**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Northeast Region Governance Training — Governance Opportunities**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: Welcome to "Northeast Region Governance Training, Governance Opportunities." So without further ado, I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, Jennifer Friedman, Office of State Systems director. Jennifer.

JENNIFER FRIEDMAN: Thank you, Jonathan, and welcome, everybody. Very excited today to be here for our third governance training session. I'm going to quickly go over the agenda and kind of the path we took to get us here today.

And then I'm going to turn it over to my colleagues in the Northeast Region, Amanda and Michael, and they have a great panel presentation that they are going to share with you as well with some great background information on the opportunities portion of what we call the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act. We're focusing on the O today.

So for today's agenda I'm doing the welcome, and then Amanda's going to be reviewing some state practices. Michael's going to have a facilitated panel, and then we're going to have an opportunity to hear from you. There's an open chat opportunity. Last session when we did the innovation, we had some great feedback from the audience and we're looking forward to some great feedback today. And then we're going to follow up with some closing remarks.

Highlight, again, the file share we have below. There's some wonderful information for you there. We have – as Jonathan's showing right now, we have today's PowerPoint but also some case studies that we're going to be sharing with you and also a TEGL that was released, a Training and Employment Guidance Letter that was released this week on that we're going to be referenced in part of the presentation today.

So without further ado, let's talk about our journey for governance training. We started in October with the foundations of governance and my colleagues Reneesa (sp) and Annmarie (sp) joined us for that conversation. And then in November we had high-impact strategic boards, and we talked about maybe the innovations of the board. And today we're talking about opportunities.

We are going to be following up in February with you guys to talk about the – we were talking about the A for the board, WIOA, the A. We want some action. So we're going to reach out to you during the next couple months after these sessions have settled in with you to find out what action steps you have taken and have maybe some peer sharing in February. So we're looking forward to that.

This is a journey we took in the beginning of this year after looking at the state plans, talking to individuals, through monitoring, just having conversations, some of our peer meetings, and, honestly, talking sometimes daily conversations with our state grantees, the boards, and some of our local boards about the impact the COVID has had on their operations and what can they do, what they cannot do. And we really thought this is a foundations time to talk about governance and also where we can be innovative and some of the opportunities we have in the act.

So we put together this training presentation. One of our panelists, Wendi, was just talking about how a lot of trainings go on and how long sessions. So these have been three sessions, and we divided them up once a month to give everyone the chance to absorb what we're talking about and think about some action they've taken.

Instead of doing governance three days in a row, we've given you a little break and doing one a month and kind of separated out because we all know – (inaudible) – some training overload. But this is really important information we wanted to share with you, and so we're excited that we actually – we're here for our third session on our journey.

Like the other sessions, I am going to start with the one workforce vision. If you've been on the other calls, you've heard me talk about this, but before we dive in I want to spend, again, a few moments talking about ETA's one workforce vision.

So you can see from the slide that ETA invests $20 billion in over 2,000 grants, but we also have other public investments in the workforce system with our partners, U.S. Department of Education, Agriculture, and Health and Human Service. I was actually on a call with two of those three partners this morning – (inaudible) – this morning talking about how in the Northeast Region we can all work together to help our – all of our states, which we work together with, understand this one workforce vision and what technical assistance that we can provide to help you guys break down some of these barriers.

So look forward for some other information coming out from ETA and our federal partners because we all are in this one workforce vision together, and we all are working, as is on the slide, to strive to serve the public together. It's interwoven. It's together. Not one of us can do it alone, and that's kind of why you guys are here today, to talk about what opportunities we have in the act and how we can work on your workforce vision and provide the best services possible but not alone but with your partners and what you can do.

So with that, I am actually going to turn it over to Amanda to actually start with us today and take us through some background information before we hear from our panelists. So thank you again for joining us today. We're very excited, and, Amanda, I am very happy to turn it over to you to hear a little bit. Thank you.

Amanda Poirier: Thanks, Jennifer, and good morning, everyone, and thanks for joining again. I'm going to provide some context around governance opportunities, including what they are, and then turn it over to my colleague Michael to ask our panel, all of whom we're very excited to hear from, some questions around governance opportunities.

So the shrinking envelope of innovation, stolen from one of my colleagues and friend, might be one of the most important things to remember today. Sometimes in an effort to do the right thing and be compliant with WIOA, there's a failure to consider the opportunities offered under it.

In this context, the red line is the federal legislation. The next blue line represents federal regulations. And then there is the state line that moves further inside the box, and then the yellow line that moves even further inside the box.

To be clear, I'm not advocating for thinking outside the box, but I am advocating for state and local policies to leverage the act to expose – (inaudible). Why restrict the system further? Let's consider the policies made by states and locals as a way to give context for the regulations, to operationalize it in such a way that allows more people to gain access to services, not less.

As an example, I'd like to offer Maryland and Virginia's layoff aversion policy. Under COVID they decided that businesses needed support to stay open. So they developed layoff aversion policies and that the mission and regulatory requirements of WIOA. This policy is within the confines of the act but provides clarity on what layoff aversion can do for businesses affected by the pandemic and thus help avert layoffs by providing PPE support, as one example, through a clear policy and procedure directive.

The driver behind policies should be to open more doors, not close them. To that end, it is important to ensure that policy does not restrict state and local operations. It's also critical that states and locals do not move so far outside the box that they lose opportunities to innovate. The goal is to capitalize on the flexibility in the law, all while meeting the vision of WIOA.

So whenever you think of your policies and try to develop them, it's important to consider, does this close doors for the system's customers, like jobseekers and businesses, or does it open them?

Before I move any further, let's talk about what are governance opportunities. Governance opportunities are using policies and procedures to maximize the flexibility of the act and/or to capitalize on the vision of the act in the areas that are not clearly defined in your state and locals, opportunity to get creative, and consider how WIOA can support your state and local vision of workforce development.

For the purpose of today's training, we hope you consider this as your chance or opportunity to go back to your board members and some with state staff to the board armed with new knowledge to engage in a conversation around, what should you be doing to support the needs in a state or local area to help businesses and jobseekers thrive? And where does the law offer flexibility to employ creative thinking to solve this challenge, particularly in today's labor and economic climate?

This is your chance to think differently about the regulations in the law. For example, how can the regulations and law support CEOs and boards' vision to help jobseekers and businesses prosper in your community?

A good example of governance opportunities is Rhode Island's dislocated worker policy. Rhode Island noticed that many individuals who had been unemployed as a result of the great recession and not regained their previous wages post-recession.

So the state – (inaudible) – the law in the regulations to provide us some concrete steps on how to determine who is underemployed through an algorithm process and leveraging existing data to open up doors so that individuals who are not considered eligible or at least systemically considered eligible without this policy could now be served under Title I dislocated worker and help those individuals who are not thriving to gain access to services to ensure they get into a career pathway that would afford them more money to support themselves and their families.

