

## **Operationalizing Access and Equity in Your WIOA State Plan: Partnerships and Practices**

### **Transcript**

December 12, 2023

>> Laura: Welcome, everybody, we would like to welcome you to our webinar today. Operationalizing Access and Equity in your Workforce innovation and opportunity act. Better known as WIOA state plan. We will learn about partnerships and practices and we are excited you are able to join our webinar which is being sponsored by the Leadership for Employment and Economic Advancement (known as the LEAD Center) and is led by National Disability Institute and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of disability employment policy. And we are a WIOA policy development center. We are glad you have joined us today and can you go to the next slide, please?

>> My name is Laura Gleneck I am the project director of the WIOA policy development center. I am with national disability Institute. And I am excited to be your facilitator today. If we can go to the next slide, please. Before we get started I want to go over some housekeeping. And things that will help you as you participate in today's webinar. We will be offering captioning today. If you wish to personalize the captioning click to show the caption option in Zoom control. To view captions alternatively, you may open a captioning webpage in a new browser. Click on the link posted in the chat box to access captions. You can adjust the background color, text color, and font using the drop-down menus at the top of the browser. Position the window to sit on top of the embedded captioning. Go to the next slide, please.

We love questions and answers. Please, we hope in today's webinar you will ask questions about what you're going to hear today. You can use the Q&A function to ask your questions of the panelist. We will have time at the end of this webinar for Q&A. If you have any technical questions or are experiencing technical issues please use the chat box and somebody will help you with that.

So, if we can go to the next slide. Through today's webinar, you will understand the benefits of meaningful strategic partnerships to operationalize collaboration, ordination, and communication.

Identify activities that ensure that all facets of the Workforce system can successfully serve diverse, underserved populations.

You will learn about promising practices that promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility also known as DEIA and nondiscrimination that are currently being implemented.

Next slide, please.

You will also explore how to incorporate the good jobs initiative known as GJI for people with disabilities into your states WIOA unified or combined state plan.

And finally, we will examine a call to action to ensure that people with disabilities and other underrepresented populations are included in all aspects of your state's WIOA unified or combined state plan.

If you can go to the next slide, please. It is really my pleasure to introduce Dana Westgren who is joining us from the employment and training administration with the U.S. Department of Labor. She is going to provide welcome and opening remarks. Dana is the Unit Chief for Governance in the Office of Workforce Investment Division of Adult Services and Governance (DASG) in the Employment and Training Administration. Most recently, Dana served as a Workforce Analyst in the Adult Services team in DASG. Prior to DASG, Dana worked at Pew Charitable Trusts after spending just under 3 years at the National Governors Association, first as an analyst on the workforce team and then as a senior analyst/project manager on the postsecondary policy team. During this time, she worked on a variety of work-based learning and workforce system projects, as well as supported DOL grantees as a TA provider. Dana came to the world of workforce policy by working as a job coach at a WIOA Title II adult education provider in Washington, DC.

Dana, I would love to turn it over to you to provide opening remarks and help set the stage for what we will listen to today.

>> Dana: Absolutely, thank you, Laura. Please go to the next slide. Thank you for including me on this webinar. This webinar cannot be more timely. The rules of partnership in serving individuals from historically underserved communities including those with disabilities is a huge focus for us right now but most recently we were excited to launch our newest guidance. Training and employment guidance letter 4- 23. Also known as TEGL 4-23. This helps states as they prepare for their 2024 state plans pretty quick overview for those of you not familiar about what a state plan is. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act or WIOA requires the governor of each state to have a unified or combined state plan that includes a four-year strategy and operational plan for the continuing implementation of a state's Workforce development system. With an update after two years. States must have a federally approved plan to provide funding under the six core programs of WIOA. At a minimum, states must provide a unified statement that encompasses the six core programs under WIOA and states have the option that includes the six programs plus one or more partner programs. We will talk more about partnership later.

We want to reemphasize during this discussion that the state plans are more than a compliance document. This is an opportunity for states to think strategically about leveraging the Workforce system to respond to modern needs. The information shared allows the Department of Labor to know what great work you are doing on the front lines including enhancing partnerships with non-WIOA partners to better serve all the individuals who benefit from our services including those individuals with disabilities. Next slide, please.

