**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Practices in Workforce Employment Network Operation, New Technical Guide**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: Welcome to "Practices in Workforce Employment Network Operation, New Technical Guide." Without further ado, I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, Steve Rietzke, division chief for national programs, tools, and technical assistance with the Employment and Training Administration with the U.S. Department of Labor. Steve, take it away.

STEVEN RIETZKE: Great. Thank you, Jon, and welcome to all of you. Thank you for joining us this afternoon. We really appreciate you tuning in, and it's great to see so many folks introducing themselves in that chat window.

My name is Steve Rietzke. I'm the division chief for national programs, tools, and technical assistance in the Employment and Training Administration. We sit in the Office of Workforce Investment, which oversees the nationwide public workforce system, and we serve as the program office for the Disability Employment Initiative and a number of other projects that are focused on disability and employment issues.

I'm really glad to be able to kick off this panel today. I think we've got a lot of great stuff to cover and, in particular, the new technical guide that we're releasing. This will be a great introduction to the resources that are in that.

I think the poll results disappeared, but I was -- I can't see them now, but I was looking at the answers coming in and noticed that the vast majority of you are definitely interested in learning more about the new technical guide that we're going to present today. Oh, I see the poll results again. So, more than 80 percent of you are interested in that aspect of this presentation.

But it looks like about half of you are interested in how operating as a workforce employment network site can strengthen your overall operation as a workforce system entity. So we're going to touch on that theme as well.

About a quarter of you are interested in how to actually become a workforce EN, and over a third of you are interested in how to strengthen your workforce EN, which I assume means you're already operating as a workforce EN and you're looking for ways to improve in that arena.

And, finally, a good chunk of you want to compare your experience of workforce EN operation with those of others. And good news. We've got some great practitioners on the panel today to talk about their experiences and help you do that. So thanks, Jon, for the the poll. I think we can go to the next slide.

So let's talk a little bit about sort of why are we here in general? Obviously, on one level we're presenting you with a new technical guide that we hope is going to be a very -- going to be very helpful in the field in understanding the benefits of participating in the Ticket to Work program as an employment network sites. And just so you know, throughout this presentation, we will probably use EN as short for employment network.

We're very excited to be able to share this resource with you all and walk through it with some of the key folks who have helped put a lot of thought into its development. But really, we also want to explain how this tool can help you in your overall approach to customer-centered workforce development and, in particular, workforce development activities that are inclusive of and sensitive to the needs of folks with disabilities who may walk through your door for services.

In doing that, we also want to drive home some key points about the benefits of participating as an employment network. There's definitely an upfront investment of time and energy to participate in this realm, but there can be real tangible, longer-range benefits to your organization -- and I apologize if you can hear my hound dog howling in the background -- and both in terms of helping you to up your game in the way that you serve folks with disabilities, but also in terms of real revenue that you can generate through participation in the program that can give you a flexible pot of money to invest in your operations and your customer service.

So, we hope that this guide and potentially your participation in Ticket to Work will support your efforts in including the skills and talents of people with disabilities in career pathway models, in your engagement with employers, in your design of training programs and supportive services, and in the way that you approach integrative services and help your customers navigate the complex landscape of funding streams and benefits.

We really have approached this work at the federal level through strong partnership with the Social Security Administration and our friends at the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the Labor Department. We really value these partnerships and -- at the federal level and appreciate all the thought and collaboration that has supported the effort in developing this guide.

So the guide we're going to present today really builds on previous guidance from ETA, the Employment and Training Administration, that tied employment network operation into WIOA implementation. And why don't we preview the guide a little bit, and then our panel is going to die of a little bit more deeply into it.

So if we go to the next slide, so the team has designed this guide to be complimentary to the onboarding training that is provided by the Social Security Administration, and ultimately we want this to be a resource that you can readily apply in the context of a collaborative workforce system.

So the team really was very thoughtful in figuring out how to make the guide as useful as possible. It's designed so that you can use it as a resource guide for specific questions or as a workbook with activities to actually support implementation and get you started. And, even if you're starting from scratch, this guide will take you from start to finish and walk you through completing a readiness checklist and an operation plan.

So we're really excited about the usefulness of this guide. And, finally, I want you to know that we developed this great resource with the help of very knowledgeable folks and subject matter experts who I think really did a great job at explaining the concepts in the guide in plain language.

And a key part of this effort has been the invaluable input that we've gotten from actual practitioners in the field who have helped us to zoom in on real challenges in workforce employment, network operation, identify practices that they recognize as useful in addressing those challenges, and helped us integrate that into the guide in ways that we hope is very helpful to you all as you're thinking through the issues of, should I become a workforce EN and how do I improve my existing workforce EN operations?

So, again, we're really excited about this resource and really excited about how we think this can help in real practical ways in the field to help the workforce system contribute in Ticket to Work at employment network sites and, really, like I said, to help you all up your game in the way that you serve folks with disabilities in getting them the training that they need and the employment services that they need for employment.

So without further ado, I'm going to pass it over to Laura Gleneck to really get things started. And, again, thank you all for tuning in, and I hope you enjoy the webinar.

LAURA GLENECK: Great. Thank you, Steve. It's really great to be here. Hello, everyone. Really pleased today with the turnout because it really shows interest in what you're going to learn more about today as we launch the new technical guide that Steve talked about and that Doug is going to show shortly.

I'm Laura Gleneck, and my colleague Doug Keast and I are with National Disability Institute, which is a part of the Maher team which helped to put this work together today. Now, Doug, who is a Ticket to Work subject matter expert, among many other wonderful qualities, is going to be serving as our master of ceremonies today. And he served as Ticket subject matter expert as part of the DEI Technical assistance team. So, Doug, if we can go to the next slide.

But before we get started, it really is my pleasure to introduce our panel of workforce employment network operators, or as we like to think of them, voices from the field. And I thought that a good way to introduce each of them would be to share a quote that we got through our insights from the field phase of this work. I think these quotes will give all of you a little insight into what you're going to learn about more today.

So I'm going to start with Brian Dennis. He is a workforce program coordinator for disability services with Iowa Workforce Development.

And Brian shared, "Have patience with the process. It is a long-range investment. It is a focus on customer outcomes. It is also systems change, which requires time. As you get some experience and seeing individuals experience success, you can develop a stronger appreciation for what can be accomplished.

You focus on quality first and always, and as people experience success, you can get a sense of what to expect so you can invest it in ways that improve capacity in a way that makes sense (and benefits planning is one of these things which I know more about) as a service that you can offer in terms of Ticket are services that you should be providing anyway." Thank you for that, Brian.

