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# How Customers Used the JAN and EARN Technical Assistance Centers

**Issue Brief – Study of Customer Satisfaction with Two ODEP Technical Assistance Centers**

The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL's) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) seeks to develop and influence policies and practices to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities through its Technical Assistance Center Program. In partnership with ODEP, DOL's Chief Evaluation Office contracted with Westat to conduct a study of customer satisfaction among the five centers. The overarching goals of the study were to examine the extent to which the program meets customer needs, as well as the reach and satisfaction with services provided by the individual Centers. This brief focuses on how the centers engaged with customers, the nature of customers' interactions with the centers, and customers' reasons for contacting the centers—what assistance they sought.



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In this brief, we present findings on how customers of the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) and the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) used the Centers.

### Study Overview

ODEP's mission is to develop and influence policies and practices to increase the number and quality of employment opportunities for people with disabilities. In 2016, ODEP sponsored a Technical Assistance (TA) Center Program comprising five Centers: the Job Accommodation Network (JAN); the Employer Assistance Resource Network (EARN); the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Y); the Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT); and the National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities (LEAD). These five Centers sought to promote successful employment policy and practices, and each had a unique focus, including assisting customers with workforce accommodations, systems-level changes, and accessible technology, as well as finding ways to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Westat conducted the study in two phases. Phase I focused on determining the feasibility of conducting a customer satisfaction survey of the five Centers by collecting information on their missions, the services provided, the targeted customers, and whether the Center was collecting customer satisfaction data. Phase II focused on JAN and EARN customer satisfaction with the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the technical assistance received, as well as perceptions of the extent to which the technical assistance resulted in the adoption and implementation of ODEP policies. Phase II data collection began in 2019 with semi-structured telephone interviews of customers and staff from JAN and EARN<sup>1</sup>. Staff from JAN and EARN emailed their customers and invited them to contact Westat to participate in a telephone interview.



### For the final report and other briefs visit:

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/completedstudies>

<sup>1</sup>By Phase II, three Centers were discontinued and data collection barriers involving privacy rules prevented Westat from contacting customers directly.

## Key Findings

All interviewed customers contacted the technical assistance Centers for assistance with reasonable job accommodations; questions about compliance of the Americans with Disabilities Act; to gather information and stay current on topics related to disability employment; or for continuing education purposes.

JAN provided free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues to customers. JAN engaged with customers through a combination of e-mail, telephone, and online video chat, and through resources posted on the askjan.org website.

73 of the 75 of JAN customers used individualized services and the majority of EARN customers used webinars.

EARN offered numerous resources through its [askEARN.org](#) website, including publications, presentations, webinars, and a space where customers and stakeholders could network and collaborate.

## Findings

### How Centers Engaged with Customers

JAN provided free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. JAN's consultants offered individualized technical assistance via a combination of online text or video chat, e-mail, and telephone. In addition, JAN provided information and resources through its [askjan.org](#) website, such as tools to help employees request, and employers to

respond to, disability accommodations. JAN offered these services to a range of customers, including, but not limited to, people with disabilities and their relatives or friends, employers, rehabilitation professionals/service providers, advocacy groups, community based organizations, and government agencies.

The [askjan.org](#) website provided customers with a variety of methods to contact JAN: JAN on Demand (a message system), telephone, e-mail, text, social media, and live chat. For

customers who did not seek direct assistance, [askjan.org](#) provided general information about job accommodations and disability employment.

EARN focused less on providing individualized technical assistance and more on producing materials to be used by customers. Those materials included written resources posted to its [askearn.org](#) website, such as news briefs, toolkits, and PowerPoint presentations on the latest policies and practices in disability employment and accommodations. EARN

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also hosted webinars and provided online platforms through which customers could network with each other and with key stakeholders in the employment and disability fields. EARN's customers were primarily employers, including private sector employers, federal agencies and contractors, state government and agencies, non-profit organizations, and universities/academic institutions. Customers also included intermediary organizations (e.g., local business organizations, Chambers of Commerce, etc.) with a wide reach in the disability community.<sup>2</sup>

Customers contacted EARN via email or telephone. EARN customers who sought direct assistance could find contact information for EARN on the [askearn.org](http://askearn.org) website. For EARN customers who did not seek direct assistance, the website provided written materials,

presentations, webinars and the opportunity for customers, partners, and other stakeholders to network and collaborate.

