

Programs that Improve the Lives of People with Disabilities

DISABILITY PROGRAM NAVIGATOR INITIATIVE

Final Report
July 2003 – June 2010



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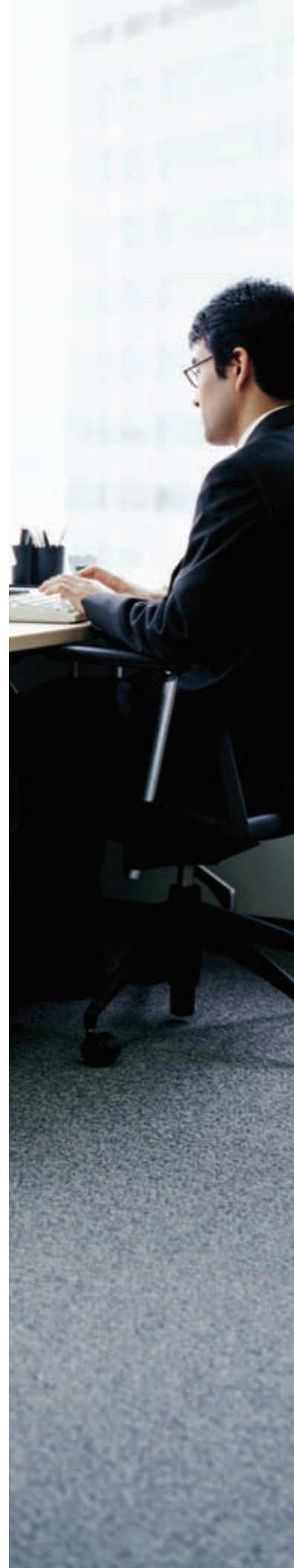
Document Prepared for:
National DPN Program Office
Division of Adult Services, Office of Workforce Investment
U.S. Department of Labor / Employment and Training Administration


This project has been funded, either wholly or in part, with Federal funds from the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration under Contract No.: DOLJ081A20684. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. Government.



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“In February of 2010, the labor force participation of individuals with disabilities was 21.9 percent... That’s 78 percent, I guess, unemployment rate. That’s just unconscionable... In the March 10th report by [Department of Labor’s (DOL)] inspector general, “Information on DOL’s Efforts to Ensure Access for Persons With Disabilities to the One-Stop Career System,” a couple points really stand out. When One-Stop Career Centers connected individuals with disabilities with jobs, employers were just as likely to keep them as a non-disabled worker. However, individuals with disabilities were less likely to be connected with jobs in the first place. So what this tells me is we’ve got to do a better job of making these connections. Once they were connected with employers, the data shows that they stayed on the job and were kept on the job just as much as non-disabled people. The other thing is that the report suggests that the Disability Program Navigators are really part of the answer. One-Stop Career Centers that had access to Disability Program Navigators did a better job, according to this study, of connecting individuals with disabilities with jobs than those without Navigators.”¹

Senator Tom Harkin, Subcommittee Chair

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

March 23, 2010

Dedication: The DPN Legacy

The Final Report is dedicated to all of the individuals who have served and will continue to serve in the capacity of Disability Program Navigators (DPNs/ Navigators). The Disability Program Navigator (DPN) initiative is where it is today because of the innovation and transformation that Navigators over the years have brought to their role in helping to build the capacity of the One-Stop Career Center system to provide more effective and meaningful employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities.

The authors of this report would also like to acknowledge Alexandra Kielty, Randee Chafkin and their staff from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (DOL/ETA) who provided the national leadership and overall vision of the DPN initiative. From day one, the National DPN Program Office understood the need for and importance of programs that improve the lives of people with disabilities. Through their passion, dedication, countless efforts and persistence, the DPN legacy was created.

Executive Summary

With the passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 1998 came a powerful message that the training and employment needs of a diverse population of job seekers and employers would be met within a single, universal One-Stop Career Center system. As a key principle of WIA, universal access offers the promise of a welcoming, integrated and user-friendly system where job seekers of all ages from various racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and with a range of education and work experiences, can reach their training and career goals. For job seekers, including those with disabilities, who encounter any number of challenges to employment, the One-Stop Career Center system offers hope for equal access, participation and opportunity.

Creating Systemic Change within the Public Workforce Investment System


To contribute to the groundwork established by WIA legislation, the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (DOL/ETA) directed funds and resources through Work Incentive Grant (WIG) projects and the Disability Program Navigator (DPN) initiative. Both projects supported policy development and systems change activities within the One-Stop Career Center system to improve access and meaningful participation of job seekers, including those with disabilities, with multiple challenges to employment. Through a variety of innovative strategies and approaches, Disability Program Navigators (DPNs/Navigators) helped to expand the capacity of the public workforce investment system to effectively serve and accommodate a more diversified population of job seekers by:

- » Developing new partnerships and strengthening alliances of the public workforce investment system and a wide range of partners to achieve seamless, comprehensive and integrated services;

- » Promoting the public workforce investment system in becoming Employment Networks (ENs) under the Ticket to Work (TTW) program to increase opportunities and choices for Social Security disability beneficiaries in obtaining employment, vocational rehabilitation and other support services;
- » Increasing the blending and braiding of resources of the public workforce investment system with mandated and non-mandated partners to leverage funding for individual job seekers; and
- » Creating systemic change within the WIA system to ensure equal access and opportunity to all job seekers and employers.

Transformative Strategies of the DPN Initiative

Over the course of the DPN demonstration, Navigators created valuable support strategies for job seekers both within and outside of the public workforce investment system. As a result of the varied approaches applied, DPNs impacted the career advancement and self-sufficiency of a diverse population of job seekers, including those with disabilities, veterans, transitional youth, individuals who are homeless, youth and adult offenders and many other job seekers who are considered underserved and/or at-risk. A number of transformative practices emerged which served to strengthen integrated service delivery among a diversity of service systems, including the public workforce investment system. The following strategies are considered critical to widespread systems change and positively impacting the employment of job seekers with diverse backgrounds, career goals and life challenges.



