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Event: Building Cross‑System Alignment in Your WIOA System Part 2: Cross‑System Coordination and Programmatic Accessibility

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>> VOICE: Recording in progress.

>> REBECCA SALON: Welcome, everyone and thank you for joining us for our webinar on Building Cross‑System Alignment into Your WIOA System Part 2: Cross‑System Coordination and Program Accessibility.

Part 1 of this series was held last week and was on building equity and inclusion in your WIOA data system. Both webinars will be archived on the LEAD Center website, and you will find the link in the Chat box. It’s at leadcenter.org. The archive for part 1 will be posted later this week and the archive for this webinar will be up in about a week so you will be able to go there and find the recording and the slides and a transcript of the webinar. It’s my pleasure to welcome you all on behalf of the LEAD Center. If you are new to the LEAD Center, we are the Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities.

We are a WIOA Policy Development Center, funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the US Department of Labor. LEAD Center is led by Social Policy Research Associates and National Disability Institute and together, we facilitate the adoption and integration of inclusive WIOA programs, policies and practices through research, technical assistance, and demonstration projects. We’re delighted that you've joined us today as we explore ways that states can promote cross‑system alignment, coordination, and program accessibility, which will support your disability, equity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts across your larger workforce system. And today, you'll hear about strategies that have been successful in several states. Stay tuned also for the release of a set of three briefing papers developed by the LEAD Center that highlight state innovations and promising practices for disability inclusion within the workforce system. Before we go further, we want to review a few features in the webinar that will enable you to fully participate. Next slide, please.

This session is being live captioned. If you wish to personalize the captioning, click the Live Transcript button at the bottom of the Zoom panel and you will find a way to enable captions or to hide captions or to adjust the caption size under the subtitle settings option. Alternatively, you may open a captioning webpage in a new browser. Click the link posted in the Chat box, adjust the background color, text color and font using the dropdown menus at the top of the browser. And we recommend that you position the window to sit on top of the embedded captioning. Next slide, please. We encourage you to ask questions during the webinar. Click on the Q & A button and type in your question. We are going to save time at the end to be able to respond to them. If you need technical support, please type your question into the Chat box. Next slide, please. It's my pleasure to introduce Dr. Chris Button, Supervisory Policy Advisor of the Workforce Systems Policy Team at the Office of Disability Employment Policy, ODEP, at the US Department of Labor. Chris leads the ODEP team that guides all of the LEAD Center's initiatives.

Welcome, Chris.

>> CHRIS BUTTON: Thank you, so much Rebecca. And thank you to everyone for being here today, I want to welcome everybody on behalf of ODEP, The Office of Disability Employment Policy, and our Assistant Secretary, Taryn Williams. We are really excited about the webinar today; we’re looking forward to hearing about the innovations that our states are going to share with us in cross‑system coordination and programmatic access. ODEP has had a particular interest in this area since, really the onset of the WIOA, and because we are really looking to increase and advance strategies that help job seekers with disabilities and others with barriers to employment to be able to effectively use all the wonderful services and opportunities that are available through the workforce development system.

So, I want to thank everyone for coming today and I want to thank our speakers in advance for what I know is going to be a really interesting sharing of information and I want to again thank our LEAD Center staff for the really amazing work that they are helping us to do in this area. Rebecca, back to you.

>> REBECCA SALON: Thank you so much, Chris, for those words of welcome. Next slide, please. We want to introduce our presenters today. I am Rebecca Salon, I’m Senior Advisor at LEAD Center. I work for National Disability Institute. We have speakers from two states today, Maryland and Illinois. We are very excited to have them here today. You will hear from Lauren Gilwee, Director of Policy at the Division of Workforce Development & Adult Learning in Maryland’s Department of Labor.

You will also hear from Lisa Jones, Manager of the Office of Employment and Training in the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Next slide, please.

In this webinar, you will hear about how states have moved from plans to action by leveraging resources and improving cross‑system services and alignment; how states have created and supported inter‑agency work groups to advance initiatives, how they have collaborated on shared intake, referral, and service delivery processes and collaborated on training and resource coordination.

Next slide, please.

So why is this topic so important to us in our work? As we know, WIOA promotes system coordination, integration and alignment.

WIOA defines the public workforce system as a comprehensive, integrated, and streamlined system to provide pathways to prosperity for those it serves and through WIOA's Section 188 it also promotes equal opportunity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of people who are unrepresented, or underrepresented, with a focus on not just physical accessibility but also on programmatic accessibility. Next slide. To accomplish that, WIOA promotes the provision of a broad array of integrated services, customer access to a seamless system of high-quality services through coordination of programs, services, and governance structures and support of the alignment of workforce investment, education, and economic development systems in support of a comprehensive, accessible, and high‑quality workforce development system. So, this is an incredibly important topic to focus on.