There are some opportunities under the – these are some of the opportunities under the act because they are not clearly defined in the act and are underregulated, meaning there is a wide-open path for boards to take these opportunities and run with them. I invite you all to consider these areas and the work that you've done and whether you've closed or opened doors for jobseekers and businesses based on your policies and procedures.

I'm not going to dig into each of these areas because our panel will talk to many of them, but before I move on, I offer one one model, a coordinated business engagement strategy. In Massachusetts, the Massachusetts BizWorks model supports an integrated business service team that has a guidebook for all the services that are available to businesses so that when a Massachusetts state or local representative goes to a business, they are capable of providing a whole suite of services wherever that business is in the business cycle.

This team is not a team that exists in isolation within WIOA. It is a partnership with economic development and other critical partners to help support businesses and allow them to thrive.

Now, helping businesses is a key tenet of WIOA, and yet it's very underdefined. There's so much opportunity here for states and locals to develop policies and procedures to open up doors for businesses, to access services, and help them succeed in growing and contracting labor markets.

And now, I'm going to turn it over to a poll. Just take a second. OK. Thanks, Jonathan.

So for this poll, I invite everyone to just check all the boxes that apply. So what are the barriers to innovation? This policy, is it state or law, law, regulation say that we can't? Is it that this is what we've done in the past? Is it partners, management, et cetera aren't invested? We don't have the resources? It's not my local, region, or state, maybe a territory type issue? Or no one is accountable, or it's something else? And if that's the case, please tell us in the chat.

So you can select – as Jonathan said, you can select multiple answers in this poll, and I'll just give everyone a second to – it looks like we're getting a lot of partners, management aren't invested and we don't have the resources and this policy, lay, regulation states that we can't.

Looks like the winner might be – not that there's really a winner here, but partners, management aren't invested. Give it another moment. Oh, starting to even out a little bit. Thank you, everyone, for posting and providing your feedback. OK.

Well, we're going to turn it over – I'm going to turn it over, actually, to Michael who's going to introduce our panelists. So thank you, Michael.

MR. TOOPS: And thank you, Amanda. So it seems WIOA is kind of aptly named; no? I'm looking at these results from the poll, and there still seems to be some nonbelievers out there. So let's see if we can't convince them otherwise with our panelists because I believe there are many more opportunities under WIOA to innovate.

So I want to – I just wanted to further underscore that I agree that starting with the customer is one of the keys to unlocking innovation. So if we start there, everything else should follow and flow pretty easily. And I especially like the idea of maximizing those should underneath the act.

I'm really kind of excited – I don't know about you – to hear more about how this is all being done in our panelists' states, including managing that shrinking envelope. But before we begin, I want to encourage our listeners to submit their questions via the chat box, and we'll make sure that we raise them throughout our discussion.

When you submit your questions, please indicate if that question is for a particular panelist or for the entire group. That way we make sure we address it to the right person or persons. And I just want to reiterate that listeners will also have the opportunity to raise further questions and share at the end of the panel.

So without further ado, it's my pleasure to introduce our panelists. And first up is Wendi Secrist. She is the executive director of the Idaho Workforce Development Council and has been doing that since 2017. Wendi helped to oversee the transition of the council to an independent agency under the Office of the Governor. The council also serves as the state workforce investment board and oversees the Idaho Workforce Development Training Fund.

Our next panelist is Lee Wheeler-Berliner. And Lee has served as the director for the Colorado Workforce Development Council office for the past six years, and in that role he's helped managed strategies to develop and sustain Colorado's industry-led talent development system.

And finally, Mark Mattke for the past 14 years has served as the chief executive officer for the Spokane Workforce Council where he's helped bring together public and private partnerships to transform Spokane's regional talent development system.

So welcome, everyone, and thank you for joining us today. With that said, let's jump right in with our first question. And so of all the opportunities that we believe are available within WIOA, what board-driven innovations are you most proud or excited about? And, Wendi, let's have you start this off.

WENDI SECRIST: All right. Thank you. And I just have to make one small correction. It's Spokane. Since Spokane borders Idaho, I feel a little bit – (inaudible).

MICHAEL TOOPS: Thank you so much. I knew I'd blow something. Thank you.

MS. SECRIST: I'm sure Mark would have taken care of that as well, but it's the airport that we have to fly into to get to North Idaho. So all right.

MR. TOOPS: Well, you know I'm from Ohio. What can I say?

MS. SECRIST: So I thought it was really interesting to see the poll just a few minutes ago, and the top response was that the partners aren't invested. And I think a lot of what I'm going to talk about today is really – speaks to getting the partners invested.

So as Michael mentioned, I'm executive director of the Workforce Development Council in Idaho. We effectively operate as a single-state workforce board. There's some nuances there, but we operate as a single-state workforce board and serve as both the state board and the local board.

Three years ago we were moved to the governor's office, and that was the first time that the workforce board had been provided with dedicated staff. I was appointed at that time to really coordinate and implement a comprehensive statewide strategic workforce development plan.

And one of the reasons that that shift happened was, quite frankly, employers in the state had gone to our previous governor and said that the system wasn't working for them and that there needed to be more coordination across the partners and a deeper connection to education. And that is something that we feel is a real critical component to success, but not only looking at the workforce partners, the different titles under WIOA, but to also engage education deeply in the work that we're doing.

So the innovation that I want to talk about is our Idaho LAUNCH Initiative, and this is something that we started working on. We started having conversations in late 2019, early January 2020. At our council meeting we talked about the need to create opportunities for individuals who were kind of falling off of what we were calling the benefit cliff.

So when we looked at what TANF and SNAP provides for service for support and where Title I programs can support individuals and so forth, we kind of mapped out where – at what level of – what poverty level do people start falling off of those benefits. And when they are falling off of those benefits, are they really at a sustainable wage? Are they at a spot where one car repair, one medical bill isn't going to put them back on public benefits? And we didn't feel that they were.

On the flip side, you've got – in the education system you've got short-term workforce training that can help these individuals move into a higher-wage job, but they don't qualify for federal financial aid. And we don't have a lot of resources in the state, a lot of scholarship types of programs that can help support people who were access – who wanted to access short-term workforce training.

So seeing that there was a gap there, we started looking at how could we build a program, an initiative in the state that would provide access to short-term workforce training to help people move into the point where they're a little bit more resistant to going back on benefits.

And this actually really – one of our state legislators has been working with our Department of Health and Welfare and has come up with this concept of creating a $2,000 savings account that could either be used for education or for medical bills and was wanting to pursue legislation to establish that. And we said, well, we might be able to do this with other resources, at least on the education side.

So that was where we were in January, starting to talk about a policy, and we're fortunate in Idaho that we have a state workforce development training fund. So we've got the state resources that can augment where federal resources can't be used.