“The [One-Stop Career Center] underwent a critical review of its whole process and quality of its customer service. This was an indirect result of the attention that the DPN initiative brought to the accessibility of the Career Center’s process and its service of people with disabilities. The [One-Stop Career Center] developed a set of core services that are applied and delivered to all customers, representing a major cultural shift. Staff is more customer-centered as a result of eliminating program barriers in general. The customer service level for all customers of the Career Center improved.”

Massachusetts State DPN Project

Introduction

The passage of legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990,² the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998³ and the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999⁴ sent a powerful message that all citizens were ensured equal access, participation and opportunity in all aspects of American society, including the workplace. The New Freedom Initiative (NFI) of 2001⁵ also aimed to expand educational opportunities to Americans with disabilities in the workforce and community by charging service systems with more effective interagency collaboration and improved outcomes. These laws and initiatives demonstrate our nation's commitment to equality and lay the foundation for eliminating discrimination against Americans in all aspects of life. Reaching the ultimate goal of an all-inclusive society and workforce, however, has proven challenging and multifaceted. Navigating the multitude of services and support systems, as well as comprehending intricate rules and incentives surrounding benefits programs are complex. In order for our nation's diverse population to fully experience the promises of equal access and opportunity guaranteed by law, more transformative strategies and widespread systemic change are needed.

Background: Disability Statistics

According to 2008 disability and employment statistics,⁶ an estimated 10.4 percent (18,312,900) of working-age (21-64 years of age) individuals reported a disability. Of that number, 39.5 percent were employed compared to 79.9 percent of their peers without disabilities, representing a 40 percent employment gap. The American Community Survey (ACS) from 2008 also reports the following information about working-age individuals with disabilities:

- » 25.3 percent were poor in comparison to only 9.6 percent of working-age people without disabilities.

- » 3,237,600 people with disabilities received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments representing 17.7 percent of working-age people.
- » 34.0 percent only had a high school diploma or equivalent, and only 12.3 percent had a Bachelor's degree or higher compared to 30.6 percent of their peers without disabilities.
- » \$39,600 was the median household income as compared to \$61,200 for working-age people without disabilities representing a difference of \$21,600.⁷

Work Incentive Grant (WIG) Projects

Recognizing that One-Stop Career Centers needed to build capacity to provide comprehensive services to job seekers with different backgrounds and employment challenges, the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (DOL/ETA) directed funds and resources initially through WIG projects. From October 2000 through June 2006, WIG grantees, in tandem with the public workforce investment system, facilitated the coordination of multiple programs that assist job seekers with disabilities and other challenges to achieve self-sustaining employment, attain skills and advance their careers. WIG projects were charged with improving employment outcomes through policy development and systems change activities by:

- » Enhancing the One-Stop Career Center system and providing comprehensive services to multiple programs for which job seekers with disabilities are eligible; and
- » Improving the One-Stop Career Centers' physical and programmatic access to job seekers with disabilities and other challenges.

New Freedom Initiative (NFI)

Shortly after WIG grants were funded, President Bush announced the NFI, which represented a comprehensive plan to ensure employment and community participation for people with disabilities in all areas of society. The NFI goals included increasing access to assistive and universally designed technologies, expanding educational opportunities, increasing integration into the workforce and promoting full access to community life. To accomplish these goals, the NFI required federal agencies to collaborate more effectively in order to produce greater outcomes. The NFI goals complemented the work set out by the WIG program and together helped lay the foundation for the Disability Program Navigator (DPN) initiative.

“I have been truly amazed at what the Integrated Resource Team has been able to accomplish for Worksource [One-Stop Career Center] customers. Previously, when working with customers experiencing a disability, I felt lost and unsure of the best way to serve them. The regional Navigator assisted in determining what resources were available and coordinating services from multiple agencies. As a WIA Case Manager, my work with the Integrated Resource Team has taught me much more about working with customers with disabilities. I feel more prepared for working with future customers experiencing these barriers.”

Jesse Aronson
Career Specialist
Worksystems Inc.,
Portland, Oregon

Promising Practices

Throughout the duration of the WIG program, DOL/ETA identified a number of promising practices that impacted job seekers with multiple challenges to employment. Primarily, projects reported that employing a “navigator” type position was instrumental to enhancing the One-Stop Career Center system in better serving all job seekers, particularly those with disabilities. Staff members assigned to navigator type roles (also known as Customer Resource Specialists, Comprehensive Resource Specialists or Consumer Navigators) were considered highly beneficial to marketing and outreach efforts throughout the disability community, as well as to mandated and non-mandated partners of the One-Stop Career Center system. As a result, navigators helped to build an infrastructure of a more seamless One-Stop Career Center system for job seekers with multiple challenges to employment in accessing employment services and supports. Important lessons were learned on policy development regarding universal access and effective service coordination which set the foundation for future WIG grantees and the establishment of the DPN initiative.

Partnering with the Social Security Administration (SSA)

In learning about the positive impact of WIG projects nationwide and value of navigators, the SSA expressed interest in working together with DOL/ETA to increase the employment of Social Security disability beneficiaries, or those receiving SSI and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Despite SSA’s implementation of the Ticket to Work (TTW) program in 1999, which provides SSI and SSDI beneficiaries with more choices for receiving employment services, there was concern that a number of employment support initiatives were underutilized. As a result, SSA joined forces with DOL/ETA to establish the DPN initiative to improve employment outcomes for disability beneficiaries and other job seekers with disabilities. In the original cooperative agreement, SSA stated that they “consider the One-Stop Career Center system a critical component to achieving these objectives since it provides information, training and other employment-related services that can assist Social Security beneficiaries and other individuals with disabilities who seek training, employment, job retention assistance and career advancement.”