And, next, we're going to go to Michelle. Michelle O'Camb is a workforce development manager with Sacramento Employment and Training Agency, and that's located in California.

And Michelle shares, "There was a point in time when organizations serving those with disabilities may not have had a lot of confidence referring customers to on job centers. That all changed as a result of the Disability Employment Initiative. We not only used the grant to increase the overall numbers of people with disabilities served, but also used it to expand the professional capacity of systems staff to include the service quality for people with disabilities and to increase their access to education, training, and employment opportunities within the workforce system.

In addition, the active use of a multidisciplinary integrated resource team model and the engagement and cross-system coordination with partners with expertise in serving people with disabilities have overall created a more welcoming environment for people with disabilities." Thank you for that, Michelle.

And then, finally, Charlotte Hirte, who is a Ticket to Work coordinator with Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Program and newer to this space.

And Charlotte shared, "We're early in the process and developing small goals first, but we'd like to use it to continue to grow and, through it, increase our investment in resources. We recognize our capacity to respond to a lot more Ticket holders."

So later on you will have the opportunity to learn more about the experiences of Brian, Michelle, and Charlotte as workforce EN operators.

So during today's presentation, you're going to learn about the benefits of participating as a workforce employment network, or EN. Doug is going to describe and illustrate the key features of the new employment network technical guide, and you'll also have a link that you'll be able to download it later on.

And then you're going to hear insights from the experiences of the three current workforce systems from the workforce EN operators themselves, namely, again, Charlotte, Michelle and Brian.

So we're going to start with what brought many of us together, and that is the Disability Employment Initiative, or as we call it, DEI. From 2010 to 2020, the Department of Labor, under the DEI, awarded 55 projects to 30 states to develop and implement plans for improving effective and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in the workforce.

The DEI had three overarching goals, increased access to and the participation of individuals with disabilities in WIOA-funded employment and training services, particularly those related to career pathways, number two, to improve training and employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities and support businesses, and then, finally, expand the public workforce system's capacity to become an EN for beneficiaries under the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program.

In thought, operating as an employment network under the Ticket program was a required component under the DEI and viewed as an important strategic approach to sustainability and collaboration in addressing the needs of people with disabilities receiving Social Security disability cash benefits.

So as we all know who have been in the disability unemployment space, progress to change thinking and behavior at individual and systems level is slow and never easy. While we do know that there is still more work to be done, the DEI have helped to make considerable progress in addressing the challenges faced by customers with disabilities, and just wanted to touch on some of the changes that took place or are continuing to take place.

People with disabilities are a targeted population to receive support across workforce system and partners at all levels. Universal access and customer centered-design supporting individuals with disabilities and others -- other barriers to employment are now a focus of workforce and partner services and partnerships around mutual customers.

People with disabilities exiting beneficiary status and poverty-level subsistence to enter into competitive integrated employment, key in WIOA. As we've been mentioning, expanding the public workforce system's capacity to serve as ENs for Social Security beneficiaries, and DEI projects through implementing workforce ENs have recognized the importance of providing SSA disability benefits and work incentive counseling to facilitate successful employment outcomes.

And since 2010, more than half of the projects have used DEI funds to certify one or more staff members to be community work incentive practitioners and counselors to help with that. And through continued support from workforce ENs, DEI projects are sustaining best practices for serving people with disabilities in the workforce system beyond DEI grant funding.

So, in a nutshell, by participating as an employment network through the DEI, the workforce system provides recipients of Social Security disability benefits with expanded choices regarding services and supports needed to enter, reenter, or maintain employment and to generate additional funding for service delivery at the AJCs overall.

So this is just a little foundation, and, Doug, I really think it's time to introduce everyone now to the new technical resource. So I'm going to turn the presentation over to you.

DOUG KEAST: Thank you, Laura. The purpose of this technical guide is to support the expansion of employment networks or ENs in the public workforce system. Our objective here is to promote the benefits of participating as an EN and to support workforce systems in the effective use of EN implementation to meet their own objectives in the effective inclusion of people with disabilities in their career pathway models.

This presentation serves to enhance workforce entity's awareness of available resources to help them in operation as an EN, including guidance and promising practices.

I hope you'll forgive me for reading these next few slides, but I'm not sure I can improve on the -- benefits to workforce systems and EN operation include opportunities to generate more flexible funding to invest in customer services. The Ticket program provides a proven revenue source that can complement state and federal resources. It is discretionary funding, allowing flexibility with how ENs use the income.

It capitalizes on work already provided to people with disabilities with additional payments for job placement. It provides an opportunity to increase capacity of workforce systems to enhance AJC services to more people with disabilities. Many ENs invest Ticket income in staff with expertise to help build the capacity of AJC programs to increase the service response to and inclusion of jobseekers with disabilities.

Increasing skills, knowledge, and resources in a workforce system makes it more likely that people with disabilities, including people with more significant disabilities, will be able to be engaged in the career pathway models developed within workforce system partnerships.

To increase the quality of customer service for all customers. The workforce EN reinforces WIOA priorities of a customer-focused workforce system. By becoming an EN, the AJC increases expertise in serving specialized populations and strengthens partnerships with vocational rehabilitation, local organizations, and employers, which enhances customer service that benefits all jobseekers.

To increase collaboration on service alignment in American Job Center customer service. Engaging VR is a core program in workforce EN operation supports states' WIOA requirements to enhance partnerships and work with multiple service systems. Cross-training of professional staff that supports the operation of an EN increases alignment of customer service for all customers.

To address a priority in the local workforce plan to increase employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Many local boards establish objectives in the engagement of people with disabilities in the labor market and in career pathways. Workforce EN operation is a strategy. Ticket payments, among other educators, serving as evidence of system impact. It supports meeting performance measures through employment, trainings, and retention.

To advance racial equity and disability justice for underserved members of the community. The Ticket program supports and reaches all individuals, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.

And, finally, more people with disabilities achieve employment outcomes. All of the reasons mentioned before lead to this. The effort that goes into successful EN operation and increased system capacity that occurs leads to more people with disabilities being engaged in work in their communities.

In the development of the content for this guide, our team conducted direct interviews with representatives from 10 workforce employment networks engaged in the DEI from round six through eight and an additional nine representatives from workforce ENs in two facilitated discussions.

The ENs that participated in the facilitated discussions were selected based upon strong current and historical workforce EN activity and in consultation with the Ticket program manager for the Social Security Administration. 13 of the operators included in the discussions reflected experiences of EN operations that are considered mature. That is, they've been in operation for 10 or more years.

This phase of the scope of work focused on gaining insights from the field. It provided an opportunity to learn directly from both DEI and non-DEI workforce employment networks that have operationalized the Ticket to work.

