

From Collaboration to Action, State Initiatives Advancing Disability Employment

Webinar Transcript

>> Welcome, everyone, and thank you for joining us for our webinar today, "From Collaboration to Action, State Initiatives Advancing Disability Employment." On behalf of the LEAD Center, I'm excited to explore with you today how states are advancing disability employment through coordinated strategies and innovative partnerships. The LEAD Center is led by National Disability Institute and funded by the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy. Next slide. My name is Yvonne Wright and I'll be your facilitator today. I am the co-project director for the LEAD Center, and I'm really looking forward to guiding today's discussion. Next slide. I want to go through a few housekeeping items that will help you get the most out of today's session. You can turn on captioning through the "Show Captions" option in Zoom or you can open the captioning link posted in the chat. The browser version lets you adjust text size, color, and background to match your own preferences. Today's session is being recorded. The recording and materials will be available on the LEAD Center website under "Recent and Upcoming Events" within 10 business days. Next slide. We would love for you to submit questions. We'd love to hear what your questions are throughout today's presentation. If you have a question about the content or the speakers, please use the Q&A panel button in Zoom and we'll address as many of those questions as possible toward the end of this webinar. However, if you need technical support, please go ahead and type your question or issue into the chat box so that our team can assist you. Next slide. I would like to thank the Office of Disability Employment Policy, also known as ODEP, for their leadership and support in putting together today's webinar. Allow me to share just a brief overview of ODEP and the work that they do. ODEP is an agency within the Department of Labor and the only nonregulatory federal agency of its kind. ODEP works with employers and government partners to strengthen workplace access and create meaningful opportunities for people with disabilities. Next slide. ODEP's mission is focused on shaping policies and practices that expand and enhance access to employment and training for Americans with disabilities while also aligning opportunities with what employers need. ODEP's mission helps ensure that people with disabilities can pursue meaningful career pathways and that businesses have access to a highly skilled talent pool. So, to set the stage at the next slide -- to set the stage for today's webinar and provide some opening remarks, I am pleased to introduce

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Ben Cheriyan. Ben is a policy advisor for ODEP where he serves on the workforce systems policy team. Ben works closely with the ODEP-funded LEAD Center in the implementation of WIOA to increase employment outcomes of Americans with disabilities. Ben provides expertise on how the workforce development system can implement artificial intelligence, financial education, and how to align services to meet the provisions of WIOA Section 188. Ben also works closely with federal partners including DOL's Employment and Training Administration, the US Department of Education, and the Social Security Administration to enhance workforce development and leverage federal resources to develop workforce policies and practices. Ben is a graduate of the College of Staten Island where he earned his masters of social work. Ben, thank you so much for starting us off today and I'll turn it over to you.

>> Thank you, Yvonne. Hi, everybody. Again, I'd like to welcome you all to today's webinar, "From Collaboration to Action, State Initiatives Advancing Disability Employment." And on behalf of the Office of Disability Employment Policy or ODEP, I welcome you to today's discussion as we examine how state workforce development agencies, labor, education, human services, and community agencies can coordinate with each other to enhance employment opportunities for Americans with disabilities. Today's discussion will examine how states are collaborating and coordinating with each other to advance service delivery, accessibility, and employment success for individuals with disabilities. But when states collaborate -- when state agencies collaborating with each other, it creates a no wrong door approach, which means job seekers can receive services without having to navigate the multiple complicated systems. This aligns with the goals of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of delivering services to meet the needs of individuals facing barriers to employment. It also allows an alliance with America's talent strategy report administration, a joint report developed by the Department of Labor, Commerce, and Education which direct agencies to coordinate and streamline services to deliver one unified workforce services emphasizing the importance of coordination to deliver a skilled workforce for the future. So, today's webinar will build on that and really emphasize that, and we will hear from states of Michigan, Missouri, and Utah, who have successfully fostered partnership. They will be sharing how they have collaborated across agency collaboration, aligned services, measurable outcomes, and lessons learned for you all within your own state. I encourage you as we go through the webinars to please be active in the Q&A, provide any answer and ask any questions, but also share innovative work that you're doing within your state to build the conversation that we're having today. The work you're doing only adds to the opportunity to learn from each other and how we can support one another as we really focus on collaboration and coordination. I want to conclude my remarks by thanking Michigan, Missouri, and Utah for being part of today's webinar on behalf of ODEP and for sharing what you're doing with your state and the work being done and how other states can replicate really touching on the main theme and that is partnership collaboration. And

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now without further ado, I'll turn it back to Yvonne to guide us through the exciting concepts today. Thank you.

>> Ben, thank you so much for your remarks. And I have to echo something that you mentioned along with the questions that you might want to ask. Do feel free to share best practices. That's what these webinars are all about is showcasing some states we know are doing great work, but also hearing from you. So, I really appreciate those remarks, Ben. So, I get the pleasure of just letting you know about the great lineup of presenters that we have today. We will hear from speakers who bring their own unique expertise and experience. What each speaker has in common is a shared commitment to making sure that job seekers with disabilities and other barriers to employment can access coordinated high-quality services that can lead to meaningful employment outcomes. So, our speakers today as well as Ben is Dallas Oberlee, and Dallas is with Social Policy Research Associates and serves as a lead subject matter expert. Jason Bennington with the state of Utah where he is the employment support services specialist. Stephanie Beckhorn who's the director of the Office of Employment and Training with the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity. And Jeff la Montia who works for the Missouri Department of Social Services and is the job development unit coordinator for rehabilitative services for the blind. Next slide. So, today, we're going to take a closer look at how states are building and sustaining cross-agency partnerships that support better outcomes for job seekers with disabilities. You're going to hear real examples of how partners are working together to align services across systems, making it easier for individuals to navigate and access the support they need. We'll also explore how states are tracking progress and measuring outcomes so that these efforts are not just well-intentioned, but truly effective. And finally, we'll highlight lessons learned from these initiatives that you can take back and apply in your own state or organization. So, our goal is to give you practical insights that you can use in your work whether you're building partnerships, coordinating services, or looking for ways to strengthen your overall approach. Next slide. And now, let's get into this webinar today. I am very excited to introduce our first speaker, Dallas Oberlee, the senior associate and LEAD Center subject matter expert with Social Policy Research Associates. Dallas is going to set the stage for our speakers by talking about why collaboration and partnerships are key to providing high-quality employment services to people with disabilities. She will also be leading the discussion with the rest of our speakers today. So, welcome, Dallas, and we're really looking forward to your insights and facilitation of the discussion.

