

OneStops.info

Policy • Implementation • Research

Access for All in Workforce Development

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OneStops.info: Premiere Issue

This is the first issue of OneStops.info, a publication series from the National Center on Workforce and Disability/Adult (NCWD). NCWD will publish OneStops.info on a regular basis on an array of topics. Some of these publications, such as this one, will be application- and practice-based, while others will focus on policy-related issues. Our hope is that this series will serve as a resource to individuals involved in all aspects of workforce development for people with disabilities, including policymakers, practitioners, employers, and people with disabilities. This issue provides an overview of services for people with disabilities in One-Stop Career Centers. NCWD plans to cover many of the issues touched on in this publication more in-depth in future publications. This issue also includes real-life examples of how Centers can meet the needs of customers with disabilities.

One-Stop Career Centers: Serving People with Disabilities

One of the core principles of the One-Stop Career Center System is to provide universal access to all job seekers. Part of operating a universally accessible system requires meeting the diverse job seeker needs that exist within the local service delivery area, which includes the needs of people with disabilities. The purpose of this publication is to provide One-Stop Career Centers an overview of issues regarding meeting the needs of people with disabilities, and specific strategies for service delivery.

Disability—What does it mean? ■

Disability is an extremely broad term, encompassing many different physical or medical conditions that impact a person's life. When considering how best to serve people with disabilities, a great deal of emphasis is often placed on physical access. While this is clearly important for people who use wheelchairs, or people with sensory disabilities (such as those who are blind, visually impaired, or deaf), there are people with other types of disabilities for whom physical access is not an issue. For people with learning disabilities, mental retardation, mental health issues, head injuries, and many other conditions, the issue is not so much access to *facilities* as access to *programs and services*. In considering the needs of people with disabilities, the focus should be as much on access to programs and services as physical access.

People with disabilities—A major segment of the population ■

Every service delivery area includes a substantial number of people with disabilities, as approximately one in five individuals in this country has some type of disability (Source: U.S. Census Bureau). In many cases, a person's disability is not readily apparent. A One-Stop Career Center may work with a customer with a disability and not even know it, unless the customer has chosen to disclose information about their disability. So whether you know it or not, chances are that people with disabilities are using One-Stop services.

National Center on Workforce and Disability/Adult

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Why Should a One-Stop Career Center Serve People with Disabilities?

People with disabilities need the kind of assistance One-Stops can provide ■

People with disabilities make up a large portion of the untapped workforce of this country. Only about 37% of adults with significant disabilities are participating in the nation's workforce, as compared to 80% of the general population (Source: National Health Interview Survey). Yet studies show that the vast majority of unemployed people with disabilities want to work. People with disabilities need the type of expertise and assistance that a One-Stop Career Center can provide to help them find and succeed in employment.

People with disabilities can meet employer needs ■

According to current labor market projections, the number of job vacancies will continue to outpace the number of available workers. It is anticipated that by the year 2006, there will be 174 million available jobs but only 149 million working-age adults to fill them (Source: National Business & Disability Council). People with disabilities have a diversity of skills and abilities, and can meet many employer needs.

Employers are eager to hire people with disabilities ■

Surveys of employers continually show that employers view workers with disabilities as capable and productive employees. Employers also feel they need to improve their efforts in hiring people with disabilities (Source: Virginia Commonwealth University—RRTC on Workplace Supports). One-Stop Career Centers can play a major role in assisting employers to tap into the underutilized pool of people with disabilities.

Funding opportunities ■

There are a variety of funding streams and demonstration grant opportunities available to serve people with disabilities. These funding sources can be used to support One-Stop intensive and training services. Among these opportunities is the new Ticket to Work program from the Social Security Administration. One-Stop Career Centers should position themselves to take advantage of these funding opportunities.

Employment of people with disabilities is a national priority ■

In the last few years, addressing chronic unemployment for people with disabilities has become a major national priority.