So we started working on the policy, and then the pandemic hit. And we recognized that this program could be a key component of recovery efforts. People across the board were laid off, were – many who were still job-attached, their employers intended to bring them back on, but we knew that the world had changed significantly and that their – they probably needed some different skills when they did go back to work.

So we were able to get $1 million out of our state's CARES Act funds to stand up the program. And we started by serving employers, and we did – we had just a phenomenal response rate to our survey. We worked with all of our industry associations to push the survey out to employers, and I know our numbers – any time we're talking about Idaho, especially when it's a group of east coast folks, take off one or two zeros from your population to compare to us. We're – statewide we've got about 1.7 million. So we're the size of some of your big cities population-wise.

But we had 800 – just about 850 employers respond to the survey, and our industry associations pushed that out and said, hey, the Workforce Development Council wants to be able to provide short-term training aligned to the needs that you have based on the COVID – impacts of COVID-19.

So we got the information back from the employers over the summer, matched up the skills that they were looking for, the things that they said had changed since the start of the pandemic or – and just the long-term types of needs that align to this shorter-term training. We matched that up with our state institutions as to what they could deliver starting online; right, because we still don't have folks back in person on our campuses in most cases. So mapping that training and then we launched our LAUNCH Initiative to connect Idahoans to that training.

And up through – so the way that an Idahoan would access it – and any Idahoan is eligible because the way that we leveraged the funds is that an individual gets connected into our American Job Centers. They get evaluated to see if they qualify for WIOA or TANF, SNAP, employment and training, or voc rehab or any of the workforce system partners. They get matched up to those programs, if they qualify, and then they're enrolled and supported through those programs.

If they don't qualify for any of those programs, then we have the CARES Act funding that is able to pay for the training through the end of the year, and we actually – we had a deadline last Friday where they had to have applied for it in order to receive it. But then if none of those other sources could support them, we have – our council set aside $2 million out of our workforce development training fund to fill the gap for anyone that wasn't eligible.

So it truly became a program that can support any Idahoan, and by connecting them through the workforce system – we had the option. We could have had them just reach out directly to the institutions to get access to the program, but we really wanted to connect it through the workforce system and help to build that collaboration, that engagement and investment among the partners.

The other piece that I'll leave you with is we built a toolkit for our partners, and I know in the document that's in the file share there's a link to that toolkit so you can see the advertising pieces that we built that our partners could push out. There was the expectation that they were going to reach out to their participants and offer training under the program as well.

So I don't have any results to give you right now because we're in the middle of getting people enrolled in this first wave where we have the CARES Act funding, but over the next months and years this isn't a program that's going to go away. This is – and we have the council's policy committee is able to approve the training that goes into the program. So on a monthly basis we can adapt what training is available through the program to meet employers' needs.

So with that I will turn it back to you.

MR. TOOPS: Thank you. That was awesome, Wendi. So we'll keep our eye on Idaho LAUNCH and see what kind of results come out. So thanks again for sharing.

So now, we're going to switch to Spokane. I got it right this time, I think. And, Lee, what are you guys up to in terms of innovation right now?

MARK MATTKE: Hey. Actually, it's Mark in Spokane.

MR. TOOPS: Oh, I switched the names. Sorry. Mark, you're up.

MR. MATTKE: Yeah. Thanks for getting it right. I appreciate it, and thanks to ETA for the opportunity to be here today.

So couple things I'd like to touch upon that we're pretty excited about in Spokane and moving more to a statewide basis, and that is customer-centered design and integrated service delivery as two key facets of our system that have really transformed how we do our work and the efficacy of our services and that WIOA has really kind of put into high gear.

So over a decade ago our business-led board recognized that customers really don't enter the workforce system seeking a particular program or a funding stream, but they come in seeking a job or a pathway to a better job.

So we've really been focused on understanding what the customer needs are and what their experience has been in trying to navigate this complex system and its array of partners and programs and different eligibility criteria. And we've redesigned our customer flow in our physical spaces to meet those customer needs and expectations rather than ours.

So really putting an emphasis upon the customer first and customer-centered design as the driver for our work. That's just been a critical component to understand how we deliver this, and that's quite a switch from the normal programmatic approach.

Then with the passage of WIOA we moved into high gear with this effort and recognized that the key to the success of having a customer-centered design was integrated service delivery and eliminating program silos.

In a traditional system, customers receive completely different types and qualities of services at times based upon which program serves them and even which staff person serves them. And so to replace this and help mitigate against that, we created a single continuum of high-quality services that every customer flows through based upon their individual needs, what they tap into over the course of their trajectory, and then realigned all of our partners and programs to work within that continuum.

So now, from the customer perspective, they don't see silos or programs or funding streams, and no one asks them when they walk in the door, essentially, what's wrong with you in order to determine eligibility, but rather, how can we help you and what do you need?

And then we co-enroll them in programs from the very outset behind the scenes so they're not the ones who are responsible for figuring out if they're eligible or not but, rather, we co-enroll them and then they receive services from an integrated team that's made up of staff from different agencies that are Title I funded or Wagner-Peyser funded or RESEA funded, et cetera, and all those different programs, and they progress toward their goals.

So it's a much better customer experience, and it's also much better I think for our staff as well who work within the bounds of the – of their jobs to deliver services as opposed to always thinking about the program that they're inside of. They're really focused upon the customer.

And a key piece of this too I want to mention I think is important is the equity benefit that we achieved from this model. Every single customer has access to really a full array of programs and services for which they're eligible and are co-enrolled. There's no gatekeeper or other person to see or another office to visit in another location in order to get these services and resources that they need to move forward.

So this really helps to ensure that people aren't screened out or face other barriers, transportation or otherwise, that might turn them away from getting what they need to move forward.

Then the last thing I'll mention that's been another key component of our success is we, about a year and a half ago, created a new collocated center along with our American Job Center called the Spokane Resource Center. And this is also in partnership with HUD, and, essentially, it's an integrated social services center that offers a range of pre-employment services that prepare people for what we can do for them in the workforce system but that we don't have the expertise to provide.

We recognize that a lot of people come to us with other barriers. They may have physical or mental health issues. They may be justice-involved, coming out of incarceration. They may have housing or food insecurity. And that's not really the workforce system's forte or our core competency.

And so we set up a center that brings together over 20 different partners from the community, much in the model of a One-Stop that we have in the workforce system, but a One-Stop for social services that can give people a stable foundation upon which they can then take advantage of what we have to offer for career services and career development and get them into a position of economic self-sufficiency.

So really it's about understanding the customer need, integrating all of our services and partners and resources to meet that need, and then continuing to think about what's around the corner or how can we continue to be nimble and adapt to what the needs are for customers going forward.

MR. TOOPS: Fantastic. Thanks for sharing, Mark. And last but not least, Lee, what's up in Colorado?