The Disability Program Navigator (DPN) Initiative

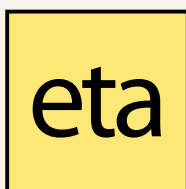
In September 2002, DOL/ETA and SSA's Office of Program Development and Research signed an interagency agreement to fund, implement, pilot and evaluate the DPN initiative. Through the initiative, DOL/ETA and SSA jointly created the Disability Program Navigator (DPN/Navigator) position and incorporated Navigators in One-Stop Career Centers throughout the country. Navigators were responsible for better informing beneficiaries and job seekers, including those with disabilities, with multiple challenges to employment about work support programs available through the One-Stop Career Centers to ensure a more seamless, comprehensive and integrated service delivery system. Through the DPN initiative, DOL/ETA worked to infuse the sub-population of job seekers with disabilities into its talent development and economic growth strategies for an inclusive workforce.

Funding the DPN Initiative

Since 2003, DOL/ETA has contributed approximately \$125 million, along with \$12 million from SSA, to fund and implement the DPN initiative within state level workforce systems in forty-seven states plus four territories. Under WIA, devolved authority and responsibility led to diversified public workforce investment systems across states and localities; therefore, no two DPN projects are alike—from state to state or from community to community. However, the goals of the DPN initiative established by DOL/ETA and SSA have provided direction for DPN projects nationwide.

"I have worked in government programs for over 30 years and I believe that the DPN initiative is absolutely the best program that brings real services, on a daily basis to our customers who have limitations and challenges to work."

Bryan Stone,
Vice President,
Policy & Procedures
First Coast Workforce
Development,
Jacksonville, Florida



EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR



For the first four years, authority to fund these projects came from the Wagner Peyser Act, Section 7(d) (29 USC-49f(d)) and Section 1110 of the Social Security Act. Since 2007, the President's proposed budget has recommended terminating the WIG program, which is the source of funds for the DPN initiative. During the past five years, the national DPN demonstration project has been hampered by insufficient and uncertain funding from year to year, and an inconsistent message around implementation of a systems change and resource coordinator model. Through PY 2009, Congress, however, rejected the President's recommendation and, as a result, the DPN initiative was funded utilizing appropriations for the WIG program in the Department of Labor Appropriations Act, enacted as Title I of the Consolidated Appropriations Act. That practice ended on June 30, 2010 for the first three rounds of DPN projects. The fourth round of projects (Arkansas, Nevada, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands), which received two-year funding in March 2009, are funded through 2011.

The Omnibus Appropriations Act for PY 2010 included funds to DOL/ETA in the amount of \$12 million plus another \$12 million for DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) "to develop and implement a plan for improving effective and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in the workforce. [These funds] will improve the accessibility and accountability of the public workforce development system for individuals with disabilities...to continue promising practices implemented by DPNs, including effective deployment of staff in selected states to: improve



coordination and collaboration among employment and training and asset development programs carried out at the state and local levels (including the TTW program) and build effective community partnerships that leverage public and private resources to better serve individuals with disabilities and improve employment outcomes.”