- In 1998, the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities was formed for the purpose of “creating a coordinated and aggressive national policy to bring adults with disabilities into gainful employment at a rate that is as close as possible to that of the general adult population.”
- In announcing his “New Freedom Initiative” in the early days of his administration, President Bush emphasized his commitment to “tearing down the remaining barriers to equality that face Americans with disabilities” in part by “increasing the ability of Americans with disabilities to integrate into the workforce.”
- The U.S. Department of Labor now has an Assistant Secretary for Disability Employment Policy to coordinate efforts and maintain a focus on employment of people with disabilities.
- One-Stop Career Centers are expected to play a significant role in this national effort to increase the workforce participation rate for people with disabilities.

WIA requirements ■

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA)—the legislation that governs One-Stop services—states that One-Stop Career Centers must be universally accessible, meaning that any individual can access the core services of the One-Stop system. The Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Regulations for WIA are also very clear:

- People with disabilities have a right to use the services of the One-Stop system.
- One-Stop Career Centers must be readily accessible to people with disabilities.
- People with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations and modifications when using One-Stop services.
- People with disabilities should not be automatically referred to the public Vocational Rehabilitation system for services.

Meeting the Needs of a Customer Who Is Blind

Carlos, a man who is blind, has recently been laid off from his position at a computer firm. He finds out about One-Stop services via the One-Stop's accessible web site. When Carlos goes into the One-Stop Career Center, staff explain the application process and describe alternative formats for completing the forms. He chooses the option of filling out the intake form via computer, using screen reader software.

Carlos attends a group orientation. He is provided the written materials used at the orientation on a disk, a supply of which is always kept at the reception desk. He reviews these materials prior to the orientation session. Included in the materials is a list of the assistive technology available at the One-Stop, which is provided to every customer. During the orientation, as a standard practice, the staff member verbally reviews the services of the One-Stop Career Center and actively solicits questions at regular intervals. Carlos uses the computer workstation with a screen reader in the resource library, which allows him to conduct job searches, update his resume, and compose cover letters. Carlos decides to take a workshop on interviewing skills. When he signs up, he asks that the materials be provided to him in Braille. The One-Stop has all workshop materials in electronic format, and can easily print out the materials on the Center's Braille printer. After a number of interviews, Carlos obtains a position. Given his previous work experience, Carlos is familiar with the accommodations he needs, including an accessible work station and placing Braille labels on office doors and restrooms, and he works with his employer to arrange them.

Partnering with Vocational Rehabilitation

Bill is an individual with limited employment success who comes to the One-Stop Career Center looking for assistance. After the initial orientation and assessment, it is clear that Bill would benefit from additional assessment. The public Vocational Rehabilitation program (VR) is co-located at the One-Stop. VR arranges for a more in-depth assessment, and it is discovered that Bill has a significant learning disability. The VR counselor works with Bill to identify accommodations that he can use to succeed in using the One-Stop services and pursuing his career goals. In conjunction with VR, Bill begins to use the career exploration resources of the One-Stop Career Center.

Bill identifies carpentry as an area of interest, in part through informational interviewing and job shadowing. Bill is found to be eligible for training services, is provided an Individual Training Account, and selects a training provider. Typically, a paper and pencil test is required to determine whether an individual will be admitted to the carpenter training program. However, the VR counselor works with the training provider to arrange an alternate means of assessing Bill's abilities. The test is given orally, allowing Bill to provide verbal answers instead of written ones. Bill passes the test.

In the training program, Bill demonstrates a strong aptitude for carpentry. His main accommodations are being allowed to tape record the training sessions so he can review them later, and completing the written exams orally. After completing the program, Bill finds a position with a local contractor. VR conducts an analysis of the position and helps Bill develop accommodation strategies to succeed on the job.

Guidelines for Serving People with Disabilities

One-Stop Career Centers are often concerned that serving people with disabilities will require a substantial amount of “extra” work and resources, beyond the One-Stop’s capacity. However, there is generally not the need to customize services or add additional services in order to serve many people with disabilities. The following guidelines can help.