LEE WHEELER-BERLINER: Good morning, and thank you so much. It's exciting to be with you all today and share some of the ways that we in Colorado have been approaching the opportunities underneath the act and how we drive innovation at the local level.

So I do sit at the state workforce board and have been involved and connected to the CWDC since 2014. I came on board right after WIOA was passed and then moved into the managing director role in 2018. And one thing I want to say that lays the groundwork for how we have approached innovation and opportunity is that from the start we looked at implementing WIOA.

Whenever someone asked the question of, how much change is WIOA creating, part of our response was, how much change do you want, and how much change do you want to see? And we definitely believe that the way that the act is written, when you focus in on the vision and the intent of the legislation, there was a lot of space to create – to built partnerships and to create solutions for the workforce challenges that your specific state is experiencing and embracing.

So to a certain extent, when you think about that envelope of innovation, we started by flipping it over and writing down, without concern for boxes, what we wanted to achieve and then applied the constraints later to understand how to best achieve what we were looking for with inside the constraints that we had to work with.

Ultimately, our focus has been on high performance, and that has been kind of distilled down to this idea that we want to achieve the federal performance measures because you have to do that, but at the same time we want to identify what we're striving to do, the positive changes we're seeking to implement, and then incentivize our state and our ten local workforce areas to embrace that.

One of the recognitions has been that you have to have partners at the table and bringing in all our partners to engage in planning. Second recognition was that you have to have people well trained at the ground level or else innovation won't be adopted. And so we have led cross-training efforts to train more than 1,000 staff members across WIOA Title I programs, Title II, Title III, Title IV, TANF programs, CTE programs, Perkins Act as well.

And so when you get everybody moving on the same page and sharing your vision, then you can start to focus in on performance. What I want to dig into today is the process that we've developed and implemented to designate high-performing local workforce boards. And this has been a method for us from a governance perspective to govern for high impact and to lead for strategy at the local level.

And so some of the ways we've gone about this is establishing a definition of what a high-performing board is, and that's spelled out in detail in the handout that you can download from the file share box there within your window. And that definition ultimately distills down to having the right people at the right table who are engaged and are seeking to make positive change in their community.

When you look at the federal law itself and you look at the required makeup of the state board and a local board, those are the right people to be making decisions for a community about workforce development, about education, about training. And yet when you dig into the regulations or if you let the regulations guide everything you're doing, those people aren't allowed to actually be perceived as the experts and to do what they want to do.

So part of the high-performing board designation elevates the role of the local board. It helps to shine a spotlight on where we see local boards truly driving innovation and doing great things.

We worked with our local boards to establish this definition, and then we developed a rubric that outlines exactly how performance is measured. And there's up to ten points that can be earned, and we set a high threshold.

We recognize that there is a board certification process that we're required to conduct as a state board for our locals, and in some ways we knew within that board certification process it's a minimum standard. You achieve the minimum standard. You're certified.

We wanted to figure out what it meant to go beyond the minimum here, and so you have to earn nine out of ten points on that rubric in order to be designated as a high-performing board. So it's not easy to achieve, and it requires our locals to think about how they engage their board members, how they structure their meetings, how they're tracking activities that are happening, and, ultimately, how they're also looking at their goals and what they're doing each and every day throughout the course of a program year to achieve that performance.

We first implemented this and rolled it out for the PY '17 year. At that point in time we recognized one board out of ten as a high-performing local workforce board. In PY '18 we had five boards that had met the threshold and gone about pursuing those standards. In PY '19 that we just wrapped up we had two boards that had achieved that threshold.

We're in a process now of figuring out how we adapt it for the context because something that was developed pre-COVID definitely has – is not going to be exactly the same to implement in the current era that we're living in right now.

And so we're excited to continue working with our local boards and have our state council drive that process, any tweaks to that definition go through the state council, and we have our private members of business members and government reps involved in those definitions.

And what we've seen is that, when our local boards are thinking about high performance as an objective, they start to think differently about innovations, and they start to think differently about how they braid funding, how they partner with other programs in their local community, and what they can do to continue to push our system forward to meet the needs of their local residents.

Michael, I'll stop there.

MR. TOOPS: Thank you so much, Lee.

So one of the kind of themes I'm hearing across the board is, within your workforce investment boards you've had to have individuals kind of come together, define a vision, make definitions, pull together sort of resources to kind of make these innovations happen.

I'm curious, Lee – we'll stick with you – what type of infrastructure or processes does your board have to have in place to support this drive towards innovation?

MR. WHEELER-BERLINER: Absolutely. So one lever is our state policymaking process, and in Colorado those are called policy guidance letters. And so whenever – a lot of that, as we've implemented WIOA, updating policies from the governance perspective and drafting those and running those through our board.

We use a very interactive process when we set that policy, and so we benefit from having structured conversations between all of our local workforce boards and state leadership, both on the state board side and the operational side within the Department of Labor and Employment. And so people are coming together once a month for all-day meetings.

And so when we're developing a new policy, I start with gathering feedback and input in one of those sessions to understand what people would want to see, what they would not want to see, what's going to cause issues in implementation. We can draft that policy. We can then take that draft to that monthly meeting, get the input again, and then release it for formal comment.

And so by the time we push it out for formal public comment, we've already – we know we've started with the customers. And in this case as a state entity, our customer is our local workforce boards and local workforce directors. So that process ensures we have good buy-in and good support.

And I think another thing that helps in this arena is the processes that the statute and the regulations have set up itself to create your local and your state plan. And I encourage everyone to ask yourselves, is our local plan, is our state plan the same as our strategic plan?

And what we saw and heard – and some context is we had one local board member – or, rather, a local workforce board had newly hired a director. She made the comment at one point in time that, hey, we don't have a strategic plan. And somebody else who was on that area's board held up, well, we have this four-year plan right here.

If those are not seen as one and the same, then you're going to have a disconnect. And so when we go through the local plan approval process, we're pushing on that strategy piece because that plan lays out the groundwork for what we're expecting local boards to perform against. And the community-level goals that we're measuring as to whether or not they achieve high performance are all written and they start right there in that local plan.

MR. TOOPS: So, Lee, before we move on to Mark, I wanted to ask just a follow-up question. Within the development of your policy guidance, how involved are your other stakeholders in helping to draft guidance? Are there – is there a co-guidance or joint guidance coming out from the board or at the state level that kind of – are from a variety of different stakeholders within the workforce investment system?

MR. WHEELER-BERLINER: Yeah. So the guidance looks a little bit differently in terms of what goes out for Title II and Title IV. In Colorado, Title III, similar to Massachusetts, is administered through the local level. And so that – (inaudible) – is really one and the same when it is directed towards our local workforce boards in terms of what they're engaged in.

We include all of our other title stakeholders in that input process, and I mentioned that it's our local workforce directors who come together once a month. On a quarterly basis we're bringing in leadership and representatives from all of the programs who have submitted within our combined plan and all of the required partners under WIOA for quarterly dialogue and discussion about what we need to do to drive our system forward and achieve the goals in our state plan.

