

One-Stop Innovations

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LEADING CHANGE UNDER THE WIA ONE-STOP SYSTEM

FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In August of 1998, Congress and the President enacted the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the first major piece of federal employment and job training legislation in more than 15 years. The law recognizes the dramatic workforce and workplace changes that have taken place in the U.S. economy and responds to these with a vision of a workforce development system that is comprehensive and customer-focused. This new system is intended to help all members of the workforce access the assistance with training they need to manage their careers, and connect U.S. companies to workers they will need. The drafters of WIA made customer service a key ingredient of the system, requiring that agencies become more flexible and adaptable, because change can come at any time.

The centerpiece of WIA is the creation of One-Stop Career Centers in every area of the country, which are to be certified and overseen by local Workforce Investment Boards. As implied in their name, these centers are intended to offer job seekers and employers ready access to the many workforce development resources available in a local area. Workforce Investment Boards are responsible for making arrangements for both “mandated” partners (e.g. public employment service, vocational rehabilitation services, public assistance programs, etc.) and other desirable partners (e.g. community colleges, public school systems) to offer services through the One-Stop Career Center system.

In seeking to streamline and improve the nation’s workforce development system, WIA has set an ambitious agenda that is potentially very broad and far-reaching. It challenges states and local areas to develop workforce development services that appeal to a broad cross-section of Americans by using, manipulating, and assembling the many different pieces into a coherent whole that will provide high quality, customer-focused services.

The U.S. Congress set July 1, 2000 as the date by which the Workforce Investment Act would be implemented in all areas. During the Act's first year of full program implementation, the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration asked the John J. Heldrich Center at Rutgers University to identify, document, and disseminate information on innovative and promising practices supporting One-Stop Career Center systems operating under the Workforce Investment Act.

The Heldrich Center staff and consultants visited 25 sites across the country to gather information on positive and inventive developments within the emerging One-Stop Career Center system for the purpose of sharing this information with the entire workforce development community. The Workforce Investment Act is still a young program and many states and local areas are just beginning to put the pieces of this complex puzzle together to form a new system. The grand vision of WIA challenges even local areas that have been making steady progress for years towards comprehensive quality systems.

Identifying and Visiting Sites

The Heldrich Center solicited nominations from across every level of the workforce development system. This included professional organizations, states, local areas, partner agencies, U.S. Department of Labor Regional Offices and others. The nomination format, selection process, and criteria were widely disseminated. The purpose of the nomination process was to find the innovators, whether small or large, to recognize their success and to inspire others in the One-Stop system.

The USDOL and the Heldrich Center researchers sought promising practices in the following categories: Services to Job Seekers – innovative practices that deliver results for job seekers and other individual customers; Services to Employers – innovative practices that deliver results for business/employer customers; and One-Stop Design and Management – organizational innovations that promote quality services and high performance.

The nomination form itself was simple and required basic information. As these were received, Heldrich Center representatives spoke to contact people from each of the nominated sites by telephone and, in many cases, requested and received additional information. Over the course of several months, 25 sites were selected for visits. These sites reflect the many diverse dimensions of the workforce development system. They are urban, suburban and rural areas, and different geographic areas of the country. Their jurisdictions include those that had developed One-Stop systems before WIA and those that have just begun the process under WIA; and nominees represent the three categories in which nominations were sought. Appendix A (page 267) displays the names of the sites visited, along with contact information, and the name and category of the promising practice that was the focus of the visit.

The teams that conducted each site visit consisted of two experienced field researchers from the Heldrich Center. The team visited every site between April and September of 2001, with each visit lasting from one to two days. The Heldrich Center then prepared profiles of each site visit, which were shared with the main contact people from each site. The resulting complete profiles follow this summary report.

General Observations

The Promising Practices sites visited demonstrated that there are many exciting developments taking place in the One-Stop system and many powerful ideas worthy of review by other stakeholders in the Workforce Investment Act system. Innovative practices have emerged in response to an array of writers and contexts. In some cases, these are environmental, such as a significant economic shift, demographic change or major legislative change, (e.g. welfare reform). In other instances, people in leadership positions have been the catalysts for change. In many areas, promising practices have emerged through incremental, step-by-step continuous improvement. A number of the innovations profiled were built on efforts made through earlier One-Stop implementation grants.

Many of the practices identified can be replicated in other One-Stop Career Centers, and many involve areas that are central to One-Stop operation. The dissemination of

this information increases access by practitioners and policy-makers in the workforce development system to practical solutions to common issues faced by workforce development boards and staff leadership. In the course of identifying and visiting sites, we used the networks that have been formed to share information, and there is a good amount of peer-to-peer communication and replication that occurs on an ongoing basis. One area we visited – Montgomery County (Dayton, Ohio) -- had modeled its job center after another site we visited – Kenosha County (Wisconsin). Replication does not mean that one site will precisely copy the approach used in another community. Rather, replication means getting ideas and using these as a catalyst to create a service center or program that fits the particular needs of a community. For example, Montgomery County learned from Kenosha’s experience, but created a center that was truly its own – bigger, and with new and innovative features that suited its community.

Although One-Stop Centers were mandated by WIA, many One-Stop Centers profiled in this research receive financial support from varied funding streams. Indeed for some of the communities studied, the WIA, one-stop funds represent a minority of total resources. Other major funding streams include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Wagner-Peyser (which funds the public employment service), other supportive services (childcare, food stamps, etc.), vocational rehabilitation, discretionary grants, foundation funding and fee-based services.

Promising Practices Themes

Although the sites were selected in three categories – services to job seekers, services to employers and One-Stop design and management – the report is structured into theme areas that cut across these categories and demonstrate some of the key emerging developments in One-Stop Career Center Systems.

Many of the practices outlined did not exclusively fit into one of the three defined selection category areas. The themes represent a more detailed level of categorization that appear in one, or all, of the three defined selection category areas.

These themes are:

- Integrating programs and services
- Universal access
- Empowering individuals
- Sectoral strategies for employers and job seekers
- Using information technology to improve service quality
- One-Stop effectiveness measures

Each of these topics is illustrated with examples drawn from the visited sites.

Appendix B (page 270) cross-references the promising practices with the thematic areas. Complete site visit reports, with background information and detailed descriptions of each promising practice, follow the summary report.

We hope that the information on promising practices profiled through this project will enhance communication among staff, board members and others interested in the workforce development system and inspire more and greater innovation to serve job seekers and employers.