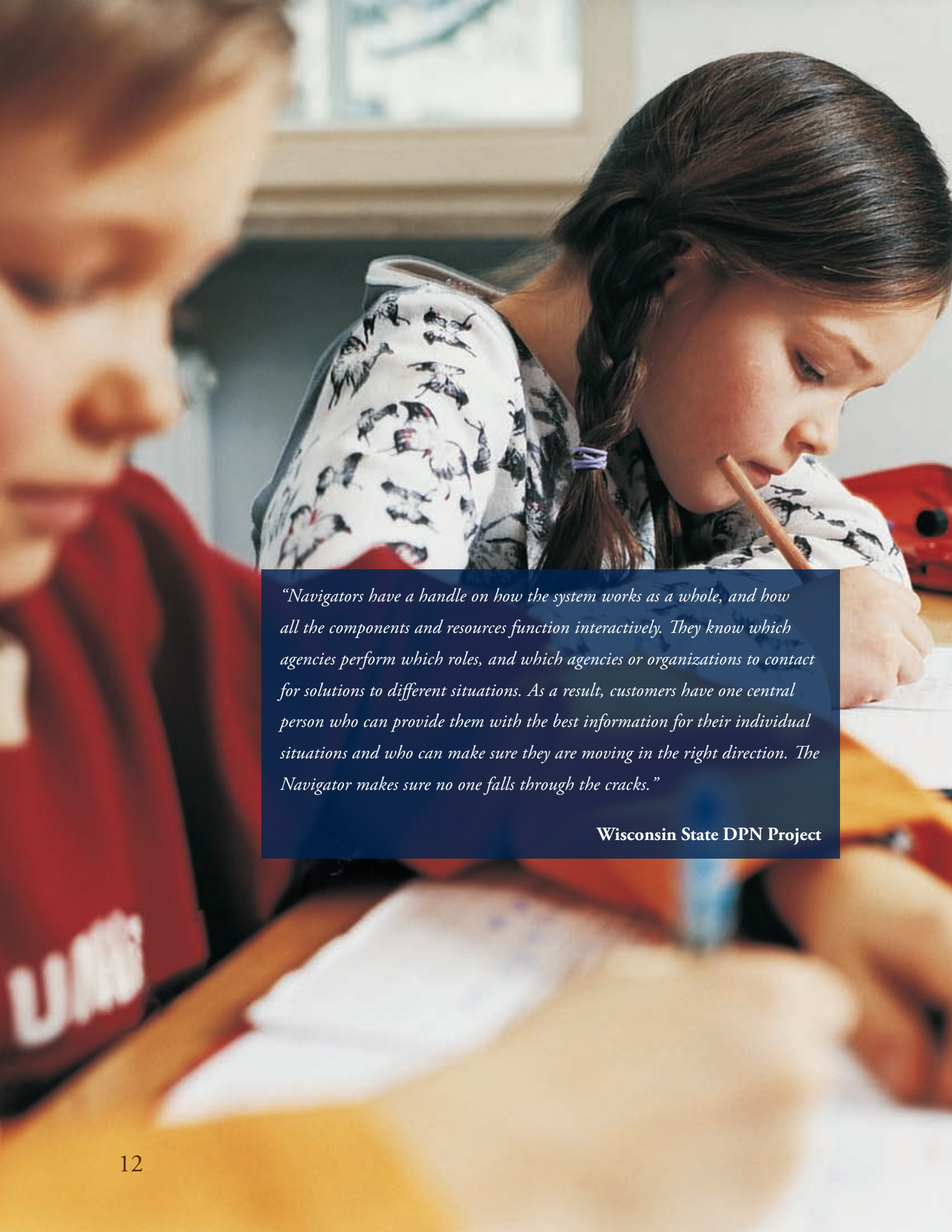


Disability Program Navigators (DPNs/Navigators)

DOL/ETA and SSA developed a comprehensive description of responsibilities and requirements for the Navigator position. The scope of responsibilities was broad and extensive, including occasionally working directly with job seekers who were seeking specific employment-related information, such as Social Security work incentives. Each state and local area was to determine how the Navigator position would be implemented within the local comprehensive One-Stop Career Center(s).

It was essential that projects also understood what the DPN was not. According to the National DPN Program Office, a Navigator is not a case manager, front-line staff person, benefits planner or Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) specialist. The DPN Position Description clearly states that the Navigator is intended to “complement rather than duplicate the responsibilities and functions” of benefits planners and VR professionals. It would not be possible for a Navigator to manage a caseload while spending a sufficient amount of time on systems change and relationship building. Furthermore, a case management role would undoubtedly lead to the creation of an additional silo within One-Stop Career Centers, thereby contradicting the purpose of the DPN initiative in helping to build an inclusive system for all job seekers.





“Navigators have a handle on how the system works as a whole, and how all the components and resources function interactively. They know which agencies perform which roles, and which agencies or organizations to contact for solutions to different situations. As a result, customers have one central person who can provide them with the best information for their individual situations and who can make sure they are moving in the right direction. The Navigator makes sure no one falls through the cracks.”

Wisconsin State DPN Project

Transformative Strategies of the DPN Initiative

When the DPN initiative was implemented in One-Stop Career Centers in 2003, the Navigator role was envisioned as an important systems change agent in expanding the public workforce investment system's capacity to more effectively accommodate a diverse population of job seekers. However, it was not until Navigators stepped into their positions that the true breadth of impact was fully realized. Given the decentralized and varied structure and administration of One-Stop Career Centers, the DPN demonstration was designed to be flexible, which has been critical to Navigators' effectiveness. As the initiative evolved, valuable lessons were learned and a series of promising practices emerged on how the public workforce investment system and other state and local systems could successfully integrate services to better serve job seekers with varied employment goals and challenges. The strategies described below represent the most transformative models and approaches demonstrated by DPN projects over the course of the initiative in creating and sustaining systemic change.

1. Deploying Dedicated Staff Experts

Assigning a dedicated staff person within the public workforce investment system, such as a Navigator, provides onsite critical expertise on both the array of One-Stop Career Center services and partner programs, as well as resources offered throughout state and local communities.

A Navigator has five primary functions including serving in the role of a resource, facilitator, problem solver, relationship builder and a systems change agent.

Navigator as a Resource and Problem-Solver:

- » Helps solve issues of accessibility, including design of buildings inside and out, access to programs and job search resources and communication access through readily available assistive technology.

- » Answers staff questions on serving job seekers with multiple challenges to employment including individuals with disabilities, veterans, transitional youth, individuals experiencing homelessness, youth/adult offenders and other job seekers considered underserved and/or at-risk.
- » Identifies range of community resources that support goals of employment and self-sufficiency, such as training, transportation, housing, assistive technology, independent living skills and accommodations.
- » Assists job seekers to navigate complex Social Security disability work incentives, other public benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps, Housing Subsidies and employment support programs, such as TTW.

2. Conducting Outreach and Marketing

Navigators engage in a wide variety of outreach activities to increase their communities' understanding of resources available in the public workforce investment system. They work with multiple funding sources and systems at the state and local levels - both within and outside of the public workforce investment system - that improve the lives of youth and working-age adults with multiple challenges to employment. DPNs center energies on alliance-building and serve as intermediaries to help build trust and dissolve roadblocks among wide-ranging service systems including the following:

State/Local systems of collaboration:

- » Vocational Rehabilitation
- » SSA/Work Incentives Programs
- » Centers for Medicaid and Medicare
- » Mental Health Providers
- » Developmental Disabilities' Agencies
- » Substance Abuse Providers
- » Adult Education and Literacy Programs
- » Welfare-to-Work/TANF
- » Asset Development Programs
- » Apprenticeship Programs
- » Housing and Transportation
- » Independent Living Centers
- » K-12 Education
- » Post Secondary Institutions

One-Stop partners of collaboration:

- » Apprenticeship Programs
- » Veterans Programs
- » Senior Employment Programs
- » Job Corps
- » National Service
- » Youth Vision
- » Prisoner Reentry Initiative
- » Unemployment Insurance grants
- » Community Colleges

Navigator as a Facilitator and Relationship Builder:

- » Invites an array of community and faith-based providers, along with their customers, into One-Stop Career Centers to demonstrate how to access self-help resources.
- » Coordinates One-Stop Career Center orientations, tours and Open Houses targeting a diverse population of job seekers, including individuals with disabilities, veterans, transitional youth, individuals who are homeless, youth/adult offenders and other job seekers considered underserved and/or at-risk.
- » Coordinates workshops on disclosure, reasonable accommodations, work incentives and rights and responsibilities of job seekers under WIA, the ADA and other employment and/or disability-related laws.
- » Attends events, interagency meetings and coalitions throughout the community to provide information on One-Stop Career Center services and programs.

