirit of moving forward, we are planning a new initiative to develop online training modules to build on the successful work of this cohort.

Sometime later this summer we anticipate making an announcement should you wish to be involved in this effort, so please keep an eye out for that. And in the meantime if you'd like to be informed about future announcement in this area, you may reach out to Laura or me and we'll make sure you receive any further notice.

Now, this page includes the contact information for our panel, again, and thank you to each of the panel presenters and all 192 cohort participants. We really appreciate your participation. And finally, on behalf of Laura Gleneck and myself, thank you all for joining.

We do hope you leave today's webinar with some a-ha learning moments, and we wish everyone a nice Memorial Day holiday later this month. Thank you.

(END)