The purpose of the interviews was to inform the structure of a technical guide to support workforce EN operation. This informed recommendations which followed for the structure of the technical guide.

The key recommendations that come from the workforce operators interviewed came both from their recognition that other workforce systems have engaged and abandoned this strategy and with their understanding of challenges that they faced in their journey. Their suggestions to us, and hopefully reflected through this guide to other workforce systems is, one, maintain the focus on why we go down this path to begin with and keep the outcomes in front of you. Identify them at the outset, and use this information to shape operation improvement over time. EN operation is complicated and the focus on the trees can cause us to lose our view of the forest.

Yes. The potential for additional income to invest in the capacity of a workforce system is significant through this strategy, but it is always about the career success of people with disabilities.

Second, the service alignment of the programs operating in the workforce system or AJC is important to the outcomes of the operation, and all programs must have a sense of investment or skin in the game.

Third, growth planning is important. Being able to reasonably project Ticket income that supports advanced planning of how that income might be invested to strengthen system capacity is very important. In this planning, it is also important to plan how the functions of EN operation can be addressed without Ticket funding in the early stages.

Fourth, have the long game in mind. While the potential for new flexible funding to a workforce system through EN operation is strong, it is also slow in coming and depends on local system leadership, vision and patience.

With this input and in light of guidance and encouragement provided by ETA related to SSA's partnership with the workforce system in EN operation, the Ticket to Work Operating a Workforce EN: Planning Guide and Workbook is being launched through today's webinar. We're pleased to be able to review a few of the highlights today.

One of the features of this guide is the EN readiness checklist. If users wish, they can complete each item of the checklist, which is aligned with content that is either valuable or necessary to EN implementation. There are two different approaches that we suggest in using this guide, which I'll address in the next few slides. These include use as a ready resource and use as a workbook and guide.

This guide will be useful to leadership teams and operators of workforce systems contemplating or desiring to operate as workforce ENs or workforce systems that currently operate as an EN and desire to reassess their operation.

There is a desk aid included that can be customized and used by workforce systems in clarifying EN operation within their AJC service flow and used in orientation and training with professional staff operating in the AJC.

Based on input from successful operating workforce ENs, there is a section on operational challenges and demonstrated solutions and practices to address those challenges.

So how to use this guide. This technical guide intended to compliment the Social Security Administration's onboarding training modules, as Steven mentioned earlier. This guide expands on the detail and guidance that SSA provides for all operating employment networks to support the use of EN operation as a strategy to meet workforce system objectives in the vision of WIOA. It does not address specific details of payment schedules and processes, determining Ticket availability, the use of SSA Ticket portal, and other operational processes addressed in the SSA training.

This guide is a ready resource for workforce systems with regard to specific topics as questions or need presents itself. For users who wish to go through the guide from start to finish, it is also a workbook with activities that support assistance planning process for EN operation and implementation of that plan.

As a ready resource, users can use hyperlinks built into the table of contents to be able to navigate quickly to the section with information desired. In addition to information addressed in that section, there are also links to additional resources in the text and often in footnotes.

In addition, Appendix II is an acronym guide and Appendix III is a workhorse EN resource directory. As a workbook for planning and implementation, this guide includes a focus on aligning EN operation with workforce board plans for customer service.

From start to finish, this is a manual that serves to support the translation of planning and knowledge to action. Content is arranged in order to support a workforce leadership or planning team in envisioning how the EN operation can be established in their system, becoming a workforce EN, planning and implementing an EN operation, and evaluating that implementation and its impact to support ongoing improvements in that operation.

Those that complete the activities in this guide from start to finish will complete a readiness checklist for EN operation and an operational plan. As a workbook, activities appear periodically in the content of the guide. This first example in the section appears -- this first example appears in the section of the workforce EN operation and through hyperlink will take the user to the appendix, where an activity on the identification of staff assigned to specific activity, the qualifications determined to be needed for that individual, and how the training will be provided to support the staff person in the role is addressed.

The second example is a link to the readiness checklist that appears in the section on envisioning the operation of a workforce EN. With this checklist item, the user is asked to identify whether the state or local plan has identified a priority for including people with disabilities in workforce system customer services. This is relevant to our operation, and the operation of a workforce EN is an excellent strategy to address that service plan priority.

Again, this guide is designed to assist state and local area workforce leadership in the process of applying to become an EN or who are new to EN operation or who are currently operating as an EN and wish to take a fresh look on what they're doing.

In the appendices, there are a number of items that will be of use to all three of these types of users. Items here include checklists, discussion questions, and exercises. Each of these activities can be utilized, regardless of the type of workforce EN model your system may be engaged in, though there may be slight differences in who engages in these activities, depending on the leadership structure established for the EN operation.

We will review a sampling of these appendices today. In Appendix I is a template for a desk aid that can be customized for local EN operation. Some of you may see similarity in this type of chart with the one that you have developed to reflect a customer service flow in your AJC or workforce service system.

This desk aid has two sections, one for initial service engagement and one for individualized customer service flow with service and case management activities. In both sections, activities reflecting EN operation are inserted to reflect alignment with Job Center service operation. The lines below each service component are provided as space in which service roles or teams can be added to customize this chart for use by professionals as a desk aid or to support staff orientation for EN operation.

Appendix V is an activity that is designed to support the user in assessing the alignment of customer service across the core required and other programs operating in the AJC. This activity is based on a self-assessment process developed by the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center and asks the user to identify what level of service alignment their partners are currently operating. Isolated, communicating, coordinating, collaborating, or integrated?

In Appendix VIII, there is an activity that supports a leadership team or user in the identification of which staff role is addressing which operational function and qualifications and training necessary to complete the role satisfactorily. This activity is laid out in a service flow similar to that of the desk aid. In Appendix VIII, there is an example to begin with and then a chart that the leadership team or user can complete for inclusion in their own workforce EN operation plan.

We referred to the readiness checklist at several points today, and it will be found in Appendix IV. Throughout the guide, there are checklist questions tied to content, and the order of this checklist chart follows the order in which questions are posed in the guide. There are hyperlinks embedded in the guide that take the user to the checklist and then back to the content area from which they can.

If the user completes all checklist items throughout the guide, then the user will also complete the readiness checklist and be able to compare the total score to the scoring rubric that immediately follows the checklist.

In the EN application with the Social Security Administration, the applicant outlines a business plan. Here the operation plan includes that information in the business plan in the SSA application, plus additional planning information that ties the information into overall workforce system operation. This will support ongoing planning and program improvement.