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LEAD Center staff engaged in a review of all of the 2020 WIOA State Plans from all 50 states; and the six territories, related to this topic.

And we wanted to share with you some of what we learned.

Many states as you will hear today from two of the states, leveraged their MOU partnerships, Memoranda of Understanding, to create and align policies across systems to advance employment for people with disabilities and other represented groups. We saw states use umbrella MOUs to promote alignment and coordination of services and operational policies, to set uniform performance expectations, to leverage resources across systems, support cross‑training and enable data sharing. We also learned about states that set and aligned equity goals across agencies and projects, including tracking disaggregated data to improve outreach, services and outcomes related to diversity, inclusion, equity and accessibility.

Next slide?

Other states created interagency workgroups to design, implement and evaluate cross‑system initiatives, to advance shared priorities. Some workgroups focused on equity, equal opportunity, service integration; others on policy development, Employment First, developing the State as a Model Employer, some states focused on service alignment, service quality and performance standards, business services, business engagement, data reporting and sharing, financial literacy services, capacity building for AJC staff and partners and more. So, there were work groups in many, many areas to lead to these system alignment outcomes and in some states, system alignment also focused on shared intake, referral, and service delivery processes to facilitate co‑enrollment and leverage resources across systems to promote equity and inclusion.

So, today, next slide, please, you will hear from two states that have created and implemented structures and initiatives that promote cross‑system alignment and coordination. And we're going to start with introducing Lauren again to talk about Maryland's work and their Benchmarks of Success. Lauren?

>> LAUREN GILWEE: Hi, everybody. Good afternoon and thank you, Rebecca, for the introduction and the opportunity to speak with this group today. I'm really excited to share some great news about Maryland's work and really appreciate just being able to highlight what we do. And of course, at the end I am happy to answer any questions. So, I just want to reintroduce myself, I am Lauren Gilwee, the Policy Director for the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning at Maryland's Department of Labor. So, in my position, I oversee a lot of coordinated policy development work with some of our core WIOA partners that I will talk a little bit more about. I also oversee the division's legislative portfolio and do quite a bit of grant and regulatory work. I am a kind of Jill of all Trades I like to say. So, in our division, we have oversight of WIOA Title I. We are one of a few states that has WIOA Title II, Adult Education in the Labor Department, so that is also in or division and then of course we directly administer the title three services with state merit staff. We work closely here with our Division of Rehabilitation Services, that’s our Voc Rehab partner and they sit in the Maryland State Department of Ed indicating. So, as Rebecca mentioned today's learning objectives really have to do with service alignment, inner agency work groups and collaboration. So, I wanted to share a little bit with you about this framework we’ve adopted in Maryland called the Benchmarks of Success and specifically tell you a bit more in detail about our WIOA alignment group which is really where the meat of our work to our coordinated approach to WIOA happens in Maryland. Next slide, please? So, I want to tell you a little bit about what the Benchmarks of Success are. So, following the transition from WIA to WIOA, Maryland wanted a better way to coordinate workforce system activities. It seemed like back in that 2015-2016 timeframe we had a lot of partners that sort of had different hands in the workforce system and we wanted to come up with a structural framework that would allow all of those stakeholders to work collaboratively but also continue thinking about placing participants at the center of decision-making.

So, there was a really intentional effort to develop this benchmarks framework. It helped to create a new culture of partnership that fostered further collaboration between some of the partners we are going to go through in a moment and the framework really revolves around shared goals that have to do with improving the earning capacity of Marylanders. I am not going to do deep‑dive into the goals today; rather I’m going to tell you about the structure that we put together that has helped us achieve alignments, really the topic of this webinar. Through this framework, this Benchmarks of Success, partners have been able to review how we deliver services. Of course, this has been a really hot topic during the pandemic. You know, how have we transitioned to virtual delivery? Is that maybe better for individuals with disabilities going forward? How will we create or foster a continued hybrid environment? This framework also allows us to really think through who we are reaching.