### What Services Customers Used

The tables below provide the number of customers who utilized different types of services from JAN and EARN at some point. As noted earlier, interviewees were not representative of all customers.

Table 1 indicates that nearly all of the interviewed JAN customers (73 of 75) received individualized technical assistance service; fewer than half (30 of 75) used the website; and only one JAN customer had attended a webinar. Table 1 also indicates that it was common for JAN customers to use more than one service, combining use of the website and of individualized technical assistance.

Among the EARN customers interviewed, ten of the 14 had attended a webinar; three had accessed resources posted on the Center's website; and one had received individualized technical assistance services at some point. It is important to note that EARN discontinued its individualized technical assistance services in 2017, which likely explains why so few customers had utilized that service. Additionally, EARN helped to recruit customers for interviews by contacting those who had registered for webinars, which helps to explain why a greater number of interviewees had utilized that service.

**Table 1**

**Services used, by JAN customer type**

Customer type	Total	Individualized TA	Website	Webinar
Person with a disability	27	27	10	0
Employer	34	33	11	1
Relative or friend of a person with a disability	5	5	2	0
Rehabilitation professional/Service provider	8	7	6	0
Other*	1	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1</b>

\*Interviewee could be categorized as more than one customer type (person with a disability and service provider)

Source: Westat qualitative interviews with customers.

Note: A customer could indicate that they used multiple services.

<sup>2</sup>In 2017, ODEP directed EARN to stop providing customized trainings offered directly to employers and focus on using intermediary organizations to reach more employers. EARN's new mission was to 'train the trainer' by increasing the resources and capabilities of intermediary organizations. The intermediary effort was reflected in the Inclusion@Work Network, a means to raise awareness and employer-led actions and was a mechanism to reach thousands of employers through membership organizations (i.e., intermediaries).

**Table 2**

**Services used, by EARN customer type**

Customer type	Total	Individualized TA	Website	Webinar
<b>Employer</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Rehabilitation professional/ Service provider</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Other*</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>

\*Interviewee could be categorized as more than one customer type (employer and service provider)

Source: Westat qualitative interviews with customers.

Notes: 1) no data is provided on persons with a disability or relatives and friends, because EARN does not service those types of customers;  
2) customers could indicate that they used multiple services.

Six of the 7 JAN staff interviewees said customers most frequently used the website to gather information. If a customer required information beyond what the website provided, those 6 staff reported that customers are most likely to either call or use the online chat service to contact JAN. According to the two EARN staff interviewees, EARN customers are most likely to use the website to access information from EARN, followed by attending EARN webinars.

### **Why Customers Contacted the Technical Assistance Centers**

Customers from both Centers reported having contacted the Centers for assistance with one of three primary issues:

1. Requesting or providing reasonable job accommodations;
2. Ensuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act; and
3. Gathering information on topics related to disability employment, sometimes for continuing education purposes.

### **Reasons Customers Contacted JAN**

JAN customers contacted the Center for different reasons. Employers typically contacted JAN for resources and guidance to address specific employee disabilities and requests for accommodations. They sought feedback on how to ensure they remained in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in their response to those employee requests. Employers also indicated that they contact JAN with questions regarding a prospective employee, not a current employee.

One employer gave the following example:

Like employers, the eight interviewed rehabilitation professionals/service providers typically called JAN to request guidance on a specific employer/employee issue. They wanted to confirm their understanding of an employee's disability and the array of reasonable accommodations that someone could request.

Among the 27 persons with a disability who were interviewed, twenty-three indicated that the primary reason they contacted JAN was to discuss accommodation requests they had made or were considering making. More specifically, those 23 individuals had not successfully obtained accommodations from



*We have a call center division and we have an applicant that came in that was blind, and he did well during the first round of interview processes. And so the management team came to me and wanted to make sure that we had appropriate accommodations should we move forward with the hire. And because this was our first hire with somebody with them being blind, and that level of disability we weren't 100 percent sure in terms of what types of technologies and other capabilities we would need to explore, to make sure that he was successful should he pass the second round of interviews.*

*- Employer, JAN Customer*

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Exhibit 1: Customer Use and Engagement with JAN and EARN



their employers, and contacted JAN for guidance on their rights and what approach they could try next. Others planned to request an accommodation for a disability in the future, and contacted JAN to determine what information to include in their request.