Good customer service principles are your guide ■

Meeting the needs of a person with a disability is in many ways no different than working with any other customer. While some technical information may be helpful (such as information on accommodations), simply by providing good customer service you will be able to assist customers with disabilities.

Key elements include:

Make people feel welcome. Like any One-Stop customer, people with disabilities should be made to feel welcome from the moment they first interact with the One-Stop system. If someone with a disability comes through the door, treat them in the same manner as you would anyone: with respect, dignity, common courtesy, professionalism, and a helpful attitude.

If you don’t know, ask! If you’re not sure how to handle a situation with a person with a disability, ask the individual. Like all of us, people with disabilities themselves know best what they want and need.

Create an atmosphere in which people are comfortable asking for assistance. It’s important that One-Stop Career Centers have an atmosphere where all customers, including people with disabilities, feel comfortable asking for help. To do this effectively goes beyond posting signs that say, “If you have any questions, just ask,” or a perfunctory, “Any questions?” at the end of orientation. Regularly ask all customers if they need help, or need any information clarified. Respond to requests for assistance in a way that respects the individual, and makes them feel glad that they asked.

Focus on the person’s abilities ■

All of us have things we are good at, as well as things we don’t do well. The same is true of people with disabilities. Emphasizing what a person can’t do is counterproductive. Instead, focus on the skills, talents, and abilities that a person has, and help them figure out how to market these to an employer.

Use a universal design approach ■

There is increasing recognition that there are ways to create environments and services that meet a wide range of preferences and needs, avoiding the need for adaptation and special design. This approach is called “universal design”. An example is the replacement of door handles with door levers, which allow a much wider range of people to open doors without assistance. Applying universal design principles to customer interactions includes not presuming that people do or don’t want assistance, but offering it to everyone (e.g., offering assistance to anyone filling out an intake form, not just people who look like they need help). Using universal design approaches not only allows the One-Stop Career Center to better meet the needs of customers with disabilities, but enhances quality service for everyone.

Use people with disabilities as a resource ■

Involve the disability community when considering how facilities and services can be designed for universal access. It’s important to include a range of individuals in this process, since the needs of a person who uses a wheelchair are significantly different from those of a person with a learning disability. Also be sure to include individuals from diverse ethnic and linguistic cultures who live in your service area.

Make it easy to ask for and obtain accommodations ■

Clearly indicate verbally and in writing the availability of reasonable accommodations and modifications in publicity materials and intake forms, in the reception area, at orientations, and elsewhere. And remember, when an individual needs an accommodation or modification, they are typically the best resource for what they need.

Don't automatically steer people with disabilities to "disability-only" services

Your state's public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) system is an important partner in the One-Stop system, and your One-Stop Career Center may have other special programs for people with disabilities. However, while these services may be helpful, they should not be the only options available. People with disabilities are entitled to the same full range of core services as anyone else, and should also be considered for the full variety of intensive and training services—not just the disability-specific ones—available through the One-Stop system.

Maximum integration and inclusion

If the One-Stop Career Center, or the individual with a disability, has a concern about whether a typical service is appropriate, the mindset should not be "what alternative is available?" Instead determine how the individual can best be supported and assisted to use the service as it exists, or how the service can be redesigned to be more universally accessible.

Don't stereotype

People with disabilities are as unique and diverse as everyone else, and should be treated as individuals. Don't assume, for example, that because you have a friend who is blind, you understand the needs of all blind people.

Incorporate disability issues into staff training

Part of the training that One-Stop staff receive should include training on disability issues. Training is available from a wide range of disability organizations (see information on disability resources at the end of this publication). As a One-Stop partner, the public Vocational Rehabilitation agency is a good resource. Suggested topics include: basic disability awareness and etiquette, designing and delivering universally-accessible services, and job placement strategies. Similarly, disability organizations should be trained on how to use One-Stop services.

Ask first, before helping

Don't assume that a person with a disability needs help. As with anyone else, before assisting someone with a disability, ask them whether they need assistance, and be sure to clarify what kind of assistance they need.

