

Cross-System Collaboration: Supporting Accessibility in American Job Centers

Achieving accessibility and effective implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) demands more than compliance; it calls for ongoing, strategic partnerships that advance America's Talent Strategy.¹ Cross-system collaboration among workforce partners (e.g., vocational rehabilitation (VR), disability organizations, and community-based entities) has proven to be an effective approach for meeting WIOA requirements and enhancing outcomes for all participants. The following examples illustrate successful collaborative efforts that align with President Trump's Administration directives and the broader goals of the nation's workforce strategy.

Introduction

The WIOA (Pub. L. 113-128) establishes that the American workforce system must expand access to employment, education, training, and support services necessary for Americans to thrive in the labor market. To ensure that the workforce system is customer-focused and accessible to all, WIOA strictly prohibits discrimination against individuals who apply for, participate in, are employed by, or otherwise engage with programs or services funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), including those delivered through American Job Centers (AJCs). In addition, the statute requires AJCs to ensure physical, programmatic, and communication accessibility, including the provision of reasonable accommodations for Americans with disabilities.

Cross-System Collaboration in Practice

Collaboration means more than co-location or cross-referrals between organizations. It requires joint planning, shared accountability, and active engagement across partners. Through collaboration, workforce systems can:

- Align policies and practices to promote access and workforce participation for all individuals, ensuring that WIOA implementation fully supports Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility standards and advances DOL's commitment to employing all Americans.
- Share expertise about disability, accommodations, and universal design to foster a workplace culture that supports America's Talent Strategy, thereby maximizing the potential of all workers.
- Develop coordinated professional development initiatives for leadership, frontline staff, and service providers to build capacity for talent development and support for DOL's goal of strengthening workforce skills nationwide.
- Establish continuous feedback mechanisms to identify workforce challenges, inform data-driven decision making, and drive ongoing improvement in program delivery, in alignment with DOL's focus on accountability and innovation.
- Leverage funding and resources across workforce systems to foster operational efficiency, promote collaboration, and maximize the impact of services for individuals eligible under multiple programs, supporting DOL's priority of expanding access and opportunity (see [Blending, Braiding, and Sequencing Resources to Support Employment of People with Disabilities](#)).

Two states illustrate how collaboration can transform the experience of Americans with disabilities within the workforce system.

Missouri created a [statewide collaborative model called NEXUS](#) that convenes 12 regional workgroups comprising representatives from multiple government agencies, private businesses, and the nonprofit sector. NEXUS meetings elevate regional employment efforts, offer stakeholders the opportunity to collaborate directly on workforce issues, and keep government leaders aware of local employment needs across the state. Some of the stakeholders engaged in the NEXUS groups include:

- Missouri VR
- Community Rehabilitation Providers
- Missouri Job Centers
- Missouri Department of Corrections
- Rehabilitation Services for the Blind
- Missouri Department of Social Services
- Missouri Department of Mental Health
- Community Action Agencies
- Other nonprofit organizations

Virginia established a cross-agency Accessibility Taskforce comprised of leaders from WIOA core programs, disability agencies, and community-based organizations. The taskforce aligned policies to adhere to the ADA, updated AJC certification tools to address programmatic and communication access and fostered a culture in which "access is everyone's responsibility." Its collaborative approach ensured consistency across the state, while embedding accessibility into policy and practice. Virginia incorporated the Accessibility Taskforce into its [WIOA state plan](#), demonstrating for all stakeholders that accessibility should be front and center in the operations of the public workforce system.



Lessons Learned

Experiences from Missouri, Virginia, and other states highlight common themes for workforce systems seeking to advance accessibility through collaboration:

- **Shared responsibility:** Accessibility is a collective commitment that requires active participation and accountability from all AJC partners across the workforce system, not just VR or Equal Opportunity Officers (EOOs).
- **Leadership commitment:** Visible support from state and local leaders is essential for driving cross-system change. As shown in the Missouri and Virginia examples above, leaders from AJCs and Departments of Social Services, Mental Health, Labor, and VR are core to successful collaboration.
- **Structured training and follow-up:** Training that includes concrete action steps, ongoing support, and accountability mechanisms moves systems beyond awareness to practice.
- **Community partnerships:** Collaboration with disability organizations and other groups strengthens the ability of AJC staff to meet customer needs and expand their reach.
- **Certification as leverage:** AJC certification processes provide an important opportunity to integrate standards into broader system accountability.

Moving Forward

Cross-system collaboration goes beyond simply being a strategy; it serves as the foundation for building integrated, shared workforce systems. The following steps can help states and partners start establishing that foundation in alignment with America's Talent Strategy and DOL priorities:

- **Convene cross-system partners:** Bring together workforce, VR, education, human services, and disability-focused organizations to identify where goals, performance measures, and customer populations overlap and can support each other.
- **Identify shared customers and priorities:** Explore where individuals may be eligible for multiple programs and discuss opportunities to coordinate services and improve accessibility for Americans with disabilities.
- **Create formal partnership agreements:** Establish memorandums of understanding (MOUs), data-sharing agreements, and other collaborative structures that define partner roles, support coordinated service delivery, promote co-enrollment and information sharing, and sustain collaboration over time.

- **Establish transparent working relationships:** Use exploratory discussions to build trust, create open lines of communication, and lay the groundwork for long-term collaboration across systems.
- **Evaluate data for collaboration opportunities:** Review data across programs to identify common challenges, shared performance priorities, and opportunities for coordinated solutions.
- **Develop shared training and accountability strategies:** Use findings from data discussions to support joint professional development, collaborative performance monitoring, and a common language across partner systems.

By working together, AJCs, VR, EOOs, and community partners can enhance the customer experience and expand employment opportunities for people who may need extra support to find and keep a job, and advance in a career. After convening partners and evaluating data, consider the steps Missouri and Virginia took to support collaboration and select one or more approaches that best fit your state and workforce system. These examples demonstrate that, when collaboration is prioritized, accessibility can lead to innovation, improved access, and better customer outcomes. Ultimately, this creates a workforce system in which workforce partners join forces to deliver accessible services that achieve outcomes, in alignment with America's Talent Strategy and DOL's priorities.

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