A leadership team or user that completes all activities in the sections of the workforce EN planning guide should have the information required to complete this workforce EN operation plan using this template in Appendix XII.

Well, these are but a few of the highlights with the workforce EN planning guide. I mentioned a bit ago that there are different workforce EN operational models that we generally see used by workforce systems. Though each operation is completely unique upon itself, all workforce EN systems that we've talked with fall into one of these three models.

These models include the local workforce development area EN model, the state workforce EN model, and the administrative EN model. The guide goes into more detail regarding the differences of these models, but we'll have an opportunity today to hear from the experiences of successful operators of each of these separate types of workforce EN operation.

Brian, Michelle, and Char have already been introduced to you earlier in today's presentation, and I'll ask that they are representative of the 19 very successful workforce ENs that have contributed to the development of this guide. We're sorry that we'll not be able to include all that have been involved in this live discussion, but invite each of you to consult with the operating workforce ENs close to you as you consider operating as a workforce EN.

Brian, Michelle, and Char are each unique in their leadership roles and insightful in the opportunity that EN operation provides for each of their systems. We're so happy that each of you could join us today.

MICHELLE O'CAMB: Thank you.

MR. KEAST: Michelle O'Camb is from the Sacramento Employment Training Agency in Sacramento, California, which is successful in the operation of a local workforce EN model. Michelle, would you like to start us off?

MS. O'CAMB: Sure. Thank you, Doug, and it's my pleasure to be here today to share our experience as an EN. I know that there's three points that Doug has asked us to hit on in our -- this first part of the presentation. And the first one is the local -- our local board's interest in the operation of an EN.

So I can share that SETA has been a contracted employment network with the Social Security Administration since 2006. We've been fortunate to have a strong support and interest from our workforce board back then and to this day and for true systems change, supporting our interests to become an EN and approving participation and administration of other initiatives, advancing the work that we do in serving people with disabilities.

Contributing to our success as an EN, our workforce board gave us lots of room needed for trial and error without pulling the plug on us. If we weren't trying, testing, tripping, sometimes failing, we weren't learning. And it takes a visionary board to support that and a steadfast commitment to making our disability programs a significant part of our workforce system fabric. So we really have been grateful to our board to give us that latitude and room to grow and learn.

It also takes a progressive state workforce board. In California, we're fortunate that our state workforce boards have included strategies within their state unified plan to address competitive integrated employment for those with developmental and intellectual disabilities and has asked all local workforce boards in the state to do the same within our local plans.

And then, finally, I will say that Ticket to Work revenue has never been a driver in the decisions our board or our staff have made as an EN in advancing services to SSI and SSDI beneficiaries. However, it has been an invaluable financial resource and benefit. So wasn't the driving force that, well, on the back end of this, it's quite remarkable.

The next point that we were asked to consider is how we operationalized the Ticket to Work program in our system. So it began with the integration of the program in the system through staff training, which we initially received from our assigned officer at Maximus.

Next, was targeted professional development on serving individuals with disabilities, which included increasing the cultural competency of our system staff, starting with disability etiquette training offered through Pacific ADA. This training is brought back periodically to introduce new team members and system partners as we gain more and add to our team members within our system.

We make it a point to ensure that all front desk and office line staff participate in this training because, oftentimes, they are typically the first individuals our customers encounter, and we want them to be a very good experience.

Identifying an approach through system partner serving people with disabilities to begin to cultivate or expand our relationships. Some, under WIA and WIOA legislation are required partners that we are to be working with under that legislation but hadn't really done so in a meaningful way.

In addition, when first becoming an EN in 2006, we had applied and received disability program navigator funding, which resulted in us certifying 10 disability program navigators. This was effective, but I should say that as time went on, many of those original 10 DPN team members retired or left the agency, leaving one remaining, which did change in 2015 under -- when we received the DEI grant as a participant under one of California's rounds of DEI and we were able to reestablish the team.

Also, we implemented recurring Ticket to Work orientations. Offered it to Job Centers two days per month with one-on-one orientations available on a case-by-case basis. We also established a Ticket to Work hotline, as well as a general disability services email address that is easy to remember and is checked daily.

We also ensured that our -- all of our coaches received training on the Disability Benefits 101 e-platform to assist SSI and SSDI customers in researching how their work plans might affect their cash benefits as well as their health benefits. And, finally, we developed policy guidance specific to the Ticket to Work program, which outlines the internal processes and procedures that a coach can follow when working with a Ticket to Work client, including the contact information for our disability resource coordinator.

And then there was one other final point that we were asked to speak on, and that was notable developments or milestones. So I'll just say that real systems change did occur and began as a result of the -- of California's DEI funding that they received from DOL.

The initiative enabled us to expand the professional capacity of our system coaches, to provide better services to the people with disabilities that we were serving and targeting. These coaches, two at each job center, established our disability services team, which stands today.

The training and professional development continued throughout the entire four years of the initiative with the intent to not only increase the numbers of people with disabilities served in our system, but to improve and increase physical access to education, employment, and training opportunities within the workforce system, which we did.

One key point I'd like to share is that when looking for coaches for our disability services team, we solicited the interest as opposed to making a – (inaudible). And this was really key. We wanted to ensure that individuals making up our disability services team were interested and committed to expanding their knowledge and capacity to improve the overall experience for the customers with disabilities that we were serving and that we serve.

In terms of milestones, the impact that the DEI funding had on our system was clearly reflected in our overall grant performance. Access to programs and services for people with disabilities within our system increased from 4 percent of the total job center system population to 18 percent, a 14 percent increase. Seven years later, we hold around 15 percent of system population served. And to give you an indication of the size of our workforce system, we historically see 25,000 distinct customers annually.

In addition, the number of Ticket assignments increased substantially, and the trend continues today. We currently have a little over 150 Tickets SSI and SSDI beneficiaries in -- that we are serving. We are currently generating payments on approximately 85 of them who have attained employment and retained employment.

The financial impact for those efforts has resulted in an increase in our Ticket to Work performance revenue from $17,000 in 2015, and I use 2015 because that's the point in time where we were participants in the DEI grant. You heard me mention that we've been an EN since 2006, but really this is notable. DEI funding capacity, professional capacity building 2015, we started at $17,000. And the year we -- into let's see -- 2020, year-end, which just ended in December, we have reached just under $220,000 in performance revenue.

So, hopefully, I didn't jumble that up too much, but I will -- that's it for me, and I'm going to pass the baton to I believe it's Brian.

MR. KEAST: OK. Well, thank you so much, Michelle. That was tremendous, and we thank you again for joining us. And we will move to Brian. Brian?

BRIAN DENNIS: Good -- yes. Good afternoon – (inaudible) – my team.