So, I will take you through what is new in this year's state plan that is the reason I'm emphasizing as this gets to the meat and heart of the discussion we are having today about the importance of partnership. And the importance of DEIA in the work we are doing at the Department of Labor, employment and training administration. So, what is

new this year for those who have been in this planning cycle with us before? Quite a bit, actually. We use the opportunity to highlight some key priorities for this year's state plan that were not necessarily at the forefront of previous cycles. One important priority includes leveraging historic infrastructure investments which will be talked about in a second.

We also prioritize investment to prepare workers for quality jobs like the good jobs initiative that Laura mentioned at the beginning of this presentation.

Quality jobs are important as we know and strengthening economic self-sufficiency hinges on the ability of individuals to obtain the good jobs to provide family-sustaining wages and advancement opportunities. Evidence-based Workforce development such as career pathways, registered apprenticeships and worker centered sector strategies including labor-management partner programs can increase the availability of good jobs and close the equity gap. If you want more information about how we defined good jobs check out training and employment guidance letter 7-22 which I believe we included in the handouts to this webinar. Another priority that we highlighted in this guidance is data-driven decision-making. So, using labor market information and evaluations to make service investment partnership decisions. The departments of education and labor encourage states to use longitudinal ETA systems and compare and share data across agencies regardless of inclusion in the WIOA state plan and support data-informed decision. For instance, such data analysis can support a local needs assessment, identifying which infrastructure occupations are most likely to provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Another priority is to envision a no-wrong-door youth workforce system that offer seamless access to resources, programs and wraparound services for our nation's young people. What does this mean? WIOA encourages further alignment and coordination across job corps, title I youth as well as system that serve students with disabilities, the state Medicaid and Medicare industry, centers for independent living and independent agencies and another priority of equity in service delivery and educational programs which we will get to the heart of our discussion today. This is where we hope states can examine populations from groups especially those identified in labor market analysis as having higher unemployment, lower earnings, and the overall population. And explore existing inequities with access to and participation in public Workforce and education programs but can also use this time to look at outcomes in terms of employment and earnings and placement and quality jobs for different previously underserved populations across the Workforce system.

Using this analysis states and local areas can focus enhanced services on those target populations including individuals with disabilities. We want to see enhanced supportive services offerings, which is another way to look at different partnerships around supportive services. To ensure people can enroll in and complete these programs.

And, finally, a priority that has been in all things is strategic partnering. We want to see how our WIOA partners are partnering across all of the different aspects of workforce development across the states but we know partnerships are essential in this work. One quick housekeeping item to remind you of. Please remember unified or combined state plans are due no later than March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024. This includes the common elements and

program-specific portion. And if you need more details about what we mean by any of the unified state plan language I'm using for any details outlined in this guidance for the revamped education request or ACR highlighted on the site. People look at resources under WorkforceGPS and the guidance TEGE letter for 2023. We will be sure to share any information with the folks on this call as they come out. Next slide, please. So, as I mentioned on the very long previous slide I highlighted. We are very interested in the Department of Labor in seeing states who are planning to partner with agencies that receive funding through the historic investments over the last few years but these investments include the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act known as the bipartisan infrastructure law. The chips act and the inflation reduction act. Quickly, the BIL the bipartisan infrastructure law (BIL), which includes 1.5 trillion to have access to high-speed Internet, transit and enable project but there's not a statutory rule in the bill but there are many ways to have a proactive role in implementation but similarly, the Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductor and Science Act (CHIPS) act includes \$52.7 billion increase – billion dollars to increase semiconductor production in the United States but this includes \$39 billion in incentives for employers to increase semiconductor production and funds for research and development. This presents an opportunity for institutions of higher education and training to provide Workforce training for economically disadvantaged individuals residing in communities that are underrepresented in the industry an opportunity for state and local to convene local partners. Finally the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provides 369 billion to fight the climate crisis. And there is opportunities for the Workforce system to connect. Even though there is not a specific, specifically written role for the Workforce system in this bill. And the Good Jobs Initiative (GJI) provides good information about defining relationships with employers to provide quality jobs but particularly those in the industries affected by these investments. So if you go to the next slide.