>> Thanks, Yvonne. Good afternoon, everybody. As Yvonne said, my name is Dallas Oberlee and I am a subject matter expert with the LEAD Center and I have spent the past 19 years working within the public workforce system and American Job Centers with a strong focus on building effective partnerships ranging from state agencies to community-based organizations. And today, I'll be kicking off our discussion by exploring why collaboration is

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so essential to our work. We'll look at the different ways organizations approach collaboration and how these approaches can strengthen both service delivery and outcomes for the people that we serve. Next slide. So, why collaborate? One of the major benefits of collaboration is that it makes it much easier for job seekers to access the training and employment opportunities they need. Instead of having to navigate multiple government agencies or figure out which door to walk through first, collaboration streamlines that entire experience. And this is what we mean when we talk about the no wrong door approach, like Ben had mentioned earlier. No matter where a job seeker enters the system, they can be connected to the right services. Partners share information, coordinate referrals, and ensure that individuals don't get bounced around or lost in the process. Collaboration also allows us to leverage our funding more effectively. When programs work together, we can combine resources, reduce duplication, and deliver services in a way that's both more efficient and more impactful for our participants. And finally, collaboration strengthens coordination across the community. By understanding what each organization brings to the table, we can align our efforts, fill gaps, and create a more comprehensive and supportive network for the people we serve. Next slide. So, the overall purpose of WIOA, the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, is to strengthen and improve our nation's public workforce system and help get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, into high-quality jobs and careers and help employers hire and retain skilled workers. This requires coordination. Coordination involves aligning services between required partners, which are those that are mandated to provide access to services through the American Job Center network, and those non-required or optional partners, which are organizations that contribute to regional, sectoral, or specialized strategy, and this creates a streamlined job-driven system. This coordination is formalized by memorandum of understandings or MOUs and infrastructure agreements or IFAs, and that assists with the shared cross-program planning. Next slide. As we think about collaboration across workforce and community systems, it's important to recognize that there's no single way to do it. In practice, organizations collaborate in several different ways, and each approach plays a unique role in strengthening services and outcomes. Today, we'll be walking through these four common approaches. Next slide. One approach to collaboration happens at the state and local policy level. States can play a major role by enacting legislation, policies, or guidance that intentionally promote coordination across systems. When states set that expectation from the top, it creates a stronger foundation for collaboration at every level. One example of this is the employment first policies. Employment first policies are designed to strengthen coordination and planning among community rehabilitation agencies. That core idea is that competitive integrative employment should be the first and preferred option for people with disabilities. To achieve that, agencies have to work together, aligning services, sharing information, and building consistent expectations across the system. Next slide. Another key approach to collaboration is the use of formal partnerships between public agencies and often

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nonprofit organizations as well. These partnerships are typically formalized through written agreements that spell out the shared responsibilities of each partner. They align how agencies will work together, what support they'll need to provide one another, and how services will be coordinated for job seekers with disabilities. These agreements can also codify practical arrangements that make collaboration easier, such as co-locating programs or services so job seekers can access multiple supports in one place. When these elements are formalized, it helps ensure that collaboration isn't just based on individual relationships or goodwill, but is built into the structure of how organizations operate together. Strong partnerships don't just happen, as we all know. They depend on having very clear expectations about roles and responsibilities. It's also important to establish meaningful performance goals so all partners understand what success looks like. And finally, there needs to be mechanisms in place to address performance challenges when they arise. This helps partners stay aligned, troubleshoot barriers, and maintain trust, all of which are essential for delivering consistent and high-quality services.

Next slide. Another approach to collaboration involves aligning financial resources across programs. Often, serving job seekers with disabilities requires multiple partners and multiple funding streams to work together. Blending, braiding, and sequencing are three strategies that help make that possible. Blending refers to combining dollars from different funding streams into one single pool of money to support a set of activities. When funds are blended, partners contribute resources upfront and agree on how the shared pool will be used. It allows for more flexibility and helps reduce administrative barrier for both staff and participants. So, an example would be if a vocational rehabilitation agency is working with a community-based organization and they combine their funds into one training fund to serve people with disabilities. And this one isn't as common to see as some of the others. Braiding is a little different. Instead of creating one combined pot of money, programs use multiple funding sources at the same time, but keep them tracked separately. Braiding allows each partner to contribute what they can and when they can while still coordinating services for the same individual. It is widely used in the public workforce system to ensure individuals with disabilities can access a broader range of support. An example of this would be at the same time, the American Job Center is paying for an individual to attend a training and vocational rehabilitation is paying for a support service like transportation or clothing. The third one here is sequencing, which involves using different funding sources in a planned order over time. For example, one program might fund an initial activity such as training or assessment. And once that part is complete, another funding source steps in to pay for the next phase of services. Sequencing ensures continuity for participants without duplication or gaps in support. So, an example would be an adult education site provides the high school equivalency testing. And then when that's done, WIOA then pays for CNA training or certified nursing assistant training. And then when that's complete, vocational rehabilitation provides job coaching. Not all at the same time, but one after the other. Together, blending, braiding, and