So, for instance, our TANF customers getting connected to the American Jobs Center. Are we co‑enrolling our Adult Education participants in WIOA Title I services? Are individuals with disabilities getting the same access to training services or individual training account dollars as other groups? The framework has also allowed us to do some gap analysis and also have really deep discussions about overlap in activities. So, I think in bringing folks together we have been really intentional about saying: “This agency or this department is providing this service. Are they the best at doing it and how can we make sure that cross‑agency referrals happen to ensure that somebody gets connected to the best possible service provider?” And then finally, the framework has really helped us meet the needs of businesses by including employer voices on work groups and in policy discussions and also making sure that our work really aligns with the goals of our Governor's Workforce Development Board here in Maryland. Next slide?

So, who is doing this work? So, this slide here kind of denotes who Maryland's state workforce plan partners are. These are organizations that participate in all of our benchmarks work, but I also want to mention that we found it really important and effective to work with not only these core partners, but also to collaborate with local partners. So, local Title I partners, community‑based organizations; community colleges, local departments of social services, public library systems, et cetera. So, I say that to sort of set the tone to let you know who we are working with, and I think we have tried to be really intentional to not only include the required state level organizations but also bring in other organizations that we know contribute to the workforce system.

Okay, next slide, please.

So, this is the meat of what I'm really hoping to talk about today. So first I just sort of wanted to describe what this slide depicts. So, it's a graphic organizer that shows the structure for Maryland's Benchmarks of Success and at the top there is an executive steering commitment that then sits over the WIOA alignment group. And then, the WIOA alignment group sits over four smaller work groups: Data and dashboard, professional development and technical assistance, communications, and policy.

So, I am going to talk briefly about what each of these units actually does and then go a little bit more into the meat of our coordination efforts.

So, under the benchmarks, in order to achieve our shared goals, we have an executive steering committee, and this is secretary‑level leadership.

So, for instance, our superintendent of education, our labor secretary, our secretary over health and human service all participate in this group.

They don't meet as often as the other working groups do- kind of the worker bees, if you will.

But they get together quarterly to make executive level decisions.

So, for example if we were officially going to officially bring a new partner into Maryland's State Plan, this is the group that would have the final kind of decision there as, you know, designees of the Governor.

That group sits above the WIOA alignment group. The WIOA alignment group has all of those organizations on it that I mentioned a moment ago.

So, we have all of the core partners under Maryland State Plan in addition to maybe some front-line staff from a local Department of Social Services, a library director.

And this group meets for three hours every single month.

It's the last Monday, 1:00‑4:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

And just really kind of addresses anything that comes up that is workforce related. I will say those meetings have looked a little bit different during the pandemic. Sometimes they become sort of a logistics discussion of what's open: Can I send my person here? But that is kind of really the unit where I am going to talk a little more about the coordinated work that we do.

Quickly I just want to touch on what each of these work groups does.

So underneath the WIOA alignment group there are four seated work groups that are permanently there. They each have a chair and a co‑chair and there are folks from all of our core partner agencies participating on these groups. So, for instance, the first one, data and dashboard, might have a management information specialist from our Voc Rehab partner, might have somebody from Adult Title II at the state level and then it could also have somebody who manages data at an American Job Center for Title I.

What that group is really tasked with is sort of tracking shared performance outcomes.

So, on a regular basis, they're looking at service to target populations.

How to look at duplicated versus unduplicated data.

If somebody is a TANF recipient and is in our Human Services Data Collection and then also in the labor system, how can we better coordinate that and get the systems to speak better together. The professional development and technical assistance group creates coordinated digital professional development learning opportunities for the state workforce system and we actually have a very robust tracking system of required professional development opportunities that go out to staff. So, in that case, the WIOA alignment group or even the executive Steering Committee would approve a professional development module and say all front-line staff that touches a WIOA customer at all of our organizations has to complete this training by this date.

And that has been a really helpful way to deliver the same information to everybody to get folks using the same vocabulary. You know, People First language and things like that. For communications, this group really does a lot with a monthly newsletter they kind of put out what is going on in Maryland's Workforce System. I think it’s been especially helpful to our front-line staff serving UI claimants during the pandemic. And the policy committee ‑‑ I actually chair that group in addition to coordinating the alignment group. Each year, the policy committee kind of takes on a broad product and tries to do a deep‑dive into it and make recommendations to the alignment group about large kind of system-level shifts or legislative suggestions like this year we are really looking at the digital divide.