The LEAD Center has a great tool that they are sharing today on this webinar. A fact sheet that indicates how the good jobs will be defined by the Department of Labor and commerce and can be leveraged to intentionally recruit, train, retain and promote individuals with disabilities. This resource also includes ways to get you started in developing these partnerships. This sort of partnership is exactly the work we want to see at the Department of Labor. We want to hear about this in the state plan. I want to see examples when I am reading through them in a few months but I want to pass it back to Laura to introduce some of the awesome state presenters on this call.

>> Laura: Thank you, next slide. Thank you, Dana, for your opening remarks and helping set the context of today's discussion. The resources that Dana mentioned will be included in the back of the resource guide. Dana helped set the tone for today's discussion to understand the benefits of meaningful strategic partnerships. Discuss activities that will ensure that all facets of the workforce system can and is serving diverse underserved populations, and how states can incorporate Good Jobs for people with disabilities

I would like to take a moment to introduce our three presenters who are going to share some promising practices that promote Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility to help put this in motion.

Representing the state of Missouri, we have Megan Wadley, who is the Coordinator of Adult Education & Literacy (AEL) and High School Equivalency (HSE) for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Megan oversees a team responsible for the administration of 29 federally funded Adult Education and Literacy programs for the state and coordination of High School Equivalency testing (HiSet/GED) for Missouri citizens. Adult Education & Literacy provides free virtual and face-to-face classroom instruction to eligible Missouri citizens in Reading, Language, Mathematics, English Language Competency, Workplace Literacy, Digital Literacy, Civics, and Citizenship. Megan is a native of Jefferson City and has worked with the Missouri Public Workforce System for 8 years.

Joining her representing the state of Illinois, we have Dave Friedman, who is the founder and CEO of AutonomyWorks, an innovative social enterprise based outside Chicago. AutonomyWorks employs a team of 80 people with autism. They outsource business operations work from large companies such as Pepsico and Grainger. In addition, Dave serves on the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board where he co-chairs the DEIA Committee and as Vice-chair of the State Rehabilitation Council. Before founding the company in 2012, Dave spent 25 years in a range of marketing and executive roles. And joining Megan and Dave as today's moderator, I would like to introduce my colleague Yvonne Wright, who is also with National Disability Institute and serves as the co-project director for the LEAD Center. In this capacity, Yvonne manages projects and provides guidance and expertise to multiple teams at National Disability Institute. Yvonne has worked in support of the disability and workforce development community for over 30 years. Highlights of her work include developing the first statewide business outreach services team for Vocational Rehabilitation, serving as Deputy Director for the Missouri Office of Workforce Development, serving as Chair of the Governor's Council on Disability, and participating in the writing of five WIOA Combined State plans and modifications.

Yvonne, I will turn it over to you to get us started.

>> Yvonne: Thank you, Laura, and welcome everyone what a great opportunity to share on this new guidance that we have. Go ahead and move to the next slide. Today, we want to be able to make sure we give you some strategies, to plan from the DEIA perspective. So, honestly, a lot of these are not heavy. This is just taking the time to invest and make these meaningful strategic partnerships that Dana so eloquently talked about a bit ago. Making those partnerships with vocational rehabilitation is great and it has probably been for people who have done a lot in their state and local planning. But we really encourage you to go beyond that relationship building into other DEIA based type thought agencies. Those who already incorporate DEIA strategies across the agency. There may be another state agency you can involve in your state planning that has developed a really good strategy. That may be great to incorporate into your state or local planning. And also, there is an abundance of agencies and opportunities to reach out. As I said, other agencies that service individuals with disabilities and they



can include community rehabilitation providers, Center for Independent living and we talked about the Gov.'s counsel on disabilities. And there are other disability groups and associations you can reach out to. If you do not know how to find them I bet that your partners will know. And a good starting place for that would be vocational rehabilitation. I think it is also an opportunity as you are writing your state plan to outline specific DEIA strategies into the WIOA and local plan. You know, I think it is about being purposeful as you align and include partners. I think knowing I have been involved in the state planning process for many years but particularly on the Workforce development end. I think there's a mistake mentality that at the state and local level and Workforce development, we have to come up with all the answers. And it is not really about that. It is putting the strategies in place such as partnerships to be inclusive will help but it does not have to follow all the answers. And all the strategies do not fall within the Workforce development. It is a partner driven initiative.

