

Response to the Evaluation of the One-Stop Career Centers in New Jersey

The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD) and the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC) commissioned a comprehensive evaluation of the state's One-Stop Career Center in order to identify areas where the state, in partnership with local Workforce Development Boards, could improve its operations and processes to better serve jobseekers and employers. The evaluation, completed by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, used a wide variety of methods to identify strengths of the One-Stop Career Centers and to identify concrete areas for service improvement. LWD has embraced these recommendations and immediately began developing and implementing service improvements.

BACKGROUND

The evaluation, timed with the implementation of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), provided the Department with a fresh, research-based perspective of One-Stop Career Center operations and an opportunity to further align services with the requirements of the new law. WIOA mandates a locally-driven workforce development system which supports local and regional collaborative efforts to align services and resources.

Under Title I of WIOA, One-Stop Career Centers are overseen by the state's local Workforce Development Boards that select a One-Stop operator and direct staff employed by county and city governments to provide employment and training services to dislocated workers, disadvantaged adults and youth. In addition, the state's local Workforce Development Boards receive WorkFirst New Jersey funds to provide employment and training services to individuals who are receiving assistance through Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), General Assistance (GA) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). State Employment Service staff, who are funded by Title II of WIOA and by the WorkFirst New Jersey program, provide labor exchange and employment services in One-Stop Career Centers.

This evaluation report gives both the state and local Workforce Development Board areas an opportunity to self-examine processes and procedures in an effort to improve services to job-seekers, workers, and businesses.

AREAS FOR ACTION

The evaluation report findings, while far ranging, can be grouped into seven areas for action. LWD has already begun to work with local Workforce Development Boards to take concrete steps to strengthen services. These efforts build on a strong foundation of services.

Action Area #1: Ensuring that One-Stops Career Centers are responsive to the diverse needs of communities across the state, while ensuring high quality services are available across the state.

LWD is committed to ensuring a locally driven One-Stop Career Center system by empowering local Workforce Development Boards to make key decisions concerning service delivery. LWD is also setting

high performance standards for local WDB's and providing improved tools, expanded technical assistance and increased professional development.

Specifically, LWD is working with local Workforce Development Boards to take the following actions:

- LWD is implementing the Career Connections initiative that creates a common service delivery model and website platform. LWD has provided training to more than 800 state and local staff members.
- Through the Career Connections initiative, LWD is developing partnerships with organizations that serve jobseekers; specifically libraries, community colleges, faith and community-based organizations, to improve services to an increased number of individuals and to ensure that those individuals most in need are referred to a One-Stop Career Center for more intensive services. LWD continues to pursue all opportunities to locate One-Stop Career Centers on the campuses of the state's community colleges.
- LWD has created a WIOA Office that is providing technical assistance to local Workforce Development Boards and One-Stop Career Centers and is providing on-going staff development to improve services to all clients, including special populations.
- LWD is focused on hiring additional bi-lingual Spanish/English interviewers to ensure that state Employment Services staff reflect the needs of a diverse state.

Area for Action #2 – Enhancing and expanding the successful Jersey Job Clubs

The state's Jersey Job Clubs were noted as an effective strategy for providing jobseekers with successful job search and career planning assistance. LWD is committed to building on this strong foundation by supporting and expanding Jersey Job Clubs.

- LWD has updated the Jersey Job Club workshops so that they are consistent with the Career Connections website and the Path to Employment service delivery model.
- LWD has provided every workshop presenter with content training including presentation skills.
- LWD is exploring strategies for assisting libraries and community colleges to implement the Jersey Job Club model in more locations.
- LWD is using the Jersey Job Club model to develop a companion Steps to Success workshop program for the delivery of group activities to individuals receiving TANF, GA or SNAP benefits and to individuals facing significant barriers to employment. The training includes employability skills to help participants gain and retain employment. (based on SETC member comment)

Area for Action #3 – Streamlining the training approval process.

The evaluation report concluded that occupational training is an effective strategy for increasing employment and earnings of jobseekers. LWD is working with local WDBs to streamline the process by which jobseekers receive financial assistance to receive occupational training.

Specifically, LWD is working with local Workforce Development Boards to take the following actions:

- LWD and local Workforce Development Boards have reexamined roles and responsibilities of state and local staff and are redesigning the customer in-take process. State staff will focus most of their efforts on group activities. Local staff will provide individualized services to jobseekers and will be responsible for career counseling and for referring appropriate individuals to occupational training. LWD and local Workforce Development Boards are implanting functional alignment of staff to foster a “no wrong door” approach.
- LWD is strengthening existing tools and information that support informed decisions regarding occupational training. This includes the expansion of employer-driven partnerships through the state’s Talent Networks and Talent Development Centers, Labor Market Information, including a new list of Industry-Valued Credentials and Degrees, and the NJTOPPs.org / Eligible Training Provider List website. These tools provide valuable information to job seekers and provide them with the data to make fully informed decisions. (based on SETC member comment)
- LWD is developing and implementing training on tools and processes to ensure that training approval/disapproval is given in a timely manner to jobseekers.