MR. TOOPS: Awesome. Thanks for sharing.

Mark, I believe when we last spoke, you were talking a little bit about professional development. What are the sort of processes you have in place to help move towards innovation?

MR. MATTKE: Yeah. Thanks. And this certainly, I think, piggybacks on what Lee was talking about about getting on the same page, having a shared vision.

So our board has supported innovation in our system by first creating the vision of the fully-integrated system and really moves to the speed of business to meet customer needs and recognize that we need to continuously push the envelope on what we think is possible to build a better system.

Business models in the private sector, they can't remain static, and our board made that abundantly clear to us, and neither can our public workforce system model. So they're really the ones that are driving that innovation and helping us to get there.

So the strategic plan that our board develops articulates this vision and the framework, and then that empowers the staff and partners to rethink our work every single day as we focus on meeting our customer needs and achieving our outcomes.

So one way in which we're able to operationalize this is our very strong focus on ongoing professional development and providing the tools and information to support all of our staff, as they are responsible for implementing innovation on the ground level, the management level administration in the local workforce system.

Without engaged staff, we found – I think we all know that the most innovative planning is not going to succeed. You're going to run into roadblocks, and folks aren't going to carry out the work. So we've got to have them engaged, and they've got to have the tools to be able to do the work.

So in our model, staff from multiple programs are employed by different agencies, and they all work in functionalities. Not by program but by function to deliver services in the various parts of our customer flow model.

And to support this and the success of this, we actually close our centers every day for the first hour of business and use that time for staff training, to deliver program updates, to bring in speakers, to discuss content, and then also for individual functional team meetings where they can really hone their craft among their teammates and make that connection.

Oftentimes, in a normal work world in centers, you have staff meetings during the course of the day, and that takes away from serving customers any given time you're pulling folks off the line to sit in a meeting. Instead, we do all that work up front every single day. We've done that for a couple of years now.

And some folks might say at the front of it, it takes away from the ability to serve customers, but really we've found that it enhances the quality of services that we do provide and really binds our teams together, effectively, so they are indeed singing from the same sheet, having a shared vision, and working to achieve that. And this has become an essential component of our ability to manage change and continue innovating.

At the state level, the state boards also recognize professional development as a part of its state workforce development strategic plan and is working to develop that content that we refer to, that shared vision, and distributed via a learning management system to educate all the partners across the workforce system so we can develop that comprehensive common understanding of all the partners, what our roles are, what our responsibilities are, and the functions within the workforce system.

One of the things that's always surprising when we started this work was you've got folks working in a center who have been there for literally decades and do not know what the person next to them does. And so we have really blown up that – those silos and gotten the walls down around that. Folks now understand more fully what it is they do in concert with one another, how they support each other to complement what they all do. And that's just key to the success of this is binding folks together in that – at the local and state levels.

The other piece I want to mention is integration of funding, and it's often the management of the dollars that flow into our centers that prevent partners from working effectively together. And we have, at any given time, over three dozen funding streams that run through our centers.

And so to manage that, rather than have it be the responsibility of separate programs, we created a single team that works behind the scenes to assign costs, to allocate those, to meet the program and contractual requirements for our programs, for our customers. So if someone's enrolled in Title I or someone's getting Wagner-Peyser services or RESEA or TANF or a range of others, we know that we're dotting the I's and crossing the T's and staying in compliance with that. But, again, it's not getting in the way of delivering the actual service.

So that team is the one responsible for knowing the laws and the regs and the contractual obligations with each funding source and ensuring the costs are in line with them. And it also executes contracts, the auditing, and has internal control. So, again, by separating that function out from the program staff, they focus on their work and serving the customer, and these folks focus on the finance piece.

And really it's this braiding of funds that support all of our customers in a customer flow model that allow us to seamlessly serve all customers that need our help, as opposed to falling back into those silos and having a lot less efficiency. So those are just key to what our success has been thus far, and that's a core part of our infrastructure.

MR. TOOPS: Fantastic. I'm starting to sense a theme here about getting everyone on the same page and elimination of silos, and I'm curious what Wendi has to add to this picture.

MS. SECRIST: Sure. So that – both Lee and Mark touched on some critical points about eliminating silos and getting that buy-in, and that's really what we have – that's been the main goal of what we've been trying to achieve over the last three years is to create a system that truly values each partner and creates a level playing field.

So what I want to focus in on here, though, is under Workforce Investment Act, under Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, all of this has been about letting employers lead. And that is something that we have really, really embraced.

The way that we've developed our committee structures, our – what we do with the council, with our committees, we have to have meaningful work for them. They have to be engaged in making decisions that have an impact. If there isn't something meaningful, then we don't need to have a meeting just to check a box then and say that we're meeting.

So one of the keys has been really hoping to define what we mean by employer, and our governor tasked the staff, myself and our staff with letting employers lead. And it doesn't – I am perfectly capable of making decisions on behalf of our council, but that's not what I was hired to do.

So one of the ways that we really set kind of that dynamic up is we talk about how employer – we're all employers. The director of the Department of Labor is an employer. She may also wear her state workforce agency hat, but when she's at a council meeting, she's an employer, and we want her thinking not only about her programs but about her challenges in her – within her own workforce.

So we've got our One-Stop committee, as Lee described. We've got all of the partners that are involved in creating policies, not just staff developing a draft and bringing it for a rubber stamp to the council. But it's got to come up through our committee structure in order to be reviewed at the council level. And through that we're able to get engagement beyond just the council.

So our committees are able to – we're able to add non-council members to our committees. That really helps us to bring education in, other community-based organizations that are not able to be represented on the council directly but are important to achieving our shared vision. So committees will work on policies, bring those forth to the council.

Council ultimately makes the decision, but I remind them all the time, put your employer hat on. Think about this as an employer. Is this what you want money invested in? Is this how you want services to be delivered from your perspective as an employer?

The elimination of silos has been a real challenge for us. We don't have much integration right now with service delivery. We don't have collocation for the most part in the state. I mean, between Title I and Title III there's collocation, but the other programs, everybody has their own offices and so forth and we don't have a lot of collocation going on.

So we've really got to – we're three years into kind of this shift from everything operating in a very, very siloed way to this integration, and the LAUNCH Initiative is one of those things where we could show the art of the possible; right? What if? What if we all put aside our silos and we worked together and we collaborated and we created something that any Idahoan can access?

So I'll leave it at that. I mean, that – I don't want to reiterate what the other two have talked so eloquently about.

MR. TOOPS: Well, no. Thank you, Wendi. And I like this idea of finding that common ground and helping even the individuals that sit on the board that oversee the programs and having them think in terms of they are also employers and what those challenges are. So I think that's a great strategy to kind of think about how people can kind of see through the same lens and get on the same page. So thanks again for sharing.