And I have to echo Dana's point about the fact that the plan is the plan. The plan is a document that outlines the strategy but it is the work that goes on and transcends that plan. And how the strategies are operationalized throughout the year and the years that the plan is in effect. It is an opportunity to look not only now but looking ahead. You can also develop committees through boards that focus on DEIA practices. And I know there are still across the nation, great things that go on. There are disability navigators and disability resource personnel that are out there that can be utilized for developing and being purposeful about spending time working on how those DEIA efforts can be forwarded and finally looking for ways to collaborate. That sounds reasonable but it needs to be meaningful, deliberate, and beneficial to partners. Plus, those who you serve.

If you have that opportunity, it allows you to understand your resources better, understand the services that each of you provide and then come together to identify those commonalities. So, let's take a chance to hear from some states that have done outstanding work in this area. And we can move to the next slide.

Two states we will profile today will really talk about what I just talked about a little bit which is how to develop strong partnerships. How they focused on DEIA in the inclusion of people with disabilities and others that are underserved in a coordinated Workforce system. So, moving to the next slide it is my pleasure – and before I say that. Let me say these two states will talk to us about the development of the strategic partnerships they have done. And the effort they put forward. How these partnerships have advanced DEIA efforts and some lessons learned and opportunities to move forward they would like to share with us.

Moving forward to the next slide, it is my pleasure to introduce who used to be very recently my partner in the WIOA planning for Missouri. I know you have been introduced, Megan. Can you share about Missouri strategic partnership approach to their combined state plan?

>> Megan: Thank you, Yvonne it is a pleasure to be here today. As mentioned my name is Megan Wadley my pronouns are she/her I am a white woman with long brown hair wearing a gray jacket and black shirt. I worked with the Workforce of Missouri for eight years as Coordinator of Adult Education & Literacy (AEL) and High School

Equivalency (HSE) for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). In the Missouri formative elementary and secondary education. And just as a frame of reference our AEL or WIOA, we serve 11,000 students a year. About half of those are high school equivalency students and the other half are English language learners and we have 29 programs in Missouri 175 class sites. And for those of you who are not familiar with Missouri we have two major metro areas on the east and west and several large population pockets throughout and a lot of rural areas but with a lot of different and diverse populations we need to serve in Missouri. Piggybacking on what both Dana and Yvonne said it is true that your DEIA planning committee exists to address the requirements of the WIOA state plan. But an inevitable byproduct of completing this task is that you will build relationships. And those relationships are the keys to regions and the populations that you service. Before we get into that there are important foundation I think everyone should keep in mind. Number one, leadership is important. But it is important to have experience and institutional knowledge on that team. It will save you a lot of time in the long run. And those people should be familiar with the spirit of WIOA. What WIOA was intended to do is partnership.

And I would recommend considering succession planning. So, you know someone is close to retiring or moving on with their career it is good to include someone else from that agency to maintain that institutional knowledge. I think that is really important. And no matter what Dana mentioned start with good data. In Missouri we are super lucky. We have an economic research and economic center. And they compile extensive labor market information that we include in our plan. And find someone who could tell you what that means. That is important for someone who can interpret that data to your entire team really identify for you to see populations that are being underserved in regions of your state.

So, keeping those basics in mind, I look at WIOA as a big puzzle for the finished product should result in seamless service delivery for all people with barriers to employment. And the key to making sure everyone is included in the services is developing key work and strategic partnerships. That word strategic is a part of that is what I keep saying has an impact about what will happen at state and local level to ensure all the resources you already have are being used efficiently and equitably. What we have discovered is the state that can be more than a task to be complete but it can be a primary tool in making sure you are achieving your diversity and equity goals. Just a little about Missouri is the state title one and title three are housed with higher education and Workforce development. And that the Department of Labor and title II, which is AEL and title four which is vocational rehabilitation those two agencies are under the Department of Education elementary and secondary. I am in the same department as Title Four. And even though we are in the same department these two titles were not housed in the same building, not that it should matter. But historically there's been a separation and probably a duplication of some services for these two titles under the same department. For example, AEL has many students who come through our doors with undiagnosed learning disabilities. And we know more personalized accommodations greatly improve their learning experience. Plus, we were not utilizing the tools of vocational rehabilitation to address those needs. We as AEL