MR. KEAST: I was just going to say, Brian Dennis is from Iowa Workforce Development and leads a state workforce EN operation. And, Brian, I'm sorry I stepped all over you. You go ahead.

MR. DENNIS: Well, – (inaudible) – not the first one, and I'm sure it won't be the last time. OK. We tend to butt heads a little bit. I've known Doug for a very long time. He's a friend and a mentor, and I take as much -- a great deal of joy in mocking him.

So, but, just the reason that we are all here today and, at least in my time zone, it's the afternoon, is what brought IWB, Iowa Works and our state workforce system to Ticket to Work. So we've been an EN since 2007, and what really started a lot of this work is the idea that our system is meant to serve all individuals. And you may have heard earlier in the presentation, workforce centers are not always the first thought when it comes to a place where a person with disabilities can go and get quality employment services.

So there was a -- very much a full planned out commitment to really change that and open those doors well before WIOA took place. So one of the big things that we do is that each one of our centers, we dedicate at least two staff who are what we call our Ticket reps. And it's not that these individuals are the only persons who serve customers who experience a disability, but these are the individuals who have the additional subject matter expertise to serve these individuals who will be accessing our centers.

Part of that comes with the -- with training when it comes to disability benefits, knowing about their resources, both financial and supportive services, and really, most importantly, they represent multiple partners within our centers. So, of those representatives that we have in our system, one person represents our local area Title I provider and the other representative represent our Title III provider.

That first step of it is never a me, that it is a we changes from a quantitative standpoint the attitude we have in working with Ticket. We've also been very fortunate that, during our time in being an EN, we were granted two rounds of the Disability Employment Initiative. And the DEI grant gave us an opportunity to really test what works.

So at that time, our state was divided into local regions and – (inaudible) – local regions work as test sites, pilot sites for the DEI grant. So we worked a lot and looked at not only staff capability but also how to make our centers as acceptable as we can be.

Now, before I go any more, I want to say just one of my favorite things, that if you're going to commit to Ticket and really good quality services for a person with a disability, you will never be complete. You would never be at the end of the road. You will never put a period on – (inaudible). Are you ever going to do that, comma?

So there's going to be trial and error. There's going to be a -- there's going to be a learning curve that you'll never get past.

So through the use of the DEI grant, we were able to look at centers across our state, some rural areas, some urban, and how can we make those centers both acceptable programically and physically. And we found things that will be really good partners, not only to the person who accesses our services, but to our statewide partners, such as voc rehab.

These are lessons that we learned in VR -- excuse me. Through lessons learned in DEI, we really worked hard on our outreach activities, on having our center staff be really open, welcome, and good quality service for persons that we serve. And what that's led to is a lot of growth.

And we do have a growth from a financial standpoint. Our EN consistently brings in six figures annually when it comes to Ticket dollars. But also, what I feel is the most important thing is that we've seen – (inaudible) – shift when it comes to how our partners and the persons who are seeking our services look at workforce centers.

We partner on both the state and local level with our partners who specifically serve persons with disabilities, whether it's VR, whether it's our community nonprofit, the community rehab providers, other groups, the Employment First Initiative, for those of you who are familiar. A lot of those partners have come to look at, partner with, and relying on workforce centers to, again -- to steal a line from Mr. Keast -- to be the ride – (inaudible) – live on boats. It really changes our systemic view of serving individuals.

The big thing also is this. It's more bang for your buck. When you're a workforce -- when you’re a state workforce agency and you're doing Ticket work, one of the biggest things that really helped me wrap my head around is that you're getting an extra reward for what you should already be doing. Ticket work at its core is no different than the services that we should and are required to provide for all individuals.

By integrating Ticket into your system -- and we integrate Ticket into everything that we do -- it is a service that is offered in all of our centers with our Ticket rep. We have Ticket information that's accessible that we have built into our data management system. Well, really it's the idea of we want every day for Ticket to be looked at as a part of the center, a part of the system, and not a standalone program.

That will always be a level of work you always have to be mindful of, but commitment to that process is from a systemic as well financial standpoint, huge, huge gain. So I've been fortunate to be a part of the team in different ways for the past eight years, but what we've seen since 2007 is that we've really seen our state, our centers, and our services role to really be more inclusive to all individuals, especially those who experience disabilities.

So, with that, that is my quick overview of our EN experience with Ticket to Work.

MR. KEAST: Thank you so much, Brian. And let's go ahead and move. Char Hirte operates the workforce EN with the Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Program in the administrative EN operation. Char, thank you for joining us today.

CHARLOTTE HIRTE: Yes. Thank you. Good afternoon, everybody. So, like Doug said, we are -- I am from Rural Minnesota CEP. We are a private nonprofit, and we are a partner in the American Job Center. We started out as an employment network in 2002, actually, through DED. DED, the Minnesota Department of Economic Development, was the administrative EN that they decided to stop being an administrative EN in 2017.

So we researched whether or not to become an employment network on our own or, again, go through and try to find another administrative EN. And we were fortunate enough to find the American Dream Employment Network. So we decided to contract with them. We are a provider affiliate with ADEN. What that allows us to do is they are actually EN of record, and it allows us to have more time to focus on providing employment support services rather than the administrative duties.

They provide us with professional training and ongoing technical assistance from national experts. They actually do the billing and work with the Social Security directly. We don't work with, as far as the billing portion, with Social Security. They have a secure electronic portal where we enter all of our information, so we have no paper files. And they also -- ADEN connects members that they call the provider village members. They provide us with employer partners committed to hiring individuals with disabilities.

So we have monthly meetings called huddles with ADEN. And usually, at every one of those meetings, they provide an employer that's searching for individuals and open to individual hire who have disabilities.

We also serve a large service area. We have 18 counties that we serve. We've had five to eight certified work incentive practitioners throughout this process. We've also been able to take advantage of opportunities from the Department of Human Services, and we've had four people become certified benefit coaches as well.

So we are located in eight workforce centers, or we call them in Minnesota Career Forces. And we have staff members trained in each of those workforce centers, and I'm kind of the coordinator for the program.

MR. KEAST: OK. Well, thank you very much, Char. Appreciate you also joining us today and being part of the panel.

And, now, we're going to move on to the panel discussion where we go around and share. And I do want to mention to each of you, Char, Michelle, and Brian, we are just a couple of minutes ahead of time. So, and I know you're not shy, but if you'd like to take a little bit more time in your response, you can, and we'll be watching the clock as we go.

And we'd like to mention to the audience also, we'll have a Q&A session at the end also. So if you wanted to add -- put in some questions in the participant question list and if we have time, we'll address them at the end as well. So let's go to this question.