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sequencing helps partners align resources in ways that maximize impact, reduce duplication, and create a more seamless experience for job seekers. Next slide. The final approach to collaboration we'll look at is system integration. When systems are integrated, the workforce network operates in a unified way, which makes it much easier for participants to navigate services. Instead of feeling like they're being handed off from program to program, they experience coordinated, high-quality, and efficient support. There are a few key elements that make system integration effective. First, shared eligibility standards across programs help reduce confusion for both staff and participants. When agencies align their criteria, it becomes much easier to determine who qualifies for what, and individuals don't have to repeat the same information multiple times. Second, streamlined intake services are essential. A unified or coordinated intake can significantly reduce duplication, shorten wait times, and create a smoother entry point into the system. The third one is a clear referral and co-enrollment pathway, ensuring that participants are moving seamlessly between services. When partners establish those pathways upfront, individuals don't get lost between programs or left to figure out things on their own. And the fourth one is a frontline navigation tool. Whether that's shared case management systems, decision support tools, or integrated data platforms, it helps staff quickly identify which programs and supports are the best fit for each person. These tools make the system easier to navigate not just for participants, but for your staff as well. Together, these elements make integrated systems one of the most effective ways to deliver coordinated person-centered services across the workforce ecosystem. Next slide. And now, I'm going to turn it over to Jason Bennington, the employment support services specialist at the Utah Department of Workforce Services Rehabilitation Division. Jason is a husband of 20 years, father of four wonderful children, the youngest having significant disabilities. He has been in vocational rehabilitation for 15 years and has been working in social services for over 20 years. Jason has a master's degree and certifications in rehabilitation counseling and has been the employment support services specialist for 6 and 1/2 years. Jason.

>> Thanks, Dallas. I appreciate that. We can go to the next slide already. That might be the best introduction I've ever received. I love it. Let's go to the next one as well. Thank you. So, this is one of those real world things where collaboration kind of hits the road, right? So, I'm going to be talking a little bit about a specific service that's provided here in Utah. Everybody, I'm sure, is familiar with it hopefully, but I'm going to talk a little bit about financial literacy. We all know that financial literacy is, you know, written into laws and regulations and it's something that we should be providing to clients of voc rehab. Up until 2021, it was a general service, I guess you could say, part of life skills or part of job readiness possibly that really didn't have a lot of training behind it, didn't have a lot of support behind it I guess as an agency. So, back in 2021, we decided that we need to take a little bit more of a proactive stance on it and make sure that clients who were in need of financial literacy were receiving it from, you know, an appropriate training individual or

person, right? So, because we had it as part of job readiness or life skills, which here in Utah is still confusing at times and they still get used interchangeably, we thought it would be pretty easy. Like, "We'll just take this service that's already kind of out there and we're just going to, you know, put a little bit of emphasis on it." So, what I'm going to talk about today is kind of how that looked as we rolled that out. I'll talk about some of the success that we experienced, as well as some of the difficulties. One of the things we looked at first was partnering with our CRPs around the state, those community rehab programs around the state who were already providing supported employment services, were providing job readiness activities and training for clients. And we knew that we were going to use them as the source to provide this financial literacy to our clients. And because of that, we knew that we could kind of jump in and make sure that it was statewide initially. Like, we do a lot of, you know, pilot programs of different things and maybe we use one part of the state to test something out. But by using our CRPs right from the start, we just figured, "You know what? We're going to jump right in. It'll be available across the state. Any CRP that wants to come and do the training or orientation, they can provide it." So, that's kind of what we were hoping for. That's what we were looking at is just doing it statewide right from the start. Next slide, please. So, the first thing that I had to do or I was responsible for was identifying an appropriate curriculum, something that, you know, we could easily access and hopefully wouldn't be something that would cause any type of financial burden. And I partnered with our independent living center coordinator here in the state of Utah, and we identified this curriculum provided through the FDIC called "Money Smart for Adults." Thank you. That's awesome. We identified it. It's an extensive service, like it is very, very large. I think it's meant to be presented as this giant class. However, there was a reduced version of it that was specific to people with disabilities, which really made it attractive. So, we landed on Money Smart for Adults. And then, we had a roll out. We knew that we were going to have to instruct CRPs on what the service was going to be. We also knew that we were going to have to educate staff. So, we started with the CRPs. We were going to use those who are considered employment specialists. That's the title we use in Utah for anybody who's completed their ACRE training. So, those ACRE certified employment specialists were going to be required to attend an orientation that I facilitated or, well, continually facilitate. But the first one we held was back in November of 2021. There was a lot of interest right from the start. We would have between 20 and 30 individuals registered for like the first few months. We got quite a lot of interest I think those first three months especially. And then, we've had this ongoing schedule where I've provided it every other month pretty much ever since then. Now, those numbers do vary. Sometimes, there's months when there's only two or three new employment specialists who want to get through the orientation. And then, we'll still have other months where there's 8 or 9 or 10. So, up until today, there have been a total of 27 of those orientations delivered. Last I checked, it was 116 total certificants or individual employment specialists who've gone through it, but that's across a pretty good number of our CRPs. Thirty-five unique CRPs have had somebody come and do the