We do have a question from one of our friends in West Virginia. Hi, Maureen. This is Michael. And it's for Lee, I believe, and they want to know, "What does cross-training look like for the frontline staff?" Or maybe that was Mark. It was Mark. Yeah.

MR. WHEELER-BERLINER: This is Lee, and I can share how we've approached that in Colorado, and if Mark wants to add in from his perspective, that would be fantastic.

I can say that we identified a problem that there were really bad referrals taking place across programs. And going back three or four years, there was this perception that, if anybody walks in the door with a disability, then we refer them to DVR without any recognition or whether or not DVR could actually help.

And so what we did was we spent about five months and did a state roadshow. And we put together a training team from across all the titles that went out into our local communities, and we did all-day trainings with frontline staff from the variety of programs. And so we brought them in and started with the basics of, here's an expert from the youth program to explain what the eligibility is, what the purpose of this program does, and what you need to know for someone coming in the door.

And so it was establishing that base-level understanding of what is each program about. What do you want when you're connecting someone to that program? And then, honestly, having people fill out a document that we called a desk aid where they wrote down cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses of their key contacts at these other facilities and other programs so they can share that with the customer when they come in the door.

We had a lean process that we went through that carried that work forward that developed a common intake form, and so everybody's trained to use one form to get the same information. We then did follow up with quarterly webinars for those staff members and then also established a learning management system where basic orientation materials are packaged and deployed into that LMF.

So a new adult education provider can go in and have an employee take the online course, which is the same course a job coach in a Title I(b) workforce center is training their staff on. So that allows for that ongoing understanding of how the program works and how the systems fit together.

MR. TOOPS: Awesome. That's great. Hey, Mark, do you have anything you want to add there?

MR. MATTKE: I do. Yeah. And similar to that, we do make sure that folks understand the programs, but our focus is not so much upon the programs as it is upon the services. And for us the programs that kind of are – have proceeded in the background, if you will, and it's the services we focused on.

So we call our staff in American Job Centers career coaches, and we focus our training upon making them the best possible career coach. We develop customized curriculum that helps them execute on their job. We've got a workshop team that all they do is deliver workshops, and so they learn about adult learning modalities and how best to teach adults in that setting and how to use technology for that.

And so that – our focus is really upon getting them the tools they need to better deliver those services they're responsible for on their functional team. So while it's important to understand who is sitting across from you and who pays them, what we've really focused on is getting them the skills to deliver quality services for the customers, and that includes things like trauma-informed care for individuals and a whole host of things that are coming up as a result of COVID as well. So that's where we've really put the bulk of our effort around trainings.

MR. TOOPS: Awesome. Thanks for sharing, Mark. Wendi, do you have anything you want to add, or shall we move on?

MS. SECRIST: I don't think I can add anything above and beyond.

MR. TOOPS: All right. (Inaudible) – to you and let's think – (inaudible) – these innovations?

MR. MATTKE: And I think you broke up there a little bit.

MR. TOOPS: Let me go back again. All right. So I'll –

MR. MATTKE: Repeat the question.

MR. TOOPS: Sure. Sure. So what type of barriers to innovation, either real or perceived, have you encountered while kind of pursuing these initiatives?

MR. MATTKE: And am I first up? This is Mark.

MR. TOOPS: Mark, yeah. You're up.

MR. MATTKE: Thank you so much. Appreciate that. I think the primary barriers, the challenge that any large system faces that's made up of different agencies and authorizing environments is that we tend to fall back into our silos and legacy thinking of how we've operated in the past. That's just kind of where we turn to when left to our own devices.

And since most of the partners and programs engaged in this have been doing it for a long time, that tendency toward inertia can be very strong. And so we need to be active at the state and local levels, I think, and hold our system and its partners accountable for both their program outcomes but then also for continuing to innovate and adopt the changes that we make and then build on those as we move forward so that we don't just fall backwards.

I think this is really the case as our system is under stress currently. People may choose to go back into their corners, if you will, when faced with the additional challenges of COVID and having to transition to virtual services and the massive numbers of UI customers that are building up and pending entry into our system and such.

So we really got to guard against that, and that accountability piece will be important for that and being able to communicate around what we're doing to combat that and ensure that we retain the lessons that we've learned.

These innovative service models we've been describing that we've traded during, quote, unquote, normal times, really cannot be scaled up and to continue to improve service delivery in this new time and are proven to be really every bit as effective now as they were pre-COVID.

And so we need to ensure they persist, that they adapt to the new environment in order to change, again, as well, and that we don't just retrench during these difficult times and then have a farther way to go as we come out of this going forward than we did before we went in.

And I think a challenge is, as governors change, as state agency leadership changes and local boards have turnover and staff in the system come and go, that we need to hold the vision clearly in front of us as that north star so we don't have to constantly reinvent the wheel and really not make the progress that our customers require of us.

If every four years we have to reinvent the system and start from scratch, we don't make very much progress, and that's the challenge in front of us. And I do think we have such a vital role to play in our nation's economic success. I think the workforce system is a cornerstone of this nation's social fabric, and now, especially in the economic recovery, it's our responsibility as workforce system leaders to think about this and meet these challenges and make sure that we're playing the – (inaudible) – important role to the best of our abilities.

MR. TOOPS: Well stated. It sounds to me like this is a never-ending battle, though. It's something that you have to kind of continue to revisit as things shift and change over time. So I really appreciate you sharing.

Wendi, you're up. What kind of barriers to innovation have you experienced or maybe you are experiencing now when you're in the thick of your new initiative?

MS. SECRIST: Yeah. So with our new initiative we haven't really had a lot of barriers to innovation, but, overall, as we've been kind of starting up this new initiative or new way of doing business in Idaho, that legacy thinking has been a real challenge.

There was just a lot of – I mentioned silos earlier – lack of coordination and collaboration among the partners and education in our system. And overall, I attribute that to a lack of a shared vision, understanding how we can work together and what positive impact that would have on our respective clients.

So really starting with the why. Why is it important that we collaborate? Why is it important that we – that we put aside those silos and we seek to provide the best experience for our citizens and our employers in the state?

And what we've had to do is listen a lot. Go and sit down with the partners and understand what their unique opportunities and their unique needs are and then try and identify solutions. If all we're doing is sitting and listening to the challenges that they face and we don't go back and try and solve some of those issues, then I don't know what real value we bring to the table.

So making sure that we understand those specific challenges that the vocational rehabilitation system is having or that adult education is having and then looking at opportunities to coordinate and collaborate. The simple things; right? Our adult education program is having funding challenges with paying for the cost of GEDs, yet that's something that can be done under the adult Title I programs.

So we haven't co-enrolled to a significant extent in Idaho, but looking for opportunities to say, all right. Why can't we partner with the Title I program and look at how to leverage those services across the program?