were not able to determine disabilities so we could make referrals to other agencies and reassess. And we needed a catalyst to motivate us to integrate services, integrate services into what we were already providing to make what we were doing adequate. So, I talked about the four main titles but I wanted to mention them with other partners in Missouri. We did a combined state plan with other partners including the Department of Social Services and the Department of corrections. Rehabilitative services for the blind and the Department of Labor and industrial relations, plus other partners that were included put together a team of those agencies to develop the state plan in the 2020 state plan which is the one we had before the one we are submitting in March. We branded ourselves the Missouri public works system and we had a logo. We represented each other on our partner website. And we at one point attempted a partnership wide online listing of our services but we were doing lots of little things that looked like they were coming together to complete partnership. We created these partner staff that focused on state priorities but we did not have a cohesive plan for any of it. Partnership in the 2020 state plan mostly consisted of referrals. Which is not strategic, it is hardly a partnership definitely not strategic. So, even though the plan modifications we did in 2022 to 2020 plan we really had not figured out the secret sauce for writing a cohesive strategic state plan. It was not strategic it was a bunch of jigsaw puzzle pieces and they were still in the box. We had not even opened the box up and the result was we were not utilizing our best resources, which allow us to be more inclusive.

In past years, each of the partners would write a section of the plan to answer one of the questions. And we would meet together and discuss the appropriate order to compile those sections that we got federal technical assistance and that is what led us to look at our state plan. They told us it was hard to follow and it was not clear how our system was addressing strategies. And to be honest, it was almost a mirror of the system itself. There were a lot of duplications but not a lot of connections. So, we had this brand, the Missouri public Workforce system but we were not using that specific plan in 2020. The partner sections did not come together you could tell they were written separately and not planned together and it felt disjointed. Which, again, is perhaps an indicator of the system itself. So, we started over after this technical assistance to address the 2024 plan and started again with good data and good leadership, which you always must do. And we determined the strengths and weaknesses we already identified were pretty accurate and that the goals and strategies that we had determined would direct the strengths and weaknesses were also on target. The question was how do we as a system grade those strings we already have? That is the only way we can achieve our goals. So, we reframed the whole plan but we started using the Missouri public Workforce system is an umbrella almost like its own department. And, for example, we would say instead of adult education and literacy we will have 29 service providers but what we said is a Missouri public Workforce system will serve adults with disabilities who need assistance with English proficiency through the 29 ACL service providers. See the distinction? It was not AEL just or we were entitled of taking care of AEL of its entire Missouri public Workforce system addressing the needs of the state. So as Yvonne mentioned, it is not rocket science it was a change



in perspective. A change in language. And what we discovered is our individual programs were too narrow and reframing the plan helped broaden our view. And suddenly the whole temperature of the plan change but that was a catalyst we were looking for. The system is responsible for all services in the system. It is not just I take care of me and you take care of you. So, using the same vocabulary to decide what we do and providing a deeper understanding of each other's vocabulary. And some things were lost in translation.

So now, the plan, instead of being a bunch of pieces in a box represents the system as a whole. We found our brand; we found the name of our system and we found the data to support our strengths and weaknesses. That was the border of the jigsaw puzzle, we completed all of that. That we put the pieces in the state plan that was like flipping over the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. Now we can fill in the middle part, right? And once you see where things are aligned and where they fit together you can see where the system has gaps in serving populations and you could focus on actually being strategic in your partnership. So, the end of this whole process is the most valuable opportunity. Again, not just a task the writing of the state plan is a tool. We identified the spokes of the current system and the previous plan before we had done that only focused on individual parts. And now that each partner is aware of past serving Missouri's diverse population we can focus our strategies on including everyone with barriers to employment.