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orientation. So, we have a pretty good number of CRPs out there who can provide the service. Another thing, you know, those ACRE certified employment specialists, those certifications go with them. So, if they change CRPs, if they take a position somewhere else, it goes with them and they can still provide that service for their new employer if they need to. Now, voc rehab, we were going to have to educate our staff on financial literacy as well. We initially did that in November of 2021 also. That basically rolled out through what we call a Visions training, which is a statewide virtual training. I do several or many of those, and this one was very specific to financial literacy. We educated VR staff on who would be providing the service. We talked extensively about what the service entailed, what would they be taught in financial literacy, how would we help them with their deficits, and that type of thing. And then, there has been ongoing training. Our different districts can request a training from me at any time. I've done several of those. We have what we call a VR resource manual where any trainings that are done virtually, they're recorded. So, there's videos available, as well as any materials that might have gone along with those trainings, specifically PowerPoint slides or Google Slides, for example. That is available to VR staff at the drop of a hat. So, they can always get in and find out that information. Next slide, please. What the ongoing support for this has looked like, we've continued to collaborate with the CRPs around the state. I'm generally the first point of contact when people have questions about financial literacy, so I'm always available. There are other what I would call subject matter experts out there. Some of our CRPs are very well-versed in financial literacy now, as well as various counselors or supervisors around the state that have provided the service numerous times to clients and so they're very well versed in what the payment pathway looks like. They're able to provide some of that I guess individual or direct information out in the districts. Technical support, again, that's usually going to be me or somebody on my team from administration that we can provide that to the CRPs. Because I facilitate the training or the orientation, I'm usually that point of contact. We do have a client services manual. You know, that's our VR manual for all policies and procedures, and we have outlined in there what financial literacy is, when it's most appropriate to provide it. It also outlines other services which are not financial literacy which fall more into life skills or job readiness. We do have a tracking form for the CRPs to use where they can outline how many hours they're spending with the client. They can provide a short synopsis of the content of each of those training hours that they're doing, and that's meant to be submitted back to the counselor at least on a monthly basis. Sometimes, they may do it a little bit more frequently as well. Next slide please. In addition to that, there was also a new position introduced that had to do with pre-ETS or pre-employment transition services. We've got it listed there, this self-advocacy and financial literacy instructor. So, our pre-ETS instructors, we have them all over the state now. As of today, I don't know the number, but it's dozens. It started out really small, but it's grown from there. And so, we've got a few of those who fit into this financial literacy instructor position just to help have additional subject matter experts out there that are specific even to working with students, right? That younger

population, which has been really great. We used to offer and it might still be part of it, but we do have classes that the counselors do in schools sort of like job readiness or job preparation classes. And I think this financial literacy instructor has kind of taken on some of that responsibility specifically in relation to financial literacy. You'll notice that it's housed under what we call our work incentive planning. We have a unit that has to do with social security benefits and other government benefits and things like that. Hopefully, everybody's a little bit familiar with it, but that's where they're housed. Next slide, please. And there's our wonderful logo, which has to accompany all of our presentations at all times. So, that's a pretty good synopsis of a lot of the good stuff. And we'll probably just wait for any questions and maybe I can go over some of the difficulties.

>> Yeah. Thank you, Jason. It was really great to hear how you were able to scale that financial literacy model across the state. Before we shift to the next speaker, I'd love to ask you one quick question. What was the biggest barrier you faced in trying to scale this effort? And how did you overcome it?

>> Oh, boy, I like it. So, voc rehab counselor education seems to be one of those things that has been a little bit difficult mostly I would say because of turnover among counselors. It's been out there for, you know, four and a half years now. We're coming up on five years that we've been doing the financial literacy with some emphasis and focus. And as we have counselors that rotate in and out of the agency, we have to provide some of that technical assistance. They're new. They don't really know what's going on with financial literacy. They're a little bit shy about using services that are outside of the normal that they might be using. That was one difficulty we had. Another one, honestly, has been tracking the number of people that have received the service. And that's on us a little bit because the codes that we use in our system to generate the authorizations, we already had a code for life skills and we kind of said, "You know what? We don't want to confuse counselors. Let's just use the same code when we're doing financial literacy." And looking back now, I kind of wish we would have changed that and done its own code so we could much more easily find how many clients have actually accessed financial literacy.

>> Thanks, Jason. That was really helpful. If anybody's thinking of any questions that they want to ask Jason, make sure to add that in the Q&A and we'll get to it in a little bit. Now I'm going to turn it over to Stephanie Beckhorn. For more than two decades, Stephanie has played an important and growing role in Michigan's workforce and economic development. Since 2020, Stephanie has served as the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunities Director of the Office of Employment and Training, providing leadership and guidance for the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, and Workforce Development. Overseeing a staff of more than 800 in an annual budget that exceeds 700 million, Stephanie has developed a well-earned reputation as one of the nation's most innovative and effective workforce development leaders. According to the US

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Department of Labor, Michigan leads all Midwest states and is number three in the nation in providing customized reemployment services. Nationally, Michigan ranks number one in credential attainment for adults, number one in highest earnings for vocational rehabilitation customers, and number one for helping vocational rehabilitation customers secure employment. Stephanie.