So, I can go a little bit further now into the WIOA alignment group and really hit what we’re here to talk about today. So, this unit, like I said, meets monthly. And over the last several years, has achieved so much. So, I am going to give you a few examples and then, again, I am happy to take questions at the end. So, the group has really been successful with coordinated policy issuances. We have a very robust policy development process that involves a public comment period, three meetings to go over drafts and then a final approval process at the Secretary and Assistant Attorney General levels. Over the past several years we have done coordinated policies among partners about Memorandum of Understanding and resource sharing agreements, monitoring. So, a document that really outlines who is monitoring you and for what and when, and then performance. So, every two years the alignment group works together to put out a performance policy that kind of goes through what each area is holding themselves accountable to and to make sure that there's alignment between what each agency is intending to do over a two‑year period.

Every policy that the alignment group works on or that we do here in Maryland actually goes out to a 5,000+ person stakeholder listserv and we get input from front line staff, leadership and then the WIOA alignment group along with the policy unit that I oversee, combs through that feedback and ends up determining what goes into a final policy.

So, having that inner agency work group has allowed us to align vocabulary, service delivery methods, performance; how we do monitoring. What type of equal opportunity language we use, and it's just really helped I think for our job seekers to see the same types of service presentation regardless of which door they walk into. That group also does coordinated State Plan preparation. I know that we are in that process now. So, they will review public comments from the State Plan and ultimately make decisions about what goes into that document.

The group also has worked really closely, and I mentioned this before briefly about communication during the pandemic.

To ensure that we have a continuity of services.

So, I think that this inter agency work group really allowed to keep our WIOA services going because we had folks that were coordinating regularly about this is shut down.

This is open. You are in a state‑leased center, a county‑leased center, et cetera.

And that just sort of open pipeline of conversation allowed us to swiftly transition to virtual services in Maryland. Now, with omicron variant it's allowed us to kind of take some things and scale them back and do hybrid, where necessary.

The alignment group also has really enhanced our coordinated data tracking. All of our partners are using different data systems.

But the alignment group has been very intentional at drilling down on data for specialized WIOA target populations. So, for instance that data and dashboard group was tasked by the alignment group to put together a quarterly report that shows here's how many individuals with disabilities are being enrolled by each core partner during each quarter and then trying to ensure that we do targeted outreach, marketing campaigns, et cetera, to try to bring those groups into our service delivery system if they are not already there.

Let's see . . .

The group also often has like a guest speaker come in. So, sometimes we have these tangent kind of topics that aren't necessarily an official part of our system but we'll have somebody come in and talk to us about utility support.

So, if there's a resource that is out there that we think our shared customers could benefit from, we'll have somebody come in from like a non‑profit organization, share those items so that all of our partners can then take them and disseminate them to our customers.

And then finally the group has really helped move accessibility forward for our system.

We have taken a collaborative approach to our nondiscrimination plan under WIOA, our language access plan; and that group reviews all of those documents and approves them. Having our Voc Rehab partner in those discussions, I think, has really helped enhance some of the service delivery and some of the accommodations that are available at our American Job Centers. Okay, next slide?

So, a little bit of what's next: I touched upon what the Policy Committee is up to this year. We will hopefully sometime in the coming months have a report about how virtual programming has impacted service delivery across the workforce system and one of the pieces that we have really drilled down on is how different target populations have kind of dealt with having to transition to virtual learning or virtual services; and what pieces of that we should retain and which ones we should do away with, so that's something that I know all of our partners are excited to see certainly: Continued coordination regarding the ongoing pandemic with closures and opportunities.

And then the last item I have here is just a link and I know someone will drop it in the Chat ‑‑ thank you so much.

We have a page about our Benchmarks of Success initiative that goes a bit deeper into the goals that I didn't discuss but also hits upon this framework and this interagency coordination that I talked a bit about today. So that kind of concludes my remarks and I will turn it back to Rebecca. Thank you.

>> REBECCA SALON: Thank you so much, Lauren. It was just great information and so many interesting things that are happening in Maryland. And now if we can advance to the next slide, I would like to reintroduce Lisa Jones from Illinois to talk about some of the things in which they have been involved. Lisa?

>> LISA JONES: Great. Thanks, Rebecca. Great act to follow with Lauren. I want to thank you all for having me today. Looking forward to sharing what Illinois has been doing. If you could advance to the next slide, I'll just jump right in. So, Illinois over the last two or three years has really been placing a very high priority on how we make sure equity in our workforce system is first and foremost. And we have 4 governing structures that are helping influence and shape the policy and programmatic experiences for Illinois.

The first one of those is the Governor's Executive Order, the second one is Education and Workforce Equity, the third is the Governor's Commission on Workforce Equity and Access and the fourth is our IWIB Equity Task Force.