So that is an example of adult education program serving adults with disabilities. For us it was a simple as learning about employers who have proven commitment to including people with disabilities from agencies like Workforce development and vocational rehabilitation. All the way through more complex problems or we are co-enrolling our students in partner programs for a better educational access. And overall, for our programs this led to a much more robust policy and guidance on serving adult students with disabilities that we did not have before. By the way shout out to Dave in Illinois. We used your adult education document as a resource when we wrote ours it is great. Awareness of the other initiatives that are happening in your state may come from the teambuilding as you look at yourself as a system. And they give you the opportunity to pass down initiatives that promote inclusion to the local channels. No matter how your team addresses the WIOA state plan the conversations that you have when getting together into knowledge about each other's work. However, approaching the plan as an entire system almost like his own department is the best way to ensure you are reaching all the populations that need our services. You cannot put a puzzle together until you get a good grasp on what the finished product should be and then turn over all the pieces. With that I will hand it over to you, Yvonne.

>> Yvonne: Megan, thank you, and I like the puzzle analogy. That was a nice way to visualize how strategic partnerships can work and mesh together so thank you very much. Moving to the next slide, let's hear from Dave in Illinois. Dave, I know you will talk to us about Illinois' adoption of more inclusive processes. So, I will go ahead and turn it over to you.

>> Dave Friedman: Thank you my name is Dave Friedman I am an older white male with gray hair wearing a gray shirt and a black vest. In Illinois we have been really lucky in the Workforce system over the last five years or so because we have a governor JD Pritzker, who was committed to both the Workforce system overall but also diversity, equity, inclusion, and access or DEIA and immediately after he started as governor in 2019 he put out an executive order asking all the state agencies across the state to come up with a report about what they would do to try to better align Workforce – the Workforce system and Workforce activity with two goals. One was to try and identify current and potential industries we could grow and invest in the state of Illinois. But also, to describe how they will better align their services and their work in order to serve particularly disenfranchised communities but disenfranchised communities across the state. As you might imagine, this led to a pretty significant flurry of activity around the state as one of the WIOA agencies, the Board of education, Board of Higher Education, and career and technical programs all went out and tried to create plans and goals and ideas of how they can address the mandate from the governor. What ultimately ended up coming out with all the inputs were two major undertakings that tried to tackle this question. And to look at how we can develop partnerships for driving success in the Workforce system. The first was the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board. Which also referred to as IWIB to look at all of the WIOA titles to see how we can redirect our efforts and spending to better improve DEIA and the second was the governor's commission on Workforce, Equity and Access. But I will talk about each of these two efforts because they are pretty good examples of how you can get strategic partnerships started.

So, the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board Equity Task Force report from 2020 to 2022 created a series of different workgroups and came up with a set of recommendations for driving equity mostly through the WIOA Workforce system. This task force consisted of representatives from all different groups. The state Workforce board, the American job center, providers about the higher education system, state agencies. Business and industry, community based organizations that serve women and people of color, people with disabilities, formerly incarcerated people, non-English speakers and so on. I will call out a couple of those that I think were particularly important to have in the conversation.

Illinois is a very diverse state with one of the biggest cities in the country in Chicago to very rural areas in the center of the state. And it is important not just for the state team working on this but representatives from the regional boards since they are much closer to the particular situations and issues in their communities. And we were incorporating all of those voices. Attempting to flood the conversation with what happens in northeastern Illinois around Chicago. It is really important to business and industry to make sure we were creating solutions that businesses would care about and that have an interest in using and partnering with us in order to actually ultimately end up hiring people. In the third is community-based organizations. We have a good philanthropic organization around the state. We are able to partner with and by bringing them into this conversation are able to look for opportunities where we can support them in the work they are doing on the ground.