>> Thank you, Dallas. I appreciate that introduction, and I'm really happy to be here today. As Dallas mentioned, I represent the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity, specifically the Michigan Office of Employment and Training. We really support three key things, people, businesses, and communities. And we really want to make sure that all three of those entities have the economic means and personal freedoms to reach their full potential. We really want to support our employers in a rapidly changing global economy and ensure that our education and training and our workers have the knowledge and skills and abilities that they need to fill growing and evolving talent pipelines. Today, I really want to focus in at LEO and our structure and supporting individuals with disabilities, how our approach and how we're uniquely structured and positioned to help serve individuals and provide benefits to both Michiganders with disabilities, as well as our state employers and communities. Next slide. And apologies, you can go one more slide for me. That would be great. I really want to talk a little bit and level set and set the stage about Michigan structure and how I believe our structure helps support the deliverables that we achieve and how we support our dual customer here in the state. The Office of Employment and Training, really as the name suggests, we want to and spend our days expanding and supporting employment and training opportunities for all Michiganders including those with disabilities. At the same time, we do serve as our other peer states do a dual customer in supporting businesses and making sure that they have access to the talent to help them grow and thrive. In Michigan and specifically under the Office of Employment and Training, we have all four of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act or WIOA titles under one entity that is employment and training. We also include the employment and training component for the TANF program, for the food assistance or SNAP program, as well as programs for veterans, migrant seasonal farm workers, registered apprenticeships and even our Postsecondary Perkins, so Perkins at our community college. So, a very comprehensive workforce system, and we lean into our structure and our co-location with our key partners. This really drives program integration. The majority of those programs that I listed, they are co-located at our American Job Centers. In Michigan, we refer to them as Michigan Works Agencies or MWAs. And so again, that really has everyone rowing in the same boat sharing a similar customer and sharing and working towards the same outcomes. Over the next few slides, I really want to provide some specific examples and lean into how that structure supports innovation and collaboration. On the slide here, one thing that I'm really proud of that we have been working on is our vocational rehabilitation programs partnering with our local American Job Centers where the American Job Center

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will potentially provide some of the WIOA Title IV vocational rehabilitation services to ensure that we're meeting customer demand, that we're leveraging resources, that we're braiding the funding and really working together in sequencing. So, kind of hitting on those points that Dallas covered earlier. Next slide, please. At the Office of Employment and Training, this is really more of an organizational structure to show we have the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons, Michigan Rehabilitation Services. In Michigan, our state, we have two VR programs. So, the Bureau of Services for Blind Programs and Michigan Rehabilitation Services jointly administer Title IV of WIOA. Also in the Office of Employment and Training is workforce development and our operations team. Next slide. We work very closely and are intentional in our co-location. We want customers to truly have that one-stop system, that one door to the fullest extent possible. That is why Michigan Rehab Services and our Bureau of Services for Blind Persons staff and programming wherever possible is co-located at those AJCs, our Michigan Works Agencies. This supports co-enrollment, it supports joint case management, and it really helps emphasize and drive home the braiding of funding, you know, where the extent is possible. This is really supported from the highest level. Our statewide workforce board has prioritized this level of co-location. Under the prior administration, a lot of our vocational rehabilitation programs and staff were co-located at community-based or local health and human services offices, so local HHS offices. Whenever a lease comes up or whenever there is something at a building that is requiring a change, the first thing we do is say, "In the community, are we able to co-locate our VR services at our American Job Centers?" Next slide. As I mentioned previously -- and I think it helps again drive that coordination -- our AJCs also deliver TANF and SNAP services, and we work together and collaborate. We have monthly meetings between employment and training, so my team, with the state department of health and human services, and that's both the state HHS and the local HHS office and our Michigan Works Agencies. Again, we really want and are striving for that no wrong door individuals come in. So, while we're administering the employment and training component of TANF and SNAP, our HHS office is referring nightly -- that happens electronically -- referring individuals into our AJCs. This is going to help us as we implement H.R. 1, particularly around both the Medicaid and SNAP work requirements. And it becomes important, that co-location with our vocational rehabilitation programs, because we know in some instances, individuals that are subject to Medicaid or SNAP requirements may also be VR program participants. So, again, what can be a challenging situation with being subject to work requirements, by co-located, by working together, we really hope to make it seamless to the individual because as we know, they don't care who is ultimately delivering the program. They just want the outcomes, and that's the same thing we want. Next slide. A specific example where TANF and our vocational rehabilitation program came together was our certified nursing assistant training. Within Michigan, our Michigan Rehab Services operates MCTI or the Michigan Career and Technical Institute. It's located in the southwest part of our state. MCTI is one of eight vocational rehabilitation centers in the nation. This is

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a 24/7 campus that's delivering occupational-based training. About 10 years ago, we launched a certified nursing assistant program. We brought in the local Michigan Works Agency and employers who said that they were struggling with access to CNA workers. This program was developed and launched at a local community in Benton Harbor that's in the very, very southwest corner of Michigan. You're basically in Indiana at that point almost. We took the program, established it, and worked with employers. It was a 10-week program that was then followed up by a two-week prevocational class to make sure individuals were ready for both the training and employment. We started with 10 students per cohort, and those individuals were either SNAP or Medicaid recipients, and the majority were single mothers with dependents living below the poverty level. We have since launched that to another location in Michigan in Kalamazoo, again driven by employer demand and again with a similar target. These are individuals that are on a public assistance, but also qualify for the vocational rehabilitation program. We want to share a little bit. This program has continued going strong. The last two years, to give some program outcomes, 60 students enrolled. So, these are 60 VR students and also public assistance recipients, 100% graduation rate, 97% license rate, and 79% employed in the trade that they trained for. Next slide. Because we also run the registered apprenticeship program, our vocational rehabilitation program -- next slide. I'll wait a second for the slides to catch up. Thank you. That had the data, the stats. So, I appreciate that. Because we also run the registered apprenticeship program, our VR staff meets every month, leadership, with and among our key programs at employment and training including registered apprenticeship. We identified there was an opportunity to work with Torch 180, which is a community-based nonprofit that provides food industry training for adults with disabilities. We came together and launched a registered apprenticeship program to help ensure individuals who go through the program successfully complete national standards and earn a credential and are working and earning those wages while they're learning. This is an extension of that campus, MCTI that I told you about. So, not only are we delivering vocational rehabilitation services at our training center, but going out to the community, meeting individuals where they are at. This competency-based professional cook registered apprenticeship program is the first of its kind in the nation, and individuals are offered a career pathway to support their growth within the industry. Our first cohort graduated last year, and we continue to add additional cohorts. Next slide. Title I includes youth programs. So, we have Title I youth individual program delivers. We also have of course our pre-ETS program under Title IV. Policies align. We want to make sure that partnering with Michigan's vocational rehabilitation services is encouraged, is supported, and that individuals work together. So, our WIOA Title I policy guidance to our AJCs includes information about working with closely our vocational rehabilitation programs within Michigan. So, not only saying it, but putting it into policy and ensuring that is always top of mind for our partners. Next slide. We also work at dual customer employers. We have a talent attraction team that works with existing employers in Michigan, but also employers that we are working to attract to