3. Building and Sustaining Partnerships

Tapping into the knowledge, resources and support of an array of mandated and non-mandated partners helps DPNs to expand the capacity of the One-Stop Career Centers to serve and accommodate all job seekers. As information is shared and trust is built among varied systems, a new level of collective problem-solving emerges and alliances are formed. The development of interagency teams helps maintain ongoing communication and collaboration to further enhance services to job seekers with multiple challenges to employment.

Navigator as a Relationship Builder and Systems Change Agent:

- » Participates in local events, job fairs and business roundtables, representing the One-Stop Career Center system as an active community partner.
- » Consults with mandated and non-mandated partners about issues of accessibility, accommodations and existing employment programs, initiatives and resources.
- » Organizes or joins interagency collaborations focused on accessibility, resource-sharing and/or improving employment outcomes of job seekers with disabilities.
- » Bridges gap between business and human services communities by organizing forums for discussion and cross-education and awareness.

4. Connecting with Other Initiatives

By coordinating efforts and aligning missions of various national, state and local initiatives, DPNs help to ensure that job seekers have access to all available resources and supports in order to reach self-sufficiency. DPNs serve as the liaison for the public workforce investment system and join forces with other projects to expand opportunities to promote quality employment for all job seekers. National collaborations established with the DPN initiative include those with:

- » TTW Program
- » Real Economic Impact Tour
- » Medicaid Infrastructure Grants
- » Employment Transportation Initiatives
- » US Business Leadership Network and Chamber of Commerce
- » Emergency Planning and Response
- » Mental Health Transformation Grants
- » Green Jobs Initiative
- » Aging and Disability Resource Centers
- » High Growth and Community-Based Job Training Initiatives
- » Shared Youth Vision Federal Collaborative Partnership
- » National Service Programs

Navigator as a Facilitator and Resource:

- » Improves cross-initiative collaboration and communication by coordinating interagency coalitions and disseminating up-to-date information on all existing projects, services and resources.
- » Consistently shares success stories of job seekers who secured employment through interagency and cross-initiative coordination among workforce partners and community.
- » Represents public workforce investment system as active participant in other agency initiatives and events, including projects coordinated by VR, Mental Health, SSA and Adult Education.
- » Ensures that job seekers with various challenges to employment are included in and have access to other national, state and local initiatives involving training and employment opportunities.

5. Leveraging of Funds and Resources

Through the Integrated Resource Team (IRT) approach, Navigators bring together multiple partners across service systems to foster collaboration and teamwork in serving job seekers who have different resource and support needs. Each IRT is made up of representatives from the One-Stop Career Center system, partner agencies, community colleges, post-secondary institutions and/or other community or faith-based organizations, all of which have been identified due to meeting specific employment needs or addressing certain challenges of the job seeker. Members of an IRT strategize with the job seeker on how their combined services and resources can support the job seeker in attaining their employment goals, while also addressing any of their challenges. Through IRTs, Navigators serve as resource coordinators in facilitating the increased blending and braiding of funding and resources to meet the needs of job seekers.

Navigator as Problem-Solvers and Relationship-Builders:

- » Works together with SSA's Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) to assist job seekers with application of work incentives to reach employment goals.
- » Influences a change in relationship with a specific collaborator, including negotiation of co-location within the public workforce investment system and/or a memorandum of agreement.
- » Coordinates "roundtable" approach to open lines of communication between different systems, instead of agencies passing on job seekers from one resource to the next.
- » Increases number of job seekers with challenges to employment to enroll in WIA services, while obtaining support services and resources from a variety of other systems.

6. Increasing Knowledge and Comfort Level of One-Stop Career Center Staff

Awareness training increases the knowledge and comfort of One-Stop Career Center staff and partners in serving job seekers with different backgrounds and challenges. Understanding how to accommodate job seekers by accessing assorted resources and supports is critical to serving the “universal” job seeker. DPNs developed a series of 30-Second Trainings to educate One-Stop Career Center staff, partners and employers throughout the community. Each training is a quick, educational and fun MS PowerPoint slide show that is distributed via email and can be completed in 30 seconds or less. It provides information on employment and disability-related topics, with a resource link for further research. Since One-Stop Career Center staff and partners typically attend numerous trainings, the 30-Second Series has proven to be a highly effective solution because they take less than a minute to review.

Navigators as a Resource and Facilitator:


- » Finds answers to questions that staff have regarding employment challenges and resources, including disability-related topics and anti-discrimination laws.
- » Provides training on effectively serving and accommodating job seekers with multiple challenges to employment, including individuals with disabilities, veterans, transitional youth, individuals who are homeless, youth/adult offenders and other job seekers considered underserved and/or at-risk.
- » Disseminates 30-Second Trainings throughout workforce network and other service systems to provide ongoing information exchange and awareness.

7. Meeting the Needs of the Employer

Navigators serve as a resource to the business community, One-Stop Business Services staff, VR business liaisons and other workforce partners who interface with employers on the benefits of hiring a diverse population of job seekers, including those with disabilities. DPNs respond to the needs of employers by providing information on the ADA and accommodations, as well as identify resources such as conflict resolution services, mental health and crisis intervention services, English as a second language training and housing services.

Navigators as Problem-Solvers and Facilitators:

- » Consults with area businesses, One-Stop Business Services staff, VR business liaisons and other workforce partners who interface with employers on working effectively with One-Stop Career Centers, including the benefits of hiring a diverse population of job seekers and tax incentives.
- » Passes on reliable resources to employers that help solve issues surrounding employment challenges (i.e., reasonable accommodations, ADA, support resources, etc).
- » Disseminates 30-Second Trainings tailored to business needs throughout employer community, including Chambers of Commerce and Human Resource groups.