Two of the 27 customers with a disability contacted JAN after their employers terminated them, and two others called to discuss strategies for applying for jobs as a person with a disability. With regard to the former, those individuals contacted JAN to determine whether their employer had unlawfully terminated them

following the disclosure of a disability. The two people who contacted JAN in the middle of a job search and application process sought feedback on when and how to declare their disability. One person said that a potential employer asked during the application process about the accommodations that they would need:

Finally, five interviewees were relatives or friends of a person with a disability, and contacted JAN for assistance on that person's behalf. Typically, they contacted JAN to determine what reasonable accommodations a person with a disability could make, or whether that person had been discriminated against either at work or during the job application process. One person reported:



*I applied for a job, a part-time job, and when I put down...they asked me did I have a disability? I said I had cancer. Then they notified me and asked me what type of accommodations I would need. I had contacted [JAN] in reference to that, because the last time I worked I didn't have a disability, I didn't need accommodations or I didn't need any of that, so I didn't know how to handle the question correctly.*

- Person with a Disability,  
JAN Customer



*I called JAN because my nephew is looking for a job. One of the places that he wanted to apply – a restaurant – told him that he couldn't apply because of his disability. I was calling JAN to find out if that was legal. It didn't seem right to me.*

- Relative of a Person with a Disability, JAN Customer

Another respondent watched their partner struggle at work due to a disability, and contacted JAN to determine what resources could help them be successful in managing their condition and their workload.

All 7 staff reported that customers contact JAN for assistance with understanding their rights under the ADA (typically the customers who are individuals with disabilities) and their responsibilities under the ADA (typically the employer customers). We asked staff whether there were requests from customers that are difficult for JAN to address. Two staff responded that, because the field of disability employment is rapidly changing, there are some needs that do not have solutions yet (e.g., changes in technology). Another two staff stated that some customers contact JAN for specific legal advice related to the ADA that JAN is not equipped to address. And another two indicated that some customers contact JAN, asking them to interpret the ADA and make a decision for the customer.

**Reasons Customers Contacted EARN**

The 14 EARN customers interviewed reported contacting the Center either to 1) stay current on the disability and accommodation landscape, sometimes for continuing education requirements; or 2) to obtain resources or guidance on specific disabilities and accommodations. Given that respondents were recruited from the list of customers who had recently attended an EARN webinar, the first reason is not surprising. Customers use webinars as a means of staying current on policies and procedures, and to fulfill continuing education requirements. One employer worked for an organization that developed and manufactured devices used by people with disabilities and used EARN to stay current on the needs of his customers. He reported:

In addition to fulfilling continuing education requirements, the five rehabilitation professionals/service providers said they engaged with EARN to request information on disability employment policies and accommodation options, and to assist a third party with questions or challenges related to accommodations.



*As much as we can, we want to keep up on all things related to what are the needs of people with disabilities. It's really about reaching out to EARN to be proactive about the products that you're developing to make sure that they're accessible to people with a variety of limitations.*

- Employer, JAN Customer

According to EARN staff, employers contact EARN to increase their confidence in their ability to make decisions and create policy related to disability employment, all while maintaining compliance under the ADA. One example given was that employers often contact EARN for help improving their rate of self-identification among employees. When asked what requests for assistance EARN has difficulty addressing, the staff offered two common examples: detailed, technical questions about compliance with ADA that require legal oversight; and employers looking to EARN for a network of individuals with disabilities who are looking for employment.

**Study Limitations**

Because this was a descriptive study, it did not provide for making causal inferences. Further, Westat did not have control of sampling of the customers. JAN staff invited 2,500 customers to contact Westat, and EARN staff invited about 200 customers to contact Westat, to complete an interview. Westat completed interviews with 75 JAN customers and 14 EARN customers. This limits the generalizability of the data to only those few customers who responded to participate in the interviews. A total of 89 customers self-selected to participate; they were not randomly selected. Thus, the findings are not generalizable to all customers of JAN and EARN, and reflect only the views and experiences of those who participated.