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Michigan. And so, our VR team is right at the table. They provide assessments, reasonable accommodations. We know a lot of employers who obtain federal contracts or subcontracts are subject to Section 503 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act. We proactively reach out and say, "Let us be support. Let us help you. We have a pipeline of individuals that you can hire." Next slide. We also understand and really lean into the expertise that our vocational rehabilitation teams provide. So, they take their expertise and they deliver equity training, disability awareness and equity training for the rest of the staff within the Office of Employment and Training. We have two levels or two phases of training. One is like a kickoff foundational knowledge, and then the second one really dives in to disability awareness and etiquette. So, again, we have our VR leaders training their peers in the different parts of our offices. Next slide. And we have that same team go out to the AJCs if they're not already physically located there, and we had informal agreements with the Michigan Works Agencies or AJC staff to deliver training during National Disability Awareness Month and local trainings that they really help be intentional and mindful and supporting the workers. These programs are internally -- these programs we develop internally before we roll them out statewide. Next slide. And I think you'll probably get a copy of this, just some contact information, some websites, some social media that's helpful. So, Dallas, thank you very much. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here today.

>> Yeah. Thank you so much, Stephanie. It was really helpful to hear how Michigan has built a structure that encourages collaboration across their partners. But before we transition to the next speaker, I have a question for you also. What has been the biggest challenge in co-locating Michigan rehabilitation services within the Michigan Work Centers, which are the AJCs, and how did you navigate that?

>> Great question. Like I said, we're not 100% there. So, I want to be transparent and recognize that. There's some logistical like bricks and mortar in ensuring that there's space that's close to the community and where we need it to be. But also, I think there's some operational and cultural, you know, considerations. I don't think you can simply just put people in a physical space and say, "There we go." I think we're really intentional about elevating the specialized strengths of both the vocational rehabilitation team, the AJC team, and we're constantly looking into, "How can we share information? How can we do that training, whether it's disability adequate training, sector strategy?" Our AJC team is really strong in sector strategies. They've brought that over. And so, our VR business service team understands sector strategies. Just a lot of joint training aligning workflows where we can. We want to make sure that we always are discussing ways to again make it seamless for the customer. We don't want them to see behind the curtain and see that three different entities touched them. All they should see is just continuity of service. So, again, transparent, it is an ongoing work. It's never done because you have people change, champions change, so constantly elevating, educating, and celebration. Please celebrate

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your successes. We Midwesterners put our nose down, do the work, and never stop and say, "That was awesome. Let's highlight it." Let's, you know, give ourselves a pat on the back and then work to continuously improve.

>> Yeah. Thanks Stephanie. I'm glad we're able to highlight some of those here today for you. And again, if anybody has questions for Stephanie, please add them to the Q&A and we can get to that in just a little bit. Moving on to our final speaker today, if we can move to the next slide, we have Jeff la Montia here. Jeff currently serves as the job development unit coordinator for the Rehabilitation Services for the Blind, RSB, with the Department of Social Services Family Support Division. In this role, Jeff oversees a dynamic team of job development specialists who work across the state of Missouri. Jeff and his team are dual customer oriented, assisting both employers and RSB clients simultaneously in an effort to effectively place qualified and talented candidates who are blind or visually impaired into employment. Jeff began at the state of Missouri in 2019 as a disability claims adjudicator, transitioning to RSB in mid 2021. While at RSB, he has contributed to the agency in a variety of capacities, gaining valuable experience in providing assistance to those who are blind or visually impaired. At the state of Missouri and in employment elsewhere, Jeff has over 15 years of experience partnering and collaborating with employers and community partners across Missouri and northern Arkansas with a goal of achieving successful outcomes. And Jeff will be next, and he may be having some tech issues with his camera, but I'm going to turn it over to Jeff.

>> Hi. Thank you all very much. I really appreciate the walkup introductions this afternoon. These are amazing. And also, the speakers before me, I'm just pumped to talk about workforce, you know, after listening to you all today, too. So, I'm super happy to be here and be a part of this amazing collaboration. Let's move on to our NEXUS slideshow. So, I'm here to talk to you all about NEXUS today. NEXUS is a wonderful collaborative that the state of Missouri has done an amazing job in helping to put together amongst our WIOA partners, Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act -- I know we've talked about that a bit today -- and then also our business partners across the state. Next, please. All right. So, what is NEXUS? We're going to take a definition right out of the dictionary here. It's a relationship or connection between people or things. It's an opportunity to focus on workforce needs of business. A place for collaboration and sharing of ideas, resources, and information. Next, please. So, NEXUS, it formed several years ago across Missouri and expanded very recently to almost every single county. But when we were starting NEXUS or this is kind of before my time, this was to implement the intentions of WIOA. To meet our workforce challenges and needs and the everchanging landscape. Dual customer approach. This has been mentioned a few times in this presentation today, and so we're going to talk about that even further with NEXUS as well. And a connection to an untapped pool of candidates. Next, please. So, interestingly and really awesomely, NEXUS is aligned with the Missouri 24-27 WIOA state plan. This is through Missouri Public Workforce System. So, NEXUS serves