I think there's a temptation certainly in Illinois but in the past it has been a state government driven process. And this brought an external customers and partners in the process. Ultimately, with all those partners you end up with a – 40 official members of this task force. And many more that help individual parts of it. These work on three major things. And Megan mentioned this and I agree 100 percent analyzing the data. Not at a broad level for getting into the detailed disaggregated data seek and determine whether disparities exist across and the access to service and the outcomes across different communities across the state. The second thing was looking at policies. Particularly within WIOA that can be changed and looking at best practices around service delivery. Again, particularly the local Workforce parts of the American Job Centers This group ultimately came up with the task force, a temporary thing for three years produced a report. Specific action steps for the Illinois Workforce innovation board and state agencies to start the drive of equity into the system. The second big undertaking with the Gov.'s commission on Workforce, equity, and access. And as I mentioned this look at the broader Workforce system outside of just WIOA and looking at ways they can change the system. To streamline the initiative and agencies. For a new government structure on how to integrate Workforce across the state. Here again we have participants from a wide range of different areas. Business and industry including leaders from some of the big companies in Illinois. Like Discover financial, Boeing, Hilton. We have organized labor involved as well. The overall group is cochaired by a senator from Illinois general assembly and the deputy governor. And the president of women employed was also there, one of the co-chairs as well as the local Workforce board executive director and executive director of the Chicago workers collaborative. It is a similar to what I was saying before. We have business, we have policy, we have Workforce, local boards but we had organized labor with community organizations. That was really important again for getting perspectives and ideas together. The commission published the report in the spring of 2023 to get back to one thing. As I mentioned the earlier group was 40 people. This group here was over 50 people working on it. And have all those voices present. It did complicate some of the process but we created workgroups. And the workgroups would be smaller anywhere between ten and 15 people. They would work on particular topics whether data or policy or best practices that they would report to the overall group and ultimately agree on the final product out of that.

There are a couple of major recommendation out of the overall thing that include the creation of a standing, diversity equity inclusion and access committee under the Illinois Workforce innovation board. We are still standing up the committee that is a committee I am co-sharing. But we got in fast enough we were able to influence and shape a lot of thinking in the state plan we are putting together now from an equity lens. To how we design programs, how we set strategies and how we set policy and I think you will see a lot of that reflected in our state plan as it comes up. Now we have to move forward to look at how we take the recommendations. The two task forces. The Governor's task force collectively had 80 recommendations but this committee is now working on sorting out so we can set priorities and allocate accountabilities for those two different

people around the state. So, what worked well for us is involvement of so many different people. In the thinking because all of the perspectives. The plan took longer to create, for sure. And people had so much to learn from the other people in groups. But what ended up happening came to an end and we were able to make changes. To the state plan, we've been able to make policy changes, we were able, through a dedicated committee, we did all that pre-work to get here. Sometimes you go slow to go fast. And I think that is the situation here. It took us a while to get everyone aligned but now there's a great deal of support for DEIA in the Workforce system but it is much easier for us to have the conversations that are necessary to get things accomplished. With that I will kick it back to Yvonne.

>> Yvonne: Thank you so much go ahead and advance to the next slide. I don't know if there is a lot that I could add to the wonderful things that our speakers shared. But I think that in summation what we are hearing is when strategic partnerships are developed they can positively impact DEIA efforts. When people sit at the table working on a common effort there's an opportunity to learn more about what each other is doing and understand those resources. Look for those opportunities that overlap and can enhance the partner effort between the resources and really try to facilitate those resources and funding between partners. I think ultimately what it does is it broadens and allows for a shared understanding of what all the community needs are tied up with a pin in the whole impetus for utilizing strategic partnerships. And remember, all of us want to see everyone that wants to have a good job be able to work competitively. For sustainable wages that are out there in the community. And the strategic partnerships allow us to support this effort spent. Again thank you to our state representatives for providing the information they did.

And I think we will go to the next slide. And we do have questions we will share with Megan and Dave and ask for your input on. And I will start with this question because it is a good question. Both of you mentioned this when talking about the inclusion of those partners that transcend the core partners but not those who have come from other community partners. The question for you is how do you attract community partners to say what is in it for them. And I will start with you, Dave and get your input on that.

>> Dave: That is a great question. It is important to get them involved. The partners can be cynical in working with the state. Here we had a couple of advantages, the new governor writing in a number of people from around the state that had been already part of this community organizations. The Illinois Workforce innovation board also has one third of the members come from community organizations. They have been engaging in the conversation for a long time. And some of them are vendors, if you will, to the state. The vocational rehabilitation group works with a lot of community resource providers to help train people and place them in jobs and have a vested interest in shaping what happens. And the other thing, there is a lot of money to be honest with you. And one of the big things that came out of it relates to the smaller community partners. Is the process we are going to allocate funding for small organizations to access that. And to rethink our notices of funding opportunities that we call NOFO for those who have less infrastructure and are maybe newer in their efforts.

>> Yvonne: Thank you, Dave, Megan?