“Their title says it all. They navigate through the One-Stop Career Center, linking job seekers and Career Center staff to resources, training staff, employers, and community-based organizations on serving job seekers with disabilities, connecting outreach to inform local agencies and consumers about the One-Stop Career Center’s disability services, and forming partnerships with other service systems to get the most money available to help our customers with disabilities. They have succeeded. Now it’s time to replicate these strategies throughout the workforce investment system. As you watch this video, you will see for yourself how the DPNs are making a difference for job seekers with a disability. We can’t successfully compete in a global economy without fully engaging the 33 million working-age people with disabilities in our workforce. Any investment in helping them realize their potential is an investment in our future.”

Opening Remarks made by Jane Oates, Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration

Promising Practices Series

In 2008, the National DPN Program Office began to identify DPN promising practices to share with the WIA system nationwide. Both a series of videos titled, “Disability Program Navigators: Making the Connections For Job Seekers with Disabilities,” and a series of information briefs named, “DPN Promising Practices,” have been developed which highlight successful strategies and promote positive employment outcomes for job seekers, including those with disabilities, with multiple challenges to employment. By disseminating effective practices throughout all of DOL/ETA programs and initiatives via the Workforce3One website page (<https://disability.workforce3one.org/>), the One-Stop Career Center system can continue to improve service delivery to all job seekers. Currently, two videos and five information briefs have been developed, with more in progress.

DPN Promising Practices Videos

Maximizing the Self-Sufficiency of Youth with Disabilities in the One-Stop Career Center System

U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration

This video highlights how Minnesota’s WorkForce Centers established Youth Zones to serve youth and young adults, including those with disabilities, ages 14-21. Youth Zones were established to provide a physical and virtual space for all youth and young adult to

gain the knowledge and skills to conduct a successful job search and select a career path. This model is very effective for serving youth and young adults with disabilities. The Youth Zone model is being expanded throughout Minnesota and



has replication potential in the One-Stop Career Center service delivery system. The video features two youth with learning disabilities who used Minnesota Workforce Centers' Youth Zone.

Disability Program Navigators: Making Employment Connections for Job Seekers with Disabilities

This video highlights how the Navigator facilitated an IRT within a One-Stop Career Center (Worksource Center, Portland, Oregon) to blend and braid resources around the employment needs of an individual job seeker with disabilities. The video tells the story of how the IRT approach was successful in assisting a job seeker who is deaf to receive training at his local community college and a paid internship, with the goal of finding a higher paying job.



Disability Program Navigators: Coordinating Quality Employment Services for Disabled Veterans

This video highlights how the Navigator facilitated a One-Stop Career Center (MontgomeryWorks, Wheaton, Maryland) in becoming a more universally accessible and welcoming service system, where job seekers with a range of disabilities and/or other



multiple employment challenges receive integrated services that result in quality employment. The video tells the story of how a disabled veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other disabilities received services at the One-Stop Career Center that resulted in a job.

DPN Promising Practices Information Briefs

Promising Practices... Quality employment for disabled veterans

An increasing number of disabled veterans are returning from combat in Afghanistan and Iraq with PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and other mental and physical disabilities resulting from their tours of duty. If the One-Stop Career Centers plan to meet the challenges of serving the increasing

number of disabled veterans seeking employment services, there needs to be collaboration and coordination between the public workforce investment system and programs that serve disabled veterans. This information brief highlights the successful strategies of Navigators partnering with the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) staff to provide access to the full array of services available to disabled veterans through the public workforce investment system.

Promising Practices... Supporting job seekers with multiple challenges to employment

Since the inception of the DPN initiative in 2003, DPNs have focused on the coordination of integrated services to job seekers with multiple challenges to employment. With considerable knowledge on resources within the public workforce investment system and in the community, Navigators often see the “big picture” or the many pieces needed to form the puzzle. This information brief highlights the use of IRTs, which represent one significant approach DPNs are using to bring together multiple partners across service systems helping to build teams who work together to combine resources and help job seekers reach employment goals.

Promoting Economic Self-Sufficiency of Job Seekers with Disabilities

Navigators throughout the country have developed and implemented successful strategies in the public workforce investment system to promote the employment and economic self-sufficiency of persons with disabilities. DPNs are helping to improve access to financial education, home ownership, entrepreneurial programs and use of the Earned Income Tax Credit to expand economic opportunities to job seekers with disabilities. One successful strategy involves the Navigator’s role in facilitating One-Stop Career Centers to become Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites. This information brief highlights strategies, resources and examples on how the One-Stop Career Center system can better support job seekers with low-incomes during tax season.

Achieving a more welcoming, integrated and accessible One-Stop Career Center system

As one of the key principles of WIA, universal access offers the promise of a welcoming, integrated and user-friendly system. All job seekers should be able to independently tap into all available employment services, resulting in fewer requests for specialized assistance and more efficient use of staff resources. Under WIA and the ADA, reasonable



accommodations are provided upon request; however, One-Stop Career Centers aim to streamline services so that a wide-ranging population of job seekers has direct access to resources, programs and activities. This information brief highlights how Navigators throughout the country are helping to expand universal access in One-Stop Career Centers for a more diverse population of job seekers, including those with disabilities.

Maximizing the Self-Sufficiency of Youth with Disabilities in the One-Stop Career Center System

While the transition into adulthood can be a time of uncertainty, youth who have the support and resources to navigate important life choices can build strong foundations for their futures. For youth who do not have a support system or who experience an array of challenges, the transition can be difficult with long-term effects. Given the evidence linking education and work experience to higher levels of self-sufficiency, there has been increasing focus on improving services to transitional youth (ages 14-24), particularly youth who are disadvantaged. In order to begin to gain equal momentum in school, work and independent living, youth service providers need a greater awareness of the experiences of youth with disabilities and more substantial training on available resources. This information brief highlights how DPNs are helping One-Stop Career Centers, schools and local youth programs across the country gain this level of awareness and support in helping to advance youth with disabilities and/or other challenges in education and employment.