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again that dual customer approach. Sharing of local job opportunities and providing a single point of contact from our providers to those employers. Partner collaboration to expand employment opportunities for people with barriers through development of business partnerships. Understanding each agency's business-focused programs and services. That's really important because we want to understand how each business operates, what their needs are, right? But we also want those businesses to understand how we as the state of Missouri operate. And as we all know that work within the state, each state that we work in, there's so many different moving parts inside of each of your states. So, being able to speak to those businesses truly helps to navigate through what can be a very complex and challenging engagement and interaction there. Next, please. So, NEXUS also aligns with the Missouri Chamber Workforce 2030 plan. This is really important because this is where we're gaining a lot of detail and guidance from the business community. We maximize business engagement and we push this, push this, push this throughout NEXUS. We focus on improving worker skills. That is by understanding what the business needs are and then taking that back to our community providers, our partners, and with inside of our agencies providing VR services to our participants. We prioritize regional sector strategies. Increase career awareness. So, this could be at the pre-ETS level all the way up into VR. Attract and retain talent, hugely important. And improve communication for all stakeholders. That's a big one as well. Next, please. Who's NEXUS? Right. NEXUS is really at its best when we have representation across all agencies and across sectors and into employment, all right? So, many of the folks or departments that you see here are with inside of the state of Missouri. Whether it's Missouri vocation rehabilitation, department of social services and rehabilitation services for the blind, could be our job centers across the state, department of mental health, but as you take a look at this slide in the bottom right-hand corner, we have HR professionals on the employer side. That is exceptionally valued because while we as a public entity can speak to best practices, processes, and procedures on our end, we are valuing what the employers are saying as well on their side of the ledger, right? So, it is that guidance that is truly important to helping to dictate where NEXUS goes, how we're properly guided, and also as changes occur, we're able to adjust to them in real time. So, that's thanks to those folks on that side from our employer partners. Next, please. What's NEXUS? So, our mission is to leverage career opportunities for individuals with barriers to employment through collaboration and business partnership. Our vision, we are to be a candidate and information resource to businesses. We do this directly with them. To be a leader in inclusive employment outcomes. This is through not only conversation with employers, but through engagement, collaboration, and partnership. We do this at the level that the employers are at on site, oftentimes on tours when we're speaking to specific roles, job tasks, and duties. In settings in which we have all of our stakeholders and partners sitting at the table or through our monthly meetings. We value competitive integrated employment opportunities, sharing best practices across the board, continued and consistent collaboration, and

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professionalism. Next, please. Benefits. This is going to tap into our dual customer approach just a little bit. Our partner benefits include monthly networking opportunities with employers and other partners as well that may have various resources that many of our partners don't know about. Share job leads and best practices. Also, braiding of services. This happens a lot through NEXUS. Employer presentations. This is an opportunity for our partners and providers to learn about the employer, what they offer, their benefits, and how they do what they do. But on the employer side, we're marketing their hiring needs. Whether or not we have participants that are in need of those specific roles, we're going to market those. We're going to share those out through emails, through our LinkedIn, Facebook pages, through our collaboratives, to other partners and agencies as well through NEXUS. We're assisting our employers with accessing an untapped talent pool of applicants, right? So, we're showing them additional opportunities to access candidates to meet their needs. Monthly network opportunity back to the employer. Guess what? There's a lot of resources out there that employers aren't aware of that could assist their current staff, their current needs, right? Could help with their EAP programs, their fringe benefits. It could help with specific resources that we bring them into the fold such as employers are able to retain their current staffs, right? And then, educational opportunities regarding these available resources. So, it's not just speaking to them. It's sharing the specific resource, the detail regarding that resource, and the contact for those employers to reach out to for questions so they can speak to those resources or speak with those teams on the sidelines, okay? We're here to benefit the employer. Next slide, please. How do we do it? Well, employers share workforce needs and challenges, right? And this is on a consistent basis, in through email, in our monthly collaborations at our meetings in person. Partners to share ideas, best practices, and solutions. Our partners and our employers are our partners as well. We listen to their best practices and ideas. We're collaborating with our public side as well with how our best practices and our procedures are set, okay? So, we're merging those, we're braiding those together. These meetings occur in person, virtually, and hybrid, right? Or on the sidelines, okay? We encourage that. This is my favorite part. I love this. Our NEXUS chapters push for employer meetings on site. In many cases, we'll have site tours and our NEXUS meeting all at the same time. And if anybody's a foodie, there's often great food there. We appreciate that. So, it's another great way to bring our partners in. But this is where our HR managers are able to have those one-on-one conversations or group setting conversations with our community resources, our providers, and our teams, all right? This is also an opportunity where our NEXUS partners are able to see exactly how jobs are done so that we can bring that information back to our agencies, our VR providers, and our participants that we serve. We all know how to read a job description, but it sure is nice when we understand how those duties are formed or performed and how we can, you know, just disseminate that message back to those that we're serving. Next slide, please. All right. So, our monthly meetings always same day, same time. We also have local steering committees for our NEXUS chapters. Our local