So it's been a growing experience for us. I love being on panels with Lee because Colorado is about ten years in to – 10 maybe 12 years into kind of these changes within their workforce system, and every day I see something that they've done that's like, all right. How do we incorporate that or how do we leverage what they learned and what they've experienced and not make some of the same mistakes?

So not only collaborating internally but looking out to other states for innovation and taking the great things that they've done and adapting them locally is – has been one of our strategies for overcoming those barriers.

MR. TOOPS: Fantastic. Thanks, Wendi.

And last but not least, Lee, what are some of these barriers that you've encountered?

MR. WHEELER-BERLINER: All right. So, Wendi, thank you for those comments. And I would say in addition to looking at other great examples within the workforce system when you think about how you overcome challenges, it's also important to take those human-centered design concepts of building empathy and looking to connect it in related issues, looking outside of workforce and recognizing that, hey, there's various models in the nonprofit sector. There's various models in government that have similar structures of a federal, a state, and a local level of implementing programs and setting policy. And so what can you learn from some of those other examples that are out there?

The two things I want to share that we've run into, one, builds off everything Mark said very well about accountability, is that, if you're going to have accountability, you have to know who's responsible for what. And one of the struggles we ran into early on is this concept of what is the role of a local workforce board member, and what's the distinction and responsibilities between the appointed board and the staff of the workforce center?

And, Wendi, I love what you said as well, that you could make all the decisions, but that's not what your job is. Your job is to help bring the voice of those governor-appointed individuals, your local LAO-appointed individuals to the table.

And so we had to dig into that. We heard some people in local areas saying, well, our board is just volunteers. And the most kind of abrupt comment I got one time was talking about accessibility and somebody saying, are you telling me I'm going to make my board chair go measure the height of a toilet?

And the response is, no. That's not what we're asking you to do, but we are asking you to engage your board to let them live into their role and bring their expertise to the table to tackle these challenges.

One of the things we did to overcome that, in addition to making the high-performing board rubric about the appointed board members themselves and not about staff, was to create documents that crosswalk the roles and responsibilities between the state Department of Labor and Employment, the Workforce Development Council, the local workforce board, and local workforce staff.

And so we have those documents that outline specific items in the statute and then who is in charge of doing what.

I think the other thing I want to say that was a barrier and was a learning process for us to – (inaudible) – overcome is understanding the right balance of the shall, the coulds, and the shoulds in the act itself.

And if you think about Section 101 of WIOA, which I know maybe two of you on the call have memorized – I won't go beyond that, but Section 101 is the roles and responsibilities of the state workforce board. And so that's where it tells me what we have to do, what we should do. It tells me that we have to identify and disseminate practices. It doesn't tell me how I have to do that.

And so when we started down the path of our high-performing board designation, we started to embed that into our policy on board certification, as I mentioned earlier, and I envisioned this three-tier model of a board is not certified, a board is certified, or a board is certified as high performing.

And when I started to go down that path, there was a lot of pushback from our local areas because that was layering on to much more restrictive policy, and that was creating shoulds for the locals that they saw as interfering with their current status of innovation and their ability to operate.

And so based on that feedback, we took the process and embedded it into our performance incentive fund, which is still outlined in the state policy, but it's an optional policy. So we are not requiring that every local board pursue the high-performing designation or submit an application for it. It's an option and we then incentivize it using our performance incentive funds which are pulled from the governor's set-aside 15 percent dollars to have a carrot that boards can think about if they want to pursue that.

So figuring out how to incentivize rather than mandate or legislate has been critical in overcoming those barriers and crystalizing the roles and responsibilities so you know who does what.

MR. TOOPS: Awesome. I like that idea of sort of making more coulds out of those shoulds. So definitely going to put that in my toolbox as we go out and help other states think through this.

With that said, I mean, I've heard a lot of good kind of gold nuggets throughout your presentation so far about how to kind of overcome these barriers. What advice – if you were talking to someone who's just really in the process of kind of struggling with this idea of getting all the partners on board or eliminating some of the barriers or kind of overcoming the perceived barriers of policies, for example, that we saw in one of our polls at the beginning of this webinar, what one bit of advice would you give someone? Where should they start? What should they keep in mind always as they kind of work through this?

And with that, let's go to Wendi.

MS. SECRIST: All right. So I could not over-emphasize the need to create a level playing field and environment across the workforce partners and education. That was and still is a challenge for us.

In the past with the state workforce board being affiliated with only one of the workforce partners, it felt, to the partners – and this is what they told me because I wasn't involved in the system at the time. But what the partners have told me is that it felt like that one entity was the 800-pound gorilla, and whatever they wanted to do, whatever they decided on was what everyone was required to do.

And so from day one I had to eliminate that and create this very level playing field and understanding what those – as I mentioned earlier, those unique needs and opportunities are across the partners but also just not letting anyone dominate the conversation. Going through our state plan process, making sure that everybody's voice was heard, that everybody's input was taken and valued, and trying to bring folks to consensus around things that were tough topics.

So you have to show that. You can't just say that it's a level playing field. You have to show it in the way that decisions are being made. And when we're developing policies, policies that really are only going to impact the Title I program, all of the entities are involved in that decision process. They're all engaged in creating that policy. That makes the policies better because they're being developed from a broader perspective.

I do want to touch on the importance of bringing education in. When we think about the folks that are the hardest to serve that we see in our One-Stop, a lot of them, things didn't work for them in K-12 in connecting to postsecondary education. And for us to be able to really address the whole system, we need to start earlier.

So one of the kind of unique things that we have in Idaho is my – the person who oversees outreach and communications on my team, her office is not located with the rest of us. She sits physically in our state Board of Education so that she is able on a day-to-day basis to hear those – well, you can't hear the hallway conversations right now because they're not happening, but when people are in their offices, she's hearing and she's involved in their staff meetings and understands what's going on both K-12 and postsecondary.

I meet with the community college presidents regularly and talk to them about how to increase the collaboration. And when it comes to the more flexible resources that we have with our state workforce development training fund, I don't – it doesn't need to be the Workforce Development Council's idea or doesn't need to be branded by us to be a good idea.

So if our partners are doing something wonderful and we could help expand it and take it to the next level, then we want to invest in them rather than creating something brand-new. So just that equity, that valuing what your partners are doing, and creating the level playing field I think is just so critical to success.

MR. TOOPS: Fantastic. So advice number one, level that playing field. Lee, what do you got for us?

MR. WHEELER-BERLINER: So I would say communicate, communicate, and over-communicate as well. The concepts in human-centered design, if you haven't had a chance to understand that five-part process, it's absolutely critical to breaking down barriers, to creating ideas and strategies, and moving forward because it starts with understanding what somebody's needs are and then getting feedback and being willing to iterate.