Workforce3 One Website Page

Disability and Employment Community of Practice - Connecting the Pieces of the Employment Puzzle — <http://disability.workforce3one.org>

Navigating the wide range of services and resources available to job seekers with multiple challenges to employment, including individuals with disabilities is like fitting together the pieces of a puzzle. On October 1, 2009, in connection with National Disability Employment Awareness Month, DOL/ETA's Workforce3 One website unveiled a new Disability and Employment Community of Practice page to provide disability employment-related resources for the workforce system. Since Workforce3 One was designed as an interactive communications and learning platform to build the capacity of the public workforce investment system, it was significant to have a section dedicated to disability and employment topics. In addition to integrating disability information onto the website, the National DPN Program Office was instrumental in having a new "Disability" super search category added to make it easier for users to find disability-related information.

Integration of National Priorities

In order for the DPN initiative to be effective within the national public workforce investment system, Navigators were integrated into DOL/ETA's policy direction, strategic priorities and other major initiatives. Navigators formed natural partnerships with a variety of ETA-funded grants and initiatives, including those focused on veterans, at-risk youth, ex-offenders, senior citizens and recipients of TANF. DPNs also worked in collaboration with the following ETA initiatives: Green Jobs Initiative; Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Opportunities in the Workforce System Initiative; High Growth and Community-Based Job Training Initiatives; and Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Initiative, implementing two pilot programs from a disability perspective. As a result of these connections, DPNs helped to increase the overall coordination and collaboration of many ETA-based projects and/or strategic priorities, as well as improve the leveraging of resources across partner systems. In addition, Navigators supported ETA's overall focus on talent and economic development by helping address the shortage of qualified workers and introducing untapped labor pools that include individuals with disabilities.

DPNs Partnering with Veterans' Programs

The DVOP/LVER staff located within One Stop Career Centers nationwide provide assistance to veterans in need of intensive training and employment, while promoting the business case for employing disabled veterans. With DPNs also located in One Stop Career Centers, successful partnerships were developed with LVER/DVOP staff to help ensure that disabled veterans have access to the wide array of resources and supports available in the community. Below are some examples of how DPNs collaborate with LVER/DVOPs to promote quality employment of disabled veterans:



“Expand the Disability Program Navigator initiative at One Stop Career Centers through the Department of Labor and work towards permanent codification of the DPN initiative via reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA).”

National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)
Spring 2010 edition of NCIL’s Policy Priorities

- » DPN, DVOP and LVER consult regularly on reasonable accommodations, assistive technology, social security disability benefits and work incentives and training and employment opportunities available to disabled veterans.
- » Navigators share their wide array of community contacts to help support employment-related needs of disabled veterans, such as job coaching, independent living skills, work-related expenses (tools, clothing, etc.) and transportation options.
- » DPN, DVOP and LVER work together to address the needs of veterans who experience multiple challenges to employment, including homelessness, involvement in the justice system, substance abuse issues and mental health disabilities.
- » Navigators invite DVOP and LVER representatives to participate in Disability Action Committees, IRTs and other coalitions that aim to improve integrated services for job seekers with multiple challenges to employment.

DPNs Partnering with TANF Programs

TANF provides financial help to children and their parents or relatives, who are living with them, for basic necessities. Many families receiving TANF experience a range of challenges to employment, including undiagnosed disabilities, involvement in the juvenile or adult justice system, transportation problems and/or issues with managing multiple benefit programs in addition to TANF, such as Food Stamps, Housing Subsidies and Social Security disability benefits. Below are some examples of how DPNs partner with TANF coordinators who

are located in One-Stop Career Centers to help increase access by recipients to all available community supports and resources.

- » Navigators establish joint referral systems to ensure appropriate referrals are made between TANF, One-Stop Career Center programs and partners agencies, such as VR.
- » DPNs include TANF recipients in disability-related workshops and trainings, which include information on benefits planning and assistance, mental health and substance abuse programs, independent living skills and transportation options.
- » DPNs increase the awareness and knowledge of TANF coordinators and other One-Stop Career Center partners on providing accommodations to TANF recipients with disabilities so they may participate fully in all training and employment programs.

DPNs Partnering with Medicaid Infrastructure Grants

Section 203 of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 established the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) program to support state efforts to enhance employment options for people with disabilities. The goal of the MIG program is to support people with disabilities in securing and sustaining competitive employment in an integrated setting. Since both the DPN and MIG projects promote systems change, the efforts to integrate activities under both initiatives was a natural collaboration for many states. Below are some examples of these activities.

- » DPNs assist MIG grantees with marketing and outreach efforts to raise awareness on ways to improve the employment of job seekers with disabilities.
- » DPN and MIG representatives serve on joint committees to ensure that job seekers with multiple challenges to employment have access to all training and employment opportunities.
- » DPN and MIG representatives coordinate joint events including seminars on self-employment for people with disabilities, awareness and education to reduce mental health stigma in the workplace and coordinated employer outreach.
- » DPN and MIG representatives work together with SSA's Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) programs to increase beneficiaries' awareness of the state Medicaid Buy-In programs and One-Stop Career Center training and employment services.

DPNs Partnering with the Green Jobs Initiative

As one of DOL/ETA's main priorities, the Green Jobs Initiative was created to foster a greener economy and a green-educated workforce. In honor of Earth Day 2010, DOL/ETA dedicated April 22nd to "The Green Generation" to learn about model programs and initiatives implemented in One-Stop Career Centers surrounding green job employment opportunities and/or training and retraining opportunities in green jobs. Below are some examples of how DPNs assist in promoting the Green Jobs Initiative by helping to ensure that specific groups of job seekers who experience multiple challenges to employment have access to training and retraining opportunities in green jobs.