>> Megan: I would add do not count out your local service provider partnerships. Sometimes the partnerships from the community can come from the front line up. Instead of from the state level down. For instance, we have a refugee assistance organization in a rural area in Missouri that had a group of refugees that came from Afghanistan that needed some English language acquisition and had some computational skills. Building that partnership at the ground level you can bring that back up to the state level by making sure your local providers know what is going on. With the WIOA and state plan but when we meet with our local service providers always talk about WIOA, the partners, the job centers, rehab. They can come the reverse way too. And they may not exist at the state level.

>> Laura: This is Laura this is a great question. I really appreciate you both talked about the thoughtfulness, identifying the gaps and identifying the pieces. This is for both of you. How do you know if the strategies you outlined in your state plans are reaching the outcomes you have identified? How do you know you reached success? Who would like to go first?

>> Megan: I will go first it is not rocket science. We will go back to the data. It is like Dave said, it is not just how many people with disabilities in the state of Missouri are unemployed or something that general. You have got to go deeper than that in your data. Where do they live? What other criteria do they have? How much education do they have? What kind of access to accommodations do they have? Then you revisit that data. And if it is worse we are not making wage data, the quarterly wage data is not going up as the population is not working and you have to go back. It always begins with data, for me anyway.

>> Laura: Thank you, Megan. Dave?

>> Dave: That is 100 percent right. WIOA has metrics but that is at a high level put in that set of metrics that would need to be reported back to the government. Another set of metrics that are more precise. Everything from geographic areas to background if you want to make sense if you are making process. Otherwise, it gets lost in the noisy overall state economy. And you have to look at it more granularly.

>> Laura: I appreciate that. Yvonne I will turn it back to you.

>> Yvonne: Thank you, we will try one more quick question. We have great questions and we appreciate everybody's submitting questions. The question that was asked a couple of times. This is a very good question, I think. Were people in underserved communities involved in your planning process? If so, how? And it was also asked this way. How would you ensure that underserved communities were represented in your planning process? Dave I will start with you again.

>> Dave: Absolutely, 100 percent a really important part of this process. Again, I'm not sure we 100 percent got that right. I do think having community representatives, which are smaller and therefore very close to the community can be valuable. Many of the people in those organizations come out of disenfranchised barriers. And that is some of their motivation for that. From their personal experience. But they are much closer to being able to access the perspective. That is in terms of how the committee works. We



have also done different surveys. For example, customer satisfaction surveys both through vocational rehabilitation and other things but to get direct feedback from the community.

>> Thank you, Dave. And Megan?

>> Megan: That is a really good question and something we can probably do better. I know we can do that better here in Missouri. I think there would be value in some kind of advisory group when it came to the actual state plan and developing strategies that are consistent of participants and we did not do that. I would say the same thing I said before. If you do not have that and you don't have an opportunity for an advisory group of participants. Then lean on your locals again. When we monitor we interview students, our teachers our educators in the AEL world have a pulse on their students because they see them every day. I think that would be a great place to start. If you do not have a high-level advisory group start with your locals. And have a conversation. It is important for people writing the state plan, you need folks at the table in touch with your clientele.

>> Yvonne: Thank you both for sharing today it has been invaluable information and we appreciate it. And with that, I will send it over to Laura to finish us out.

>> Laura: Thank you for that, Yvonne. If we can go to the next slide. The next two slides have first federal resources that Dana had talked about and then the state resources that Dave mentioned. If we can go to the next slide, please. Be sure to check out the LEAD Center's website where you can find this event's recording and transcript within ten business days plus a very robust library of resources. We also encourage you to sign up for our newsletter as it will give you information about future and past events, and promising practices from the field. On the next slide you will see how you can follow the LEAD Center on social media.

We want to thank you for joining the LEAD Center webinar today. That means you are interested in how you can help operationalize access and equity into your WIOA state plans. A special thank you to Dana for starting us off and helping set the stage and show you what the Department of Labor is doing. And for Megan and Dave showing what two states within this great country are doing. To not only talk the talk but also walk the walk. Thank you Yvonne for moderating. Thank you, everybody. We look forward to seeing you again at future webinars. Enjoy your afternoon, and happy holidays to everybody.