And this has been a personal transition for me to adopt these strategies of, when you're about to launch a program, it doesn't have to be fully baked. You can put out a prototype. You can start with a pilot. You can start small. You can get the input and then adjust as you need to make sure you're building up to the full scale that you want to achieve.

MR. TOOPS: Awesome. So we'll keep talking then. Awesome. Thank you, Lee. And, Mark?

MR. MATTKE: I'll be brief. I would say maintain the focus. Overcoming the barriers, I think was the question. And so really maintain the focus on the customer meeting their needs and what the actual law and the rules are and then working to the maximum extent possible to support flexible approaches to carrying out the work.

We recognize that we're all under-resourced and none of us individually as a program can meet all the needs that are out there and we have to work together. So how can we demonstrate to all the partners the benefits of this working together and further integration, improved outcomes, and more resources coming into the system that allow us to expand our capabilities and serve even more businesses and people I think are a couple.

And then I think creating an accountability process of having public (inaudible) dashboards that report out on how our programs and system is performing in as close to real time as possible. How we're working together, demonstrate all that here's what we're doing. Here's what the results are and how the investments are being made across our system to benefit our customers so we can, to Lee's point – communicate, communicate, and over-communicate. Just keep information in front of people showing what the benefit is.

And then, if not, how are we using that data to change what we're doing and demonstrate that we're capable of making changes happen for the benefit of our customers?

MR. TOOPS: This is really great. So we've got create a level playing field, communicate and continue communicating, and then keep with that customer-centered focus and getting the right information in customers' hands I think are all worthy pieces of advice.

To kind of close out our panel discussion today, I'd like to ask each of you, now that you've got this all figured out; right, what other opportunities are you planning to pursue under the act? And, Lee, I'll let you start.

MR. WHEELER-BERLINER: Thanks so much. So continuing on that theme of performance and motivating high performance, we're looking at how we apply similar definitions to our sector partnerships, to thriving work-based learning communities, and to continuing to expand that mindset into other aspects of work within the system.

To that end, we're exploring new pay-for-performance opportunities and specifically about to pilot a workforce income sharing agreements that can help advance training as well as supportive services for specific populations in the state. So we're excited about the guidance that has come out on pay-for-performance, and we're going to be digging in to expand that and see how we implement it to the best of our ability here in Colorado.

MR. TOOPS: Fantastic. And for our listeners, in case you were wondering why we had TEGL 08-20 posted in our file share, that is the new pay-for-performance TEGL that came out just a couple days ago. So fresh off the press. Make sure you download it and take a look, and thanks for sharing, Lee.

And, Mark, what about you? What are you looking at?

MR. MATTKE: Beginning to really drive innovation at the state and local levels across all the title partners, and I would echo too, yeah. Using the policy framework that we have and the regulatory guidance that's coming in through TEGLs and UIPLs to expand the flexibility within which we can do this work and work to those limits and have that become more of the norm and less the exception.

I think we want to further recognition that all the different titles under the act are really intrinsically linked as the foundation of the system to help all these shared customers and how can we use those – what we have out there for the law and the regs to operationalize that?

And we also got to expand out, I think, and do a better job of connecting to SNAP programming and to further expand in TANF as well. We're seeing a lot of people coming in the system now with COVID that are food insecure and receiving TANF. We've got to do a better job of linking to them, and that's kind of a step in the – a next step in the right direction I think for our system is to better enhance those linkages.

MR. TOOPS: Awesome. We look forward to seeing those results. Keep us posted; okay?

And, Wendi, last but not least. What other opportunities are you thinking about?

MS. SECRIST: Yeah. So we're really, really wanting to start working on integration of service delivery and employer services. That's – I mentioned earlier we just – we have not done a good deal of integration across the system, and what I'm hopeful is that the LAUNCH program gave everybody a taste of what could be; right, how we could partner together, how we could do more through collaboration.

So that's going to be our focus over the next couple of years is really starting to think more deliberately about what might collocation look like. What does that customer experience look like where we're not collocated, and how could we improve things there?

And then with respect to employer services, just we're a small state. We have a limited number of employers, and we don't have the market share that we should have with working with employers. And we're not going to – each entity isn't going to be able to improve things on their own. So we've got to collaborate.

MR. TOOPS: Awesome. Thank you, Wendi.

And, again, I can't thank you guys enough for joining us today, especially you that had to kind of get up very early in the morning to join us. Again, thank you for taking your time. We are looking forward to hearing further about some of the great innovations that are in your pipeline, and I'm sure we'll be in contact in the future. Feel free to drop a line to us anytime and let us know what's up.

And with that, again, I want to thank you, and we will move on back to Amanda to close things up. Amanda, you're up.

Amanda Poirier: Thanks, Michael, and thanks again – I'll just echo what Michael said – for waking up when the rooster crows to talk to us this morning. We appreciate you and your work.

And wrapping up, I want to note that there's a lot of innovation happening in our own backyard, so to speak. Rhode Island will be presenting in the peer-to-peer call in January on their virtual services and return to work program, which is a unique program and infrastructure that will support jobseekers and businesses during COVID and beyond.

And there are many sessions that have been presented before during the peer-to-peer calls, and I invite you to explore or re-explore.

And to kind of echo what Lee said, I think that where do you start in terms of everything that you've heard today? And I think that pilot programs are great, and I really do think that that's the way to go a lot of times. New Hampshire has done that several times when I was FPOing for the state, and they piloted leveraging their statewide set-aside money or dislocated worker grants, like the sector partnership one, the OJT, or the RSI DWGs.

And I think this is a good way to leverage extra funding to support a new approach to do business and then kick off a new idea and see if it works or not.

And then I'm going to turn it back over – I'm sorry. Not yet. Apologize.

All that said, I want to thank you for your time. I know you all are extremely busy. I hope you consider this presentation as an invitation to maximize the flexibilities offered under the act to ensure jobseekers and businesses – (inaudible). Please invite us to your conversations on this. We want to support you in articulating your vision as best we can. And thank you.

And now, I will really turn it over to Jennifer to close up.

MS. FRIEDMAN: Thank you, Amanda. Thank you, Michael, and thank you to our panelists. It was a great conversation. I just want to highlight, as Amanda said, we're having our next peer call. We're starting those sessions again in January. We are having Rhode Island talking about the virtual career center, which is really great.

And then also I want to highlight some resources. These are links to the previous governance trainings we have done and also the case studies, which is in the file share. We didn't have a lot of time for questions today. So if you had any questions of our panelists or of Michael and Amanda, please contact us, and we will get you answers to those questions.

Also, I want to remind everybody that we are looking to find out what action steps you've taken, and so we'll be reaching back out to you in January to talk about having presentations in the peer – for the February peer meeting and really finding out what actions you've taken or started taking or even thinking of taking.

We want to thank you, as Amanda said, for your time today, but thank you for your time for the past three sessions. And have a great rest of the day, everybody. Thanks.

(END)