Provide many opportunities for feedback

Any business that practices good customer service regularly solicits feedback from customers in a variety of ways, through both formal and informal mechanisms. Customer surveys, comment cards, and focus sessions, as well as conversations with individual customers, can give the One-Stop Career Center a sense of how it is doing in meeting the needs of all its customers.

Go beyond current customers for feedback

Customer feedback should not end with individuals who have already used One-Stop services. Make efforts to solicit feedback from those who are not currently using the One-Stop Career Center to determine what steps to take so that the One-Stop Career Center is seen as a valuable resource by a wider spectrum of the population.

Include disability issues in employer outreach

People with disabilities should be included as part of the normal candidate referral process to employers. Additionally, One-Stop Career Centers may wish to consider enhancing employer receptiveness to hiring people with disabilities by conducting information sessions with employers to address issues regarding employing people with disabilities.

Include people with disabilities in general marketing materials

When developing marketing materials, include information about disability issues. If your marketing materials have pictures, include pictures of people with disabilities alongside people without disabilities. Include your TTY number along with the voice phone number.

Working with a Community Agency

Adrienne is a woman with a cognitive disability who is receiving services from a local community rehabilitation program. Adrienne comes to the One-Stop Career Center with Sharif, a staff member of the program. Adrienne asks if Sharif can sit in with her at the orientation to help her understand the information being presented, and the Center is happy to accommodate this request. After the orientation, Adrienne starts to use the resource library with Sharif's assistance. Adrienne uses a wide variety of One-Stop services, including a number of the core job seeking classes and on-site employer interviews. After Sharif works with Adrienne, she begins to use the services of the One-Stop without him. She finds a number of job leads, which Sharif works with her on pursuing. Eventually she finds a position working as a dietary aide in a nursing home, and the community rehabilitation program provides post-placement support services for her.

Customer with Disclosure Concerns

Charlotte has chronic depression. She has a bachelor's degree, and worked successfully for several years in the banking field prior to the onset of her illness. She hasn't worked steadily in over five years. Her illness has stabilized, and she feels ready to pursue employment again. Charlotte begins to use the services of the One-Stop Career Center, without revealing her disability. As she becomes more comfortable, she asks for an appointment with a One-Stop staff member, and requests that the meeting be held in a private office. During the appointment, Charlotte discloses her disability. She asks for assistance on dealing with the gaps in her work history and issues around disclosure to a prospective employer. One-Stop staff assist her with creating a resume that downplays her sporadic work history. In consultation with staff, Charlotte decides not to disclose her disability to prospective employers. The One-Stop staff then work with Charlotte on providing reasonable explanations in a job interview concerning her background and work history, without disclosing disability information.

Charlotte is extremely nervous about interactions with employers. One-Stop staff encourage her to attend job fairs and on-site employer forums to increase her comfort level prior to arranging formal job interviews. When Charlotte misses one of the events she had expressed interest in, a One-Stop staff member calls to tell her in a friendly way that she was missed, and to remind her about future events. The Career Center staff also begin to call the day before events with quick reminders, and find that these simple reminders make Charlotte feel welcome and build her confidence. Charlotte also particularly benefits from the weekly support group for job seekers that the One-Stop sponsors. The Career Center helps her arrange some employer tours and informational interviews. After a couple of months, Charlotte feels confident enough to pursue job applications and interviews. Charlotte eventually finds a job at the library of a local university. The One-Stop is concerned about Charlotte's expressed need for post-placement support, at a level beyond what the One-Stop typically provides. However, the Center has a relationship with a local community mental health provider, and is able to arrange for Charlotte to receive the necessary support through this agency.