- » DPNs help to ensure that job seekers with disabilities and other challenges to employment are integrated into job candidate pools for "green" jobs, with supportive employment components available through partner programs.
- » Through extensive community outreach, DPNs help to increase awareness about positive aspects of green economies and jobs, as well as market Green Jobs Fairs and other "green" events among partners and job seekers.
- » DPNs help low-income workers and individuals participating in TANF (many of whom have disabilities) with securing internships with on-the-job training, working along side maintenance and weatherization staff as they rehab, retrofit and provide energy savings retrofits on low-income housing units.
- » DPNs help to ensure that youth with disabilities and other challenges to employment have access to "green" training and/or employment, such



as partnership with Habitat for Humanity to employ youth to build “green” houses or through the Client Assistance Program (CAP) funded jobs in construction focused on weatherization.

DPNs Partnering with the Ticket to Work Program

DOL/ETA contracted with Mathematica Policy Research (MPR), Inc. to conduct a quantitative evaluation of the DPN initiative through the use of the One-Stop Career Center system by SSI and SSDI beneficiaries. The study was conducted with Colorado, Iowa, Maryland and Oregon which were early implementers of the DPN initiative and were willing to share their WIA adult and dislocated worker and Wagner-Peyser (W-P) data base information for the period Program Years (PY) 2002 – 2007. Key findings from the quantitative evaluation report⁸ include:

- » One-Stop Career Centers are serving a very large share of persons receiving SSA disability benefits and the public workforce system is providing important support for SSA disability beneficiaries who want to work. These numbers greatly exceed the participation levels of beneficiaries in other programs (e.g., VR).
- » SSA beneficiaries, who used One-Stop services, achieved positive employment outcomes. In Colorado, the employment rate ranged from 27 percent in PY 2004 to 36 percent in PY 2007; in Iowa the employment rate increased from 37 percent in PY 2005 to 42 percent in PY 2007; in Maryland the employment rate grew from 30 to 33 percent. While these are significantly lower entered employment rates than the overall rate for WIA programs, they are significantly greater than a comparable national average of 10 percent, the rate at which SSA beneficiaries enter employment.
- » During a 12 month period after exit, 11 to 24 percent of SSA cash benefits were reduced to zero compared to a national average of 6 percent identified in a different study covering a four year period.
- » When former SSA beneficiaries are considered, along with current beneficiaries, the number and percentages accessing WIA and W-P nearly doubled in each state.
- » There was a significant increase over time in the percentage of One-Stop Career Center users, who were receiving SSA disability benefits, who were identified in WIA and W-P program data as users with disabilities. “The steady and increasing trend...suggests that the DPN might have facilitated the collection of disability information, possibly by raising awareness of disability issues among staff and improving administrative processes.”

Conclusion

During the past seven years, DOL/ETA has funded DPN demonstration grants to over fifty-one states/territories to improve physical and program access in the One-Stop Career Centers and enhance cross agency coordination of employment services and supports to more effectively serve job seekers with multiple challenges to employment. Response from DPN projects nationwide on the impact of the Navigator within and outside of the public workforce investment system has been overwhelmingly positive. Findings from a wide variety of evaluation methods on the effectiveness of the initiative have revealed that Navigators deployed a range of strategies and approaches in helping to ensure more meaningful employment opportunities for job seekers nationwide. As a result of the varied approaches applied, DPNs impacted the career advancement and self-sufficiency of a diverse population of job seekers, including individuals with disabilities, veterans, transitional youth, individuals who are homeless, youth and adult offenders and many other job seekers who are considered underserved and/or at-risk.

Throughout the duration of both the WIG and DPN initiatives, DOL/ETA uncovered a number of promising practices proven to significantly impact job seekers with multiple challenges to employment. Primarily, DPN states reported that employing a “Navigator” type position was instrumental in enhancing the One-Stop Career Center system to better serve all job seekers, particularly those with multiple challenges to employment. “Navigator” type roles (also known as Customer Resource Specialists, Comprehensive Resource Specialists or Consumer Navigators) were considered highly beneficial to marketing and outreach efforts throughout the disability community, as well as to mandated and non-mandated partners of the One-Stop Career Center system. Overall, Navigators helped to build an infrastructure of a more seamless One-Stop Career Center system for job seekers with multiple challenges to employment in accessing employment services and supports. Important lessons were learned on

policy development regarding universal access and effective service coordination which provided a foundation to widespread systemic change.

Though both WIG and DPN projects have made considerable progress in opening doors to the public workforce investment system to job seekers with disabilities, the efforts involved in building the capacity of the One-Stop Career Center system to serve and accommodate a diverse population is an ongoing process. The important work of the DPN initiative is not yet completed and must continue if job seekers with disabilities are to be served equally and effectively by the public workforce investment system. There is a great deal more work to be done towards improving the employment and economic status of youth and working-age adults with disabilities.

Congress understood the need to continue these promising practices and the benefits of the DPN initiative approach when it not only directed DOL to develop and implement a plan for improving effective and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in the public workforce investment system, but also provided \$24 million in funding to replicate its successful strategies throughout the workforce investment system. In October 2010, nine projects were funded to implement the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI). The purpose of the DEI is to improve education, training, and employment opportunities and outcomes of youth and adults with disabilities who are unemployed, underemployed and/or receiving Social Security disability benefits. The DEI projects build upon the DPN initiative by hiring staff with expertise in disability and workforce issues. These projects also support extensive partnerships and collaboration (IRTs), provide for coordinated services across multiple generic and disability systems; and expand the workforce investment system's active participation in the TTW program.

Endnotes

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3. Workforce Investment Act of 1998, WIA, Public Law 105-220. For further information see <http://www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/wia/act.cfm>.
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