Area for Action #4 – Improving Customer Service

While the evaluation found that a significant percentage of jobseekers were satisfied with services received, the report also found that there were some areas for improvement. LWD is working with local Workforce Development Boards to take the following actions:

- LWD is developing and implementing staff training on core competencies including interpersonal skills.
- LWD and local Workforce Development Boards are professionalize the One-Stop Career Center in-take processes by using trained, competent staff as the first point of contact for jobseekers.
- LWD is committed to using technology, through data mining and dynamic interaction tools, to ensure that jobseekers are fully aware of the services available to them and are provided appropriate services in a timely manner. (based on SETC member comment)
- LWD is committed to strengthening communication regarding our customers between WIOA Titles I, II, III, and IV, Unemployment Insurance, WorkFirst and other programs.

- LWD is exploring options for enhanced measurement of customer services and satisfaction.
(based on SETC member comment)

Area for Action #5 – Using Technology to Improve Services to Jobseekers

Technology can be used to strengthen services to jobseekers. However, many jobseekers lack the technology skills to effectively find a job and to pursue a career. LWD is working with local Workforce Development Boards address both the possibilities and the challenges of technology.

- LWD has implemented the Career Connections website and service delivery model to ensure a common service model. LWD will continue to make improvements to the website and will implement a new job board to replace the OnRamp tool.
- LWD is refocusing Employment Services staff to assist customers in the One-Stop Career Center resource areas with job searching efforts and utilization of technology.
- LWD will work with local Workforce Development Boards to reinvigorate literacy services in One-Stop Career Centers through basic computer instruction and partnerships with WIOA Title II providers.
- LWD will use the state’s longitudinal data system, being developed through the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI), to effectively and efficiently target customers for employment opportunities, job fairs, recruitment events and other services

Area for Action #6 – Integrating Sector-Strategy Approaches in the One-Stop Career Centers

The state’s seven industry-focused Talent Networks are a critical part of the state’s workforce alignment effort. LWD is taking the following actions to ensure that the Talent Networks efforts are fully aligned with the work of the One-Stop Career Centers.

- The Talent Networks are focused on engaging employers to identify and communicate information on the workforce needs of key industries. The Talent Networks have played a key role in the development of the state’s industry-valued credential list and will partner with LWD’s labor market analysts to produce an annual industry-focused workforce report that can guide Workforce Development Boards and One-Stop Career Center staff.
- The Talent Networks are working with employers to develop 20 Targeted Industry Partnerships (TIPs) across the state. These employer-driven partnerships will create new pathways to employment and careers for a wide-variety of One-Stop Career Center customers. LWD will invest \$5 million to support the most promising ideas development through the TIPs. Effective pilot efforts will be expanded to additional local workforce areas.

- The Talent Development Centers (TDCs) are anchor members of the TIPs. In collaboration with the efforts of the Talent Networks, they create the pipeline of skills needed in the industry sector. LWD is committed to building industry-needed capacity through the development and expansion of the Talent Development Centers. (based on SETC member comment)

Area for Action #7 – Ensuring Proper Allocation of Staff and the Coordination and Integration of Services

The majority of staff in One-Stop Career Centers are employed by county and city governments under the direction of local Workforce Development Boards and are funded by Title I of WIOA and the WorkFirst New Jersey program. State employment service staff funded by Title III of WIOA and by the WorkFirst New Jersey program also play a key role in the One-Stop Career Centers. Despite federal funding constraints, LWD will continue to work with local Workforce Development Boards to ensure that staff levels in One-Stop Career Centers are adequate and appropriate.

- LWD is conducting a review of the allocation of state employment services staff to specific One-Stop Career Centers as appropriate. LWD will rebalance staff, as needed, to respond to local needs. LWD is also hiring bi-lingual staff as previously noted.
- LWD is working with local WDBs to improve customer flow with clearly defined partner roles and responsibilities.
- LWD will continue to expand group activities, such as the state’s successful Jersey Job Clubs and the Career Connections effort, to increase the number of individuals receiving services per employee.
- LWD is developing and implementing cross-training to assure flexibility in meeting client needs.
- LWD and local WDBs have defined roles and responsibilities of state and local staff and full implementation will occur by July 1, 2017.
- Common intake, assessment and referral procedures are being developed with implementation planned for July 1, 2017.
- LWD is also developing an improved linkage process to ensure that appropriate One-Stop Career Center customers are connected to services provided by LWD’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (funded by Title IV of WIOA) and by local agencies providing adult literacy services funded by WIOA Title II.