So, if we advance to the next slide, I am going to talk about each one of those in a little bit more detail. The first one, the Governor's Executive Order, Governor Pritzker took over in 2019 and this was actually his third Executive Order his second day in office, so demonstrating certainly his strong commitment to workforce development programs and making sure that our populations in Illinois are really able to access workforce services that lead to self‑sustaining wages. So, this particular order, as you can see: There were four primary focuses for us to think about. It’s how are we going to strengthen workforce development and job creation; how do we improve industry targeting, so how do we work better with businesses and looking at stronger ties to work-based earning. How are we aligning our resources to serve disenfranchised populations? So really thinking about where are the services getting to? Where are the gaps that we’re having in services? How do we use data to drive those services and then finally how do we convene and make sure we are aligning our education, workforce, and economic development systems in a more strategic way?

From that order we created an action agenda item that really took a three‑step approach to how we're going to move forward in Illinois. One was really focused around employer-based priorities, the other was job seeker priorities and then the third was more around system alignment. So, if you could advance to the next slide, please?

Just last year, almost a year ago now, the Governor and the General Assembly came together and enacted the Education and Workforce Equity Act. It was signed into law on March 8. One of the key features of the Education and Workforce Equity Act was for the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, along with our education and other workforce and human service partners to conduct a feasibility study that would really look at how do we streamline services to create greater access to job training for underserved populations.

The study required us to bring together as I mentioned all of the workforce programs, but we also brought together all of our education partners because we thought that would be extremely important in really looking at how we streamline service.

So, we even had from education perspective, our Board of Higher Ed on this committee, in addition to human services. We were to look at what did other states do? So, we had an extensive look at how were other states aligned. And really had a lot of discussions within ‑‑ as the report was being developed ‑‑ is consolidation -- does consolidation really mean that you're creating better access to services?

And what does that really look like? And is it just ‑‑ you know, is marketing a better approach. Or just looking at different activities and different things that would really create more of a streamlined system rather than thinking consolidation is the answer. And from that report came these two recommendations, one was really thinking about the participant and stakeholder experience and then the other was infrastructure and technology.

So, from that report, if you'll advance to the next slide, the Governor's Commission on Workforce Equity and Access was formed. This commission is actually going on right now. They are looking at equitable and effective future for the state workforce system. How are we grounding ourselves in understanding of user and stakeholder experience, and then also looking racial, social and geographic inequities to inform our experience and our outcomes. And what they are doing is looking at the current and future state of our system and how do we reimagine workforce services in Illinois as one of the key things they are looking at from a user perspective.

Right now, we have workshops going on. I’m sorry, not workshops—we have focus groups going on talking to businesses. We are talking to the actual user of the system, talking to the frontline staff. And then those-- that information is going to be fed up into the commission. And we will have recommendations presented to the Governor and the General Assembly. Sometime this summer or in the fall.

So, if you would advance to the next slide, the fourth area that I want to touch on briefly is our IWIB Equity Task Force. The Equity Task Force came not only out of the feasibility study but also was something that we did as part of the action agenda for the Governor's Executive Order. This task force is made up of businesses, all of our workforce partners, certainly community‑based organizations.

We have some advocacy groups on this task force. The task force is looking at how we can align the education system with the workforce system to establish goals that will reduce inequities. They are looking at ‑‑ our priorities are the following three: How do we infuse policies and practices into programs, policies as authorized by law. Looking at what kinds of tools are out there we can use to make sure that equity is infused into all of our workforce programs. One of the things we are doing in our policy work group through the equity task force is looking at a tool and we’re piloting a tool right now so that any policy or practice that we're thinking about or considering in Illinois, how does it align with what's going on in Illinois.

We’re also looking-- the other one we are doing is a data work group under the equity task force and how do we use data more strategically to inform not just policy but to inform practices and making sure that the system ‑‑ the users of the system are being served and getting access to the services they need.

If you could advance to the next slide and I think what I want to do now is that-- I have kind of given you a high-level overview of what’s driving our system. And now this is kind of how we are moving forward in coordinating our workforce system activities. As you can see, we have centered this around the vision and we have kind of color‑coded this to help us focus where-- as we think about our policies and processes: Where does it really fall?

So, we are looking at strategies. And if you advance to the next slide, it will get into this a little bit deeper, but the vision really starts at the upper level with our Governor and the workforce board which assists in making not just the vision with the Governor but also sets the foundation for the strategies.