A One-Stop for Disability Resources

Key to meeting the needs of people with disabilities is identifying local resources that can provide information and assistance when needed. Like others needing assistance in finding employment, people with disabilities have often been subject to a system that is fragmented and difficult to navigate. Connecting with disability resources is commensurate with the central goal for the One-Stop system: providing a central location for information and services for job seekers and employers. As with other job seekers, One-Stop Career Centers can play an important role in bringing together programs and resources for people with disabilities in a user-friendly system that simplifies and expands access to services. While the mandated partnerships (such as with public Vocational Rehabilitation) are a key starting point, One-Stop systems should consider becoming an information conduit, resource, and referral point for people with disabilities beyond mandated partnerships.

Disability resources can assist One-Stop Career Centers in a variety of ways:

- Answering questions from One-Stop staff concerning service delivery for customers with disabilities (such as advice on meeting the needs of a customer who is deaf).
- Specialized assistance and resources to enable the One-Stop Career Center to meet the specific needs of customers with disabilities (such as expertise related to job accommodations).
- As a resource for services beyond (but not in place of) what the One-Stop system can typically provide (such as specialized transportation, ongoing assistance with benefits management, or intensive post-placement job site support).
- As a resource to customers for information and resources beyond what the One-Stop system itself is able to provide.

Resources—Where to find them

In identifying resources, the public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) system is a good starting point. Your state and local systems may also have additional public and private disability agencies as partners who can provide assistance. Beyond formal One-Stop partners, every state and local area has many other resources that can assist One-Stop Career Centers to meet the needs of customers with disabilities. There are a variety of national information resources as well.

Examples of disability resources that may be available to assist One-Stop Career Centers in meeting the needs of people with disabilities:

Non-partner public disability agencies

State agencies such as Departments of Mental Health (national listing available at: www.nasmhpd.org/members.htm) and Developmental Disabilities/Mental Retardation (national listing available at: www.ddrcco.com/states.htm).

The Social Security Administration

Information available at: www.ssa.gov/work

Community rehabilitation providers

Agencies that provide intensive job placement and support services for people with disabilities.

Independent Living Centers

Organizations run by and for people with disabilities that provide a variety of services. National listing available at: www.virtualcil.net/cils; or www.ilru.org/jump1.htm; or by phone: 713-520-0232.

Protection and Advocacy Organizations

Organizations in each state that protect the rights of people with disabilities, and can provide assistance with questions on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Information available at: www.protectionandadvocacy.com; or by phone: 202-408-9514.

Advocacy organizations for specific disabilities

There are many different national organizations dedicated to specific disabilities, most of which have state and local chapters, which have a variety of expertise and resources available.

Assistive technology projects

Each state has an organization that is dedicated to meeting the assistive technology needs of people with disabilities. National listing available at: www.resna.org/taproject/at/statecontacts.html

Disability Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs)

Federally-funded regional centers that provide information, training, and technical assistance concerning the ADA. Further information is available at: www.adata.org/dbtac.html. To reach your local DBTAC: 800-949-4232.

These are just examples, and there are many others as well. A listing of disability resources is available in Section 14 of the manual *Access for All—A Resource Manual for Meeting the Needs of One-Stop Customers with Disabilities*, which can be downloaded at no charge from www.onestops.info

How to Connect

The following are some ideas on how One-Stop Career Centers can connect with disability resources.

- Have literature and information from local organizations available in your resource library.
- Meet with local disability organizations to learn how they can assist the One-Stop to meet the needs of customers with disabilities, and also how the One-Stop can assist these organizations in meeting their needs.
- Consider having an advisory group, made up of representatives of various disability organizations, which meets on a regular basis to discuss the role of the One-Stop system in meeting the needs of people with disabilities.
- Have staff from local disability organizations conduct presentations and workshops at the One-Stop Career Center, possibly together with One-Stop staff. For example, in the Boston area, disability organizations have given presentations at One-Stop Career Centers on Social Security Disability Benefits and Using Personal Networks.
- Have staff from local disability organizations available on-site at the One-Stop Career Center at specific times to work with customers (for example, a representative from the local Social Security office).
- Dedicate a portion of the One-Stop web site to links for local and national disability resources. This is useful for both customers and staff.

These are just examples, and there are many other ways that One-Stop systems can work together with disability organizations to each other's mutual benefit.



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