How does the EN operation fit into your overall workforce system operation? And for this one, Brian, would you like to start us off?

MR. DENNIS: Absolutely. My mute button was pushed. I apologize.

MR. KEAST: OK.

MR. DENNIS: OK. Yeah. And, again, after you talk, Doug, then I'll speak up.

OK. Yes. So, how do we integrate the EN operation into the overall workforce system? So, we integrate it in -- it's going to sound like -- I'll expand a little bit. But, first off, we integrate everything that we do to really start with step one. So individuals accessing our centers, they have the option to self-disclose that they receive benefits which can then identify them as a Ticket holder.

What happens then is that, again, we have two individuals in each one of our locations, at least two individuals each one of our locations who are a Ticket to Work representative. The individuals identified as potential Ticket holders are connected with these individuals who will discuss the Ticket to Work program, look at the – (inaudible) – of a Ticket. That's where I come in to check the – (inaudible) – and really have that individual develop a plan of how to move to employment.

The other thing is that we serve all customers. So regardless of being a ticket holder or not, an individual who comes to our center is going to receive all this service with move into employment. However, those who are Ticket holders are, again, connected with that Ticket representative to do some of that more specialized frontend work regarding benefits, planning, looking at where they are with their benefit, potential impact. And then we look very strongly at any and all co-enrollment.

But that is where we would look to our Title I partners or other resources when it comes to education and training. We look at what preparedness, through workshop schedules. Obviously, with the pandemic, we work a little differently as we are all very COVID conscious at this point.

And then we want to make sure that, on the local level as well, Ticket is one of the things that is looked at by our local workforce development boards and the various disability access committees we have out of each one of our centers. So, all of those groups also take a strong look at Ticket from a service standpoint, from an enrollment standpoint. Obviously, we keep an eye on the incentive dollars that have flowed – (inaudible), obviously, highlight and orient those dollars for the local level for the reinvestment of the Ticket holders.

We have a really strong partnership with our VR partners, and we get a lot of referrals through the partnership plus agreement, which also is integrated into our system that we are working with on both a state and local level with the representative from our VR agencies to make sure that we are serving these individuals and making sure that we are attaching individuals from the front door as well as the handoff between partners.

So, we integrate each one of those things in every step that we do through our workforce operations.

MR. KEAST: OK. Thank you, Brian. Char, would you like to take this question?

MS. HIRTE: Sure. So kind of piggybacking off of what Brian indicated, yeah. When a customer comes into the workforce center, we look at any of our programs that we have to offer. So we work with WIOA and WIOA youth. We also serve – (inaudible) – clients, so our TANF -- individuals who are receiving TANF funds.

So when they come into the workforce center for assistance, we look at any programs that they may be eligible for. So if somebody is receiving SSI or SSDI, then that's when we take a further look at it to see if it's a situation where they would be eligible for the Ticket program.

A lot of individuals aren't quite ready for that. They might be wanting to work and supplement some of their income. But just with the training that we've been able to receive through the Cornell and also the give DB 101 through the certified benefit coach, we're able to offer a lot of general information. We also have pamphlets out, the Red Book and Social Security brochures.

So even if something isn't -- if someone isn't ready for the Ticket program, they just maybe want to work and earn a few extra hundred dollars a month, we're able to provide them some resources and guidance on how working affects their benefits.

So, but once somebody is identified as a possible Ticket customer, then they are referred to one of our Ticket team members to do additional assessments and work with them more directly, obtaining their DBQIs. Right away, we provide an initial benefit summary so they know what happens when they start working, and also really alleviating a lot of the fear that comes in too when somebody starts working, not wanting to lose their benefits and especially their health benefits.

So being able to provide that information and, again, coordinating with any of our other programs that we have. We also serve the Senior American Program, and we've actually had several people co-enrolled in our Ticket program and Senior American Program. So it really is kind of a wraparound service that we can provide.

MR. KEAST: Excellent. Well, thanks so much, Char. And, Michelle, how are things working with you? And I just thought I'd mention we have caught up with the time now, so we're back on target. Michelle, are you there?

MS. O'CAMB: So sorry. I did what Brian did. I had to unmute myself. So sorry.

So, client flow is very similar in our workforce area, but so I -- but I'll go back to kind of that customer engagement. So before even engaging with any customers, it was really critical for us to understand kind of the challenges that impede employment for people -- for the people with disabilities that we're serving, not just their challenges but also our system challenges. And it is necessary to revisit those challenges on occasion as changes occur either in the economic landscape such as COVID and others.

So, I mean, some of the challenges that I think most of us are familiar with are competing with the SSI and SSDI benefits, how to counter the fear our customers may have in losing their disability benefits, fragmented services requiring multiple doors of entry, and many of us having to do things like – (inaudible) – client to access services, again, because – (inaudible)identified.

Longer-term engagement required to reach employment goals. Some cases it does take longer, but how do you work with your clients to understand that and help assist with that or maybe establish shorter -- maybe that short- and long-term goal setting. Maybe have some goals within that.

Lack of access to services with disabilities. That kind of goes to the system challenges, especially those with developmental or intellectual disabilities. And then also employers that are not in tune to hiring people with disabilities, not because of a bad experience but just because they're -- they have never had exposure to that.

So then it's establishing the strategy. We create a no wrong door access by promoting a centralized service model. The response has been partner training and coordination – (inaudible). That creates more entry points for people with disabilities in our system. It can create those colocation opportunities for partners and for staff, so not just partners collocating in our Job Centers but staff, our staff collocating in places like community college, improving service access and co-enrollment opportunities to for that – (inaudible) – organization.

We really focused on building and expanding and we're still doing this today upon our – (inaudible) – community-based organization expert in serving – (inaudible) – disabilities. Repurpose for Independent Living comes to mind as one of our core partners. Providing a continuum of professional development of our disability services team, such as job readiness for people with disabilities or including and -- which includes a module on disclosure.

Actively promoting cultural competency beginning with the disability etiquette, which we mentioned earlier. We are -- I am a strong proponent and supporter of the multidisciplinary integrated resource team, which supports the coordinated service delivery strategy, including plan development, shared decision making, and shared success principles.

It's certainly expanding employer and business engagement, knowing that it's the value of hiring skilled – (inaudible) – with disabilities. And then in terms of increasing our outreach to SSI and SSDI Ticket holders to promote the benefits of the Ticket program, we include providing access to benefits planning. We offer work incentives. We coordinate the delivery of the workforce services resource, while also kind of providing that safety net for beneficiaries who – (inaudible) – a little bit of work without fear of immediate loss of cash or health benefits.