Oh, excuse me. So, here we set priorities and objectives to achieve our vision for the workforce system. The blue is the policy piece. And our WIOA inter agency leadership team is actually our high‑level policy and operations planning team. They are senior level staff; they meet periodically to really think about what are--- what kinds of decisions we have to make around MOUs, policies, strategies, those kind of things. And then our orange is our operational piece, and the operational piece is our middle level managers and frontline staff and how are they operationalizing the strategies and the policies and what are the real commitments and resources do we need to make these strategies and these policies in place. And then the one I don't have on here that I am remiss but is definitely a driver and very significant in our planning is our professional development. And our professional development really works in tandem with all of our ‑‑ with the operations piece and the policy piece to make sure that, as we go forward in implementing a policy which my next couple slides will really dig into it, our service integration policy and how does that move forward and how does professional development support that?

So, I’d appreciate if you could advance to the next slide, please. As part of our operationalization, you can see, and I talked about this in the previous slides – but this is how we function. We have the IWIB and under the IWIB we have various standing committees and sub committees. Those are our long-term committees; those are things like we have a continuous improvement committee. We have—um--- I'm blanking, sorry. Our Executive Committee is also under this. We have a Career Pathways Committee for targeted populations that looks at career pathway work. Our task forces are shorter term efforts. And as I mentioned earlier, that is our equity task force. So, those have time‑limited missions if you will, and they make recommendations that get folded into committing and subcommittees. Our then our policy work groups are really focused on individual type policies. As Maryland mentioned, they have a very robust policy process, we do as well in Illinois. Where the IWIB has set a baseline of you know, these are the folks that have to be at the table in addition to the core partners. So, we always have every level of our education system at our table in addition to core the partners. Human service folks, community‑based organizations and we try to match state to local. So that it's not just a state‑driven policy work group but it's very much driven from the bottom up for our policy work group. If you could please advance to the next slide, I appreciate that. Thanks.

And then this goes a little more into what our interagency work groups are and how we function, even more so in Illinois. I talked about the interagency leadership team a little bit. The advisory groups and councils, those are really our broader councils and groups that somehow inform the workforce system. One of my ‑‑ the example that pops in my head right now is my participation with our adult education advisory council and one of the work groups that we're working on right now is service integration which I'm going to talk about next. And also, our other one is we have a task force for employment and economic opportunities for people with disabilities and they're required to have a Strategic State Plan; and in that State Plan we have been able to tie their work with what we're doing in our Unified State Plan to make sure that we're all moving forward in serving our customers. The WIOA inter agency technical assistance team, that is our operational team, and they really focus on supporting the local level front line staff and boards and how do we, you know ‑‑ if they are having trouble with their MOUs, they are at an impasse, how do they operationalize Governor guidelines not just MOU guidance but the infrastructure, funding agreements. How do they, when they need assistance with that. So, they are really operational on the ground connection between the state and the local areas.

Certainly, our Illinois workforce partnership: That is the group that is made up of all of our local areas in the state which Illinois has 22 local workforce areas. They're very involved and worked hand‑in‑hand with us on creating policy, setting the vision for the state. And then I also mentioned professional development. So, I won't talk any more about that. If you could advance to the next slide, please?

Now I really want to dig into an example of how we put all of our coordination into practice. And this was. Probably we started this in 2018/2019 really thinking about, even though we had dabbled in it, but we really started a strong focus on: How is service integration going to look in Illinois? So, we brought together our policy work group folks as I mentioned before. From the WIOA core partners, our TANF folks, our food stamp folks. We had community college people participating in this work group as well and came together and said what would service integration look like in Illinois. And we came up with a definition.

And as part of our research, we also said ‑‑ we looked at of course at best practices to see what other states were doing and we came across WINTAC and really started to think about their service continuum. If you go to the next slide, you will be able to see the whole continuum. Got together with WINTAC. If you could advance to the next slide, thanks. Sorry about that. Worked with WINTAC and they actually came into the state and helped us develop our service integration policy based on the continuum. And as you can see the continuum goes from isolation to integration. And if you go to the next slide, I will talk a little bit more about the policy. But really, what is that continuum self‑assessment? It's going to look at the local level and the connectivity to our other one‑stop partners. We wanted to make sure as we were developing the policy and looking at the continuum that folks knew there really wasn't any right or wrong level except for isolation. And movement could be within each of the levels. It didn't necessarily mean – as you were thinking about service integration and what services you were going to employ in a local area to move needle, as you were thinking about in a, you didn't have to jump up one level; you could move the needle within that level.

We wanted to make sure that there was a dashboard or way for system partners to track their movement and come up with a plan on how they were going to move forward with integrating into their system.