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steering committees, again, we're made up of our partners across the board. That could be public and private. We have a lot of employer partners that sit on these committees and help guide these best practices and help to point us as the public agencies in the right direction because remember we're here to meet the needs of the employers. We're here to engage at that level so that we can do that proactively and pragmatically. We do have meeting minutes that are shared out every single time we have a meeting. We assist greatly with communication to our partners all across the board. We plan specific events. These could be tours. These could be connecting events, outreach events, partnering events, events at chambers of commerce, right? Social events. We do a lot of data collection. And then, we also spend a lot of time through our NEXUS steering committees promoting our group. And one of the ways we do that and if you all want to take a look at any given time is if you just type in NEXUS, Missouri, and LinkedIn, you'll see some of our groups across the state. But that's another way that we promote that, but then also through working together in job fair settings or working with our partners and stakeholders across the state. Next slide, please. So, our agendas. Well, we like to have sign-in, introductions, member updates. That's huge, right? What are our members doing specifically? We like to introduce folks consistently, okay? We also speak to our mission every single time that we are having our meeting. We share our mission moments. I'm going to talk to you a little bit about one at the very end of our presentation. Employer updates and job leads, upcoming events, information sharing obviously, and then our next meeting. When is that going to be? We're sharing that information out right then and there so we can have everybody ready to go. Next slide. We currently have 13 NEXUS groups across the state. You see here some of the areas in gray do not -- they don't have NEXUS groups currently. But however, there's far northwest Missouri is developing a NEXUS group near the Lake of the Ozarks, which is smack dab in the middle of the state. That area is currently gray. Right now, we have a NEXUS group getting ready to come online here over the next few months. But not so long ago, we just had a few NEXUS groups across Missouri. And we want to thank our partners in the St. Louis area because that gateway NEXUS group really helped to lead the way as NEXUS began to expand across our state. Next slide. Mission moments, right? Our mission moments leverage career opportunities for individuals with barriers to employment through collaboration and business partnership. I'm going to give you one real brief here. When I first started working with NEXUS on the VR side, I connected with a large employer called Bass Pro. Many of you may know about this employer, okay? Working with a participant that was just struggling to find work and really had the tools and abilities and the talent and the credentials to move into a specific role or specific sets of roles. They had applied at this employer. Really, they just were struggling to get anywhere, right? But through NEXUS, we were able to make that connection, and that allowed that employee to be a strong value add at Bass Pro, but then also it allowed that individual to connect to a job opportunity, and that was done through NEXUS. And Bass Pro has been a nice partner for NEXUS since because they see the value, right? That was a real-time experience there. Next slide. So,

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new priority for WIOA planning. We continue expansion to all counties in Missouri and grow existing groups and strengthen those groups with inside of their communities. That is our plan with NEXUS and will continue to be our plan. And part of that, you know, is to continue to spend as much time as we can with employers to understand their needs so that we're adjusting with them as the landscape changes. Next slide. Does anybody have any questions?

>> Yes, thank you so much. We really appreciate you being able to share what NEXUS has been doing. Just one quick question for you. I know we only have a couple minutes left, so just a quick question on what's the biggest challenge that you've seen in bringing state agencies and businesses into alignment.

>> Absolutely. That's a very good question, and there are many challenges that fall into that category, but the biggest challenge that we've seen is, you know, creating opportunities and environments for state agencies and employers to interact, engage, and partner. You know, what we've done to address this is to collaborate with inside of our own state agencies together to develop a unified approach, a streamlined approach to connect with those and engage with those employers on a consistent basis and disseminate information that is universal and streamlined back, okay? But then also to develop and create opportunities for individuals inside of our agencies to connect with those employers sending that message. The other side of that too is NEXUS. NEXUS has allowed us to engage. They're that intermediary. It allows us to engage with those employers and businesses and create that environment, but it helps to generate the contacts that we need, the people in place that we need to facilitate proper connection, whether it's from the public side of it or from the private sector side of it. So, we're putting the right people in place, and NEXUS helps to do that. So, I hope that answers your question.

>> Yeah. Thanks so much, Jeff. I'm going to turn it over to Yvonne.

>> Thank you so much, Dallas, and thank you to our speakers. You know, I always think we're going to have time for more questions, but I'm so glad that, Dallas, you were able to ask some questions, some follow-up questions with the group. And thank you for all of you who provided questions. Maybe we can get some of those answered in the question box before we end today, but my job is to take you home. And so, let's move on to the next slide. One of the things we want to do today is make sure that we share another webinar that is upcoming. In fact, it's upcoming tomorrow. This is presented by another one of ODEP's technical assistance centers, CAPE-Youth. And so tomorrow, March 26, from 1:30 to 3 p.m. Eastern, CAPE-Youth will host a webinar focused on practical strategies to support young apprentices with disabilities. We know that's a very important topic and how employers can better engage in this talent pool. I do want to share that it's not too late to still register. We're going to put the registration link in the chat for you, and we encourage you to check

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out CAPE-Youth's great webinar. And we'll move to the next slide. We've already talked a little bit about LEAD and what we do at LEAD. I think what I really want to emphasize here is that we are a technical assistance center. And moving on to the next slide, if you or your organization would like any assistance, whether it's strategy development, program alignment, or capacity building, the LEAD Center is here to support that work. We offer various options for technical assistance for state agencies, WIOA partners, AJCs. We work with all kinds of organizations. So, if your organization is considering a TA request, a technical assistance request, our team would work closely with you to identify what your goals are and tailor an approach that fits your needs. You will see a QR code on the slide and you can scan it to learn more. And we're also going to be providing a link you can check out in the chat. We encourage you to explore that option if you're thinking about how to move your WIOA efforts forward. Next slide. We also want to share that on our LEAD Center website, we have a great resource, our state specific policies and data page. And this resource is going to allow you to select any state and quickly see policies, initiatives, and available services that are related to disability employment, as well as workforce development. It's a great way to understand what's happening in your state and identify gaps or opportunities and look at how approaches compare across the country. Next slide. And then finally, we just want to end by making sure that you know how to access LEAD Center at any other time. We want to share some ways to connect with LEAD -- excuse me. We encourage you to visit our website at leadcenter.org where you can sign up to receive additional information, resources, as well as notifications. Next slide. You can also follow us on social media at any of these platforms to keep us up to date with resources and events. And finally, our last slide is just a thank you. I know we ran a couple of minutes over. I appreciate your patience. Great content. Thank you again to our speakers for sharing their experience, and thank you all for spending the time with us today. We truly appreciate the work you do and hope today's discussion was helpful. So, have a great afternoon.