And then, finally, continuously seeking funding opportunities to enhance and expand services such as the governor in the state of California disability and – (inaudible) – funding which – (inaudible) – has additionally funded from his WIOA discretionary allocation.

To give you example, we are just starting our fourth round of VEA funding. The grants are intended to accelerate employment and reemployment for people with disabilities through work-based learning opportunities and education and training and job placement and retention of services, which have been a perfect complement to our Ticket to Work program.

And I know we're running tight on schedule, but I would be remiss if I did not indicate that we couldn't do this without our partners and, really -- and I know I've said it, but partners are critical in this. It's impossible for workforce system coaches to be expert in serving all populations. It's just not realistic. So we do leverage that expertise through our partners. We learn as we do that and then they do as well.

The term that it takes a village is never more appropriate than with some of our developmentally disabled customers that we have served under IRTs, oftentimes made up of three or four organizations with coaches coordinating numerous programs and services, sometimes as many as five different programs.

And then also, the colocation of those partners, which you heard me mention, Department of Rehab, invaluable. Nor Cal Center on – (inaudible) – is invaluable. Resources for Independent Living, invaluable. The Regional Center.

And then there is not a training opportunity that our workforce team members do not take advantage of, whether offered by DOR, the California Workforce Association here in California, or our own regional workforce training team, so for that continuum of professional development. I'm passionate about the work. So sorry that I went over it.

MR. KEAST: OK. Well, thank you so very much, Michelle, and all three of you. And it's really clear that, through your process, all of you have added expertise to your customer service and your centers through your operation as an employment network, something that you all shared.

Since we are -- we moved from ahead of the schedule to behind on the schedule, I'm going to skip the implementation challenge but will note that implementation challenges that have been identified by all of the folks that we interviewed with in gaining our insights from the field and responses to those ways of addressing those challenges, there is a section in the technical guide on that. And we may come back to this in the Q&A session, if we run out of questions.

So let's move on, and, briefly, if you're able, let's talk about just a quick customer success story. And, Michelle, would you like to -- we'll flip it around. Would you like to start?

MS. O'CAMB: OK. I can share a story -- a success story. His name is Charles, and we started working with him back in November 2007. We're still working with him today, not in an enroll manner. With Charles, there have been many opportunities for on ramps and off ramps.

We met Charles through our colocation at one of our community college campuses. We were collocated in the DSTS office. He had a career goal of becoming a CNA. We -- I -- we had under our disability employment accelerator grant, one of them, we were working with a skilled nursing facility that was in need of a food service worker. And so Charles voiced an interest in kind of getting his foot in the door with a skilled nursing facility. And and he interviewed and was hired for the food service under an OJT under our DEA grant.

And he was struggling, and we -- through our IRT, we reached out to DOR, and they were able to secure a job coach for Charles. And within a two-month -- a two-week period of time, his productivity level increased and -- as well as his confidence. He successfully completed that OJT.

Within five months of completing his OJT, because his goal was not to be a food service worker but to be a CNA, we brought the IRT team back together and talked about the next step for Charles, which was a CNA program. His employer, the skilled nursing facility, was able to provide him release from work for about five weeks accelerated training course at the adult ed campus that he attended. He was also supported by Alta Regional Tailored Day Program. So he had an aide who was able to help him navigate the campus as well as support him through -- with daily incidentals.

Alta Regional also secured Yellow Cab services for Charles because he was relying on paratransit. And those of you that are familiar in California with paratransit, it's not like calling Uber and saying, I need to be picked up at 8:00 o'clock. So we had Yellow Cab at his disposal for not just lab hours but also when he moved to clinical with the CNA program.

He successfully completed the training in spring of 2019 and secured his state license in the summer of -- that summer. And we did reach out to Red Cross to request accommodations, not to lighten the load on what he was tested on but just made some accommodations for a quieter area for the testing.

Charles, once he secured the credential, was promoted by his – (inaudible) – employer, the skilled nursing facility. He was promoted to CNA. With that experienced, Charles decided to extend his goal to be an LVN. He is currently taking classes at the community college for prerequisite courses. He does plan to go to adult ed again for that LVN accelerated course.

He is also working on his continuing ed units for -- to maintain his license. In addition to all of that, we are working with Charles to address his transportation challenge. So we are securing driver's education for him, and also we'll be looking at ILS services to talk to him about ultimately -- and he's interested in it -- independent living and being fully self-reliant.

So the total engagement of time with Charles has been about three and a half years. He's, again, not currently enrolled in our program, but as we continue to work with him, we have seen advances in time, if there's some support that's needed or his training dollars needed. We'll be right there with him.

MR. KEAST: Awesome. Thanks, Michelle. Brian, do you have a customer success story?

MR. DENNIS: Did my unmute work quickly this time? Sure. So one of the things that -- and I know you asked us previously, Doug, to give you individual success stories and we have several. But one thing I just want to talk about was kind of more of a systemic success story.

And really one of the successes that we've had through our integration of taking -- I alluded to it earlier -- is the amount of our co-enrollment or sharing of customers, that we have that happen across the state.

So we've heard multiple times the integration of the integrated resource team, which is that multidisciplinary approach to serving individuals that experience disability, have those complex needs. So from -- really from the DEI grant forward, we routinely do integrated resources team where we bring together partners from our state workforce system, our Title I providers, our VR partners, our local nonprofit, to move people to a employment.

So, one of the things that I think is just so incredibly powerful when it comes to participation in Ticket is not only the individual successes but the systemic change where your organizations no longer look back at something that is a last resort. For a person with disabilities, you are an active first choice partner for a person with disabilities. And that goes from the top down.

You definitely see it on the local level through disability access committees, the local level board, and all these initiatives and the growth of your individual centers. So had a really hard time to give one particular success story of an individual versus I really want to talk more about just the overarching and the moving the needle from a systemic standpoint, which is really tied to the work of the partners and can really be bolstered by Ticket to Work participation.

MR. KEAST: Awesome. Thanks, Brian. And that leaves Char.

MS. HIRTE: Sure. So, we do have several success stories, but, just in general, we've had three individuals actually phase out of the Ticket program, meaning they have met all of their milestones, have -- we've received all the payments we are going to receive on them, but they are no longer requiring SSI or SSDI, which is the ultimate goal for individuals.

Not everybody is going to meet that goal, of course, but just knowing that in the -- kind of the short time that we've been in it, knowing that this could take seven years for somebody to go through the whole thing, that we've had three individuals phase out of the Ticket program is -- it's one of our success stories.

MR. KEAST: That is truly awesome. I think it's a good reflection on any employment network when they see folks they're serving reach that milestone.