If you could advance to the next slide, please? Thanks. So, this is actually the process that we went through. The assessment and the planning process that we've worked through and incorporated into the policy, and this is how it's operationalized at the local level. What we had the local areas do was really assess the current level of engagement and the activity and connectivity between all of the partners within the one‑stop system and then we had facilitated discussions with staff and partners. Looking at what the assessment results were. What were the local considerations and possible opportunities to strengthen or develop or improve partnerships? What's some long‑term and short‑term planning that we can do?

How are we going to measure those outcomes and then of course evaluating progress and providing renewed focus? And if you can advance to the next slide, please. We created some tools that we embedded in the policy. And the first tool is the service integration overview and self‑assessment guide. And that guide really is a step‑by‑step look into how you go about determining what level of service integration you are at and then the assessment for how you move that forward. This also contains a facilitators guide. So, we wanted to provide not just the tool, but also how do you implement this work? And so, anybody can pick it up and know what's the How To, anyway doing this service integration. If you could go to the next slide, please. Thank you. I just mentioned the facilitators guide, which is the step-by-step advice. And then we also worked with WINTAC, as I mentioned, and we had several facilitator's trainings to work directly with the local areas and them we also did some pilots to test the tool and how the tool worked, and we created a website also that serves as a resource for our local areas to access when they are doing their self‑assessments and the self‑assessments are required yearly. We're looking at that from a policy perspective but right now they are yearly. Interestingly, though, as soon as we rolled this out, COVID hit.

So, we’ve had to take a step back and think about how we're going to move forward with the service integration assessment. So, if you could go to the next slide, please. Thank you.

This is an example of our assessment. In addition to the assessment and some questions we also came up with a rubric for you to be able to gauge where you were. And, as you can see, this one was customer‑centered design, which was one of the five areas we focused on within our self‑assessment process and then we were looking at collecting and getting customer input from anybody that was a user of the system. And as you can see, we took the function and the goal and then we said what does a customer‑centered design goal look like for isolation? What does it look like for communication? Communication is where partner agencies share information about service design related to customer input; and then: Am I at that one or not when we think about communication? Or: Do partners meet regularly, and do we plan services together? Are we approaching service design separately but we’re sharing information which would really point to on the continuum you um that we are at collaboration and integration is all of our partner programs really regularly meeting together, getting feedback on customers and improving all aspects of service delivery? And if you could advance to the next slide, please.

This is another example that is included within the self‑assessment process; and this is the participant form and each of the partners was provided this form and with the facilitator's guide they walked through a process to determine where do I think I am as a partner in the system in the integration continuum. Once all of the partner pieces were done, then we came together and discussed those. If you could, please, advance to the next slide. Thanks.

As you can see, we had some baseline data. Interestingly, the vast majority of our local areas thought communication or coordination is where they fit. Where they wanted to go was generally one level higher. Priority ranking, staff cross‑training, and communication were the highest priority levels. If you could advance to the next one?

Then this is just some general information about where the local area's action plans were when they identified what they wanted to focus on. We did also give some money to do some pilot sites that I will not have time to talk about but certainly would be happy to provide information on those. Then I think the last slide, if you could switch to that slide, is this is where we are kind of thinking ability where additional opportunities for alignment beyond service integration efforts. Really thinking about business engagement. A systems approach and then aligning with, greater alignment with our education and workforce partners.

I'm sorry, I think I went a little bit over so please forgive me for that. But I will kick it back over to Rebecca and I really appreciate the opportunity to provide you with what we are doing in Illinois.

>> REBECCA SALON: What great information that both Lisa and Lauren just provided. I think, you know, it's really clear that we have so much that we can learn from these long‑standing structures that have been in place in these two states: the WIOA alignment group and the equity task force have been around for a while.

And really have developed ways of working together.

So, I appreciate so much what you had to offer.

We have a lot of questions that have come in and please feel free to continue to put questions in the Q & A box.

We appreciate that.

While Lisa catches her breath maybe I will start with a question for Lauren. Lauren, could you describe how Maryland's partners collaborate on MOU development and how they make modifications when things change, or things become challenging.

>> LAUREN GILWEE: Sure, absolutely. We actually had an MOU policy that was standing for several years. And then I guess towards the end of 2020 we had a lot of questions come up from partner organizations that had to do with you know, what should we do if we need to add somebody in; how can we better align our MOU and RSA. And we really saw that as an opportunity to re‑develop the policy.

I think there wasn't as much guidance about how to put together those documents when WIOA first rolled out in Maryland.