With the next question, I'd like to ask each of you to perhaps do it in one sentence, if you can. Do you have a specific suggestion for other workforce systems, all of the folks that are on this call today? They may be workforce EN operators. They may be considering it. What's the main suggestion you would have for them as they implement an employment network? And on this one, let's start with Brian.

MR. DENNIS: The specific suggestion would be invest in the skill set of your staff. The more well trained in everything from business planning, partnering, – (inaudible) – filing, disability etiquette, the more professionally the investment professional development for the staff will be serve your customers, and that will create the end benefits when it comes to inclusion and your incentive dollars.

MR. KEAST: Thank you, Brian. Char, what is your suggestion?

MS. HIRTE: Yeah. I was going to kind of say the similar thing to Brian, but also then being able to provide that education that we obtain to professionals really across the system and with our partners, being able to inform them, even helping out with the local Social Security offices. I'm sometimes an advocate for individuals working with the Social Security office. So, again, really sharing the information and resources with everybody across the system.

MR. KEAST: Excellent. Thank you, Char. And, Michelle, what is your advice?

MS. O'CAMB: Echo that, but also I would say that identifying and taking an existing workforce development board that is an EN within either your region or if you can't find one, look to Maximus to see if they can find one for you as -- for that mentorship and as a go-to.

I mean, one more I would add, the technical guide. The new technical guide can be used as a as a great resource for implementing a new program in your system, and I wish we would have had it. And I think it will help us to strengthen our -- the work that we're doing.

MR. KEAST: OK. Well, thank you, panel, and stick around because we do have a Q&A session coming up here.

We'd like to thank the dedicated and compassionate people that joined us for this presentation today in releasing the new Technical Guide for Workforce Employment Networks.

In reflection here, I think that you here in the audience have heard information from these workforce EN operators that's very consistent with what our team heard throughout the process of developing the structure for this guide. We hope that we've captured this insight successfully in the guide and that this, with resources that are added and developed in the guide, will be useful to all workforce systems wishing to operate as an employment network.

And one final reflection before I ask Steve if he has anything to add. I'm really, really impressed with the fact that each of our panel members spoke of the EN operation not as a program in and of itself but as a larger part of the whole system strategy to include people with disabilities in their system services. And I think that's truly amazing.

Steven, do you have anything add?

MR. RIETZKE: Well, I think I would echo all the comments that Doug made, and I just want to really say thank you to everybody who contributed to this guide and in particular Doug and Laura, Brian, Michelle, Charlotte. Thank you for your contributions and for walking through your insights with folks today.

I hope that for all of you who have tuned in, you've been able to learn something new and that we've inspired you to check out the technical guide, which we think can be so useful in the efforts that our panel walked through today.

I did just want to pause real quick and note that we got a couple questions from folks asking if we have DEI grants available at this time and how you might go about getting more information about those.

At this time, we don't have specific DEI funding. We funded DEI for a number of rounds, I think about eight rounds. And for the last few years, we've been kind of with limited appropriated resources at the federal level. We've actually been contributing to ODEP's RETAIN initiative, which focuses on stay-at-work, return-to-work strategies or particularly early interventions for folks who are at risk of detaching from the labor market because they become injured or ill.

And so, we've kind of been contributing funding on the ODEP side for the RETAIN initiative. I can't say for sure what the future may hold in terms of funding that looks like DEI, but at this time, I don't have funds like that on the immediate horizon. But thank you for the question.

MR. KEAST: OK. Thank you, Steven. We do have a few questions about how you access the guide.

And we're pleased at this time to announce that the new technical guide is available at the link on this page at Disability.WorkforceGPS.org. I checked this myself yesterday and it is up and I was able to access it and hope that you will be able to find it and also note the other resources that are available at the same location. And my colleagues are posting the link as I speak. So you should be able to pull it down from the session.

And now, moving on. Time is rolling away pretty quickly. This has been a great discussion, and I really appreciate the great insight from Brian, Michelle, and Char.

We have just a few minutes to address some questions. This is a great question. "Is there a section on partnering with the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency?"

And, actually, it's addressed in a number of ways in the guide. One is in discussion related to the partnership plus and how important that is as vocational rehabilitation agencies operate with their own agreement already with the Social Security Administration.

But you're right. In your question about VR being a core program in operating a workforce center system. And it's addressed several ways as far as how the leadership is engaged in operating a workforce employment network because, certainly, they have great expertise in supporting the system and being responsive as a system to individuals with disabilities. So that is addressed through the service alignment section as well.

Moving on down, looking at additional questions. Brian, Joe's interesting, Joe Robinson, what part of Iowa are you from? He's from – (inaudible). Maybe you guys can connect a little bit later. Let's see.

MR. DENNIS: So do you want to answer that?

MR. KEAST: Sure. Go ahead. Just very quickly because I want to get --

MR. DENNIS: Sure. Sure. I know we're short on time. Joe, I'm in the Des Moines area. And I'm not sure if my contact information is anywhere in this, but we should definitely make contact – (inaudible). Absolutely.

MR. KEAST: OK. I want to get to Sandra Alfaro's question. "Is there a conflict for a workforce EN to pay for Ticket holder's training and support since under Ticket to Work EN cannot pay for services?"

And there isn't a conflict. You can use it to obtain services. And if there is a gap -- and I'll answer this one and if any of the panel members would like to jump in. If there there are gap services that existing programs aren't offering and work more in EN, many workforces ENs do use the Ticket resources to purchase services to fill the gaps. But, Michelle, Brian, and Char, what are your thoughts on that?

MR. DENNIS: Not only is it not -- I was going to say, not only is it not a conflict, I would completely support using those ticket dollars for those gap services. Ticket can be a lot sometimes a little more responsive than some of our more traditional funding streams. So I would definitely suggest that, if you're going to do this, that's part of your planning and strategy would be using Ticket money and setting aside part of it as part of a plan for those gap services for yourself and for your partners.

MS. O'CAMB: Same here in Sacramento. We have not used our funding for training because we leverage other resources for that. But for Charles's sake, in his instance, we purchased four additional scrubs for him because, with our WIOA training dollars, the training only came with one scrub. We wanted to be sure he was armed with all scrubs for the entire week so he wouldn't have to worry about that to eliminate that part – (inaudible). So, Ticket dollars were used for that.

MR. KEAST: OK. Well, thank you and I'm looking at the clock and we are over time. So, I do want to thank everybody for joining us today. It has been a pleasure to share information with all of you and to hear once again from the leaders across the country in workforce engagement of people with disabilities, both those with questions and with our esteemed presenters. And, now, I will pass the control over to Jon, our host, who will close us out.

(END)