And Maryland tried to create something that really answered all of the questions for our partners. So, we actually spent like the first six months of this year updating that MOU and RSA policy. And issuing it jointly. So that, for us, means that all of the leadership at our core organizations had to sign off on it as did their Assistant Attorney Generals.

So, it was just kind of a really big effort to go back and look at what wasn't working, what was or what wasn't working and kind of put together a new document for the next few years.

>> REBECCA SALON: Great. That's really helpful. Again, I think we have so much to learn from your experience.

Lisa, a question for you: What do you think have been the positive effects of the interagency work groups on policy and system alignment in Illinois and have there been negative effects?

>> LISA JONES: I think a lot of positive.

It's really, it’s very refreshing. I think it's very exciting, it’s energizing the synergies that we’ve created within our work groups. I think now more than ever our groups, we rely on each other. We don't operate in the silos or the vacuums that we used to, you know, years ago.

Have come a long way in Illinois.

I think one of the challenges is, is time. When you work in a group setting, a lot of times it might take longer to get input. But certainly, for me I think that is the biggest challenge is time to get things done. Because there is so much you want to do and so much that needs to get done.

But for Illinois I think it's turned our system around, actually, just to have those synergies with the interagency alignments.

>> REBECCA SALON: That's great now. Thanks so much.

Another question for Lauren: Who are the WIOA partners who are represented on the WIOA alignment group, you know, in addition to the required partners? It sounds like you have both required and non‑required partners?

>> LAUREN GILWEE: Yes. From our required partners we try to make sure there is a voice from both the state and the local level. So, for instance, for Title II for Adult Education, we will have the State Adult Ed Director, but we also have a program administrator from one of our 25 adult education grantees. We sort of see that structure across all required partners.

We also have front line staff or mid‑level staff from some of the required organizations.

For instance, we have our State Workforce Director who oversees Title III but then we also have a Labor Exchange Administrator who oversees Title III operations for one local workforce area. So, we get sort of that dual state and local perspective. And then there are a couple of organizations that are represented on the group as well. So, for instance, we have somebody from the public library system. This is not a current partner; but it's somebody who, you know, a lot of our stakeholders work very closely with.

Right now, in Maryland, although this could be a change soon, we do not have SNAP as a partner under our combined plan but something we hope to change so we brought somebody in from human services SNAP office and then additionally, same thing, we don't have Perkins as a combined partner yet, but I think it’s something that the state wants to work towards. So, somebody from our Department of Ed office is there too. So, really it is a sort of state and local perspective and then upcoming organizations and then some of our close community partners.

>> REBECCA SALON: Great. Thanks. It is interesting to hear you have been able to pull in as partners and who you all see as a benefit to have at the table for your structure.

Lisa, there’s been a similar question for your group: Which WIOA partners are on the IWIB equity task force and how long is their charge under the State Plan?

>> LISA JONES: We do have all of the four core partners are on the equity task force.

We also have in our Department of Human Services our TANF and Food Stamp and SNAP representation.

We do also have our education partners on the task force, and I want to say we’ve . . . of course I'm blanking.

I apologize for that.

We have most of the required partners but not all of them.

Migrant council is the one that comes to mind right off the top of my head.

But we do make sure in all of our work groups and particularly the equity task force that we have a broad representation of all our partners.

>> REBECCA SALON: That is great. It is wonderful again to learn from both your states about how you think about this and what you have done.

I don't think I have time for other questions at this point because we want to wrap up with a few more issues. If you could go to the next slide, please.

We wanted to give you links to the different resources that both Lauren and Lisa talked about but also to highlight the Disability Reference Guide. There is a Promising Practices in Achieving Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity, a Section 188 Disability Reference Guide that was issued by the Department of Labor and gives lots of examples of other ways to promote system alignment and collaboration. So, we encourage you to look at this. Again, these slides will be posted so you will be able to have direct links and also the links are being dropped in the Chat box. Next slide, please.

We encourage you to connect to the LEAD Center if you are not on our mailing list to get information directly, please go to leadcenter.org and sign up to get announcement about webinars, to get our newsletters and notifications of briefs, things like that, that are issued.

Next slide, please?

And please follow the LEAD center and connect with us through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. I want to greatly thank Lisa Jones and Lauren Gilwee for taking the time to provide us with such important information about what their states are doing and we look forward to seeing the outcomes coming out of that from a system alignment perspective and I also want to thank Chris Button for taking the time to welcome us and for providing context for the webinar. Thank you all for joining and we look forward to connecting with you through the LEAD center on other activities. Stay well, everyone.

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