Best Practices: MOUs for the One-Stop Delivery System

Webinar Transcript

>> Good afternoon, everyone. People, I know, are still coming in, but we're going to get started. Welcome today to our LEAD Center webinar "Best Practices: MOUs for the One-Stop Delivery System." On behalf of the LEAD Center, I am so excited that you have joined us today. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, also known as WIOA, requires Memorandums of Understanding, also known MOUs, between local workforce development boards and the statutory partners that make up the one-stop delivery system. Effective MOUs are action oriented. They outline partners' roles and responsibilities, service options, and available resources. They support a well-coordinated customer-focused service delivery network that improves access to services and gets results for job seekers, including Americans with disabilities. For today's webinar, we're going to hear directly from workforce leaders about strategies that they've developed for crafting and implementing effective MOUs to improve cross-system partnerships, better utilization of resources, and stronger employer engagement leading to an increased number of successful employment outcomes. Before we begin, I want to acknowledge that the LEAD Center is led by National Disability Institute and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy. We can go to the next slide. My name is Sarah Loizeaux and I will be the facilitator for today's webinar. I serve as subject matter expert on accessible career pathways with the LEAD Center at National Disability Institute. I am really looking forward to guiding today's discussion with you and introducing each of our presenters. We'll go to the housekeeping slide, please. Before we dive in, I just want to go over a few quick housekeeping items to help us 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 allows you to adjust text size, color, and background to match your preferences. This session today 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 love questions. And we certainly appreciate all of the great questions that were submitted to us by folks when you registered. And we want to hear your questions as well throughout today's presentation.

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For any content question you may have that comes up during this presentation, please use the Q&A panel. We will try to address as many as possible at the end. If you do not see the Q&A panel at the bottom right now in Zoom, click on where it says "More" at the bottom and you will find the option to add that Q&A box to your settings. For any technical support, any issues you're having on the technical side, please type that question into the chat box and someone from our team will assist you. We will be adding and sharing a lot of hyperlinks and other information today in that chat box so please check for that. If you miss it, remember, we will be recording this and the archived materials will be available within 10 business days. Next slide. So, before we get started, I just want to take a minute 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 a brief overview of ODEP and the work they do. ODEP is a subcabinet-level agency within the Department of Labor and the only non-regulatory 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 opportunities for Americans with disabilities while also aligning opportunities with what employers need. ODEP's mission helps ensure that people with disabilities are able to pursue meaningful career pathways and that businesses have access to a highly skilled talent pool. We move on to the next slide. So now to set the stage for today's webinar and provide opening remarks, I am so pleased to introduce Ben Cheriyan, senior policy adviser with the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy. His bio will be shared in the chat box. Ben, the floor now belongs to you. Welcome.

>> Thank you, Sarah. Hi, everybody. I'll be very quick. I want to make sure we have time for our real stars [inaudible] and that is our presenters. But, on behalf of ODEP, I just want to welcome all of you to today's very exciting webinar learning how Memorandums of Understanding, or MOUs, are effective tools to enhance partnership and coordination to provide effective services for all Americans including job seekers with disabilities. As you heard from Sarah earlier, the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act sets clear expectations of partners to build partnerships across the workforce system. But, beyond compliance, [inaudible] effective MOUs build a customer-oriented network where -- to help streamline services, leverage each other's expertise, and work with each other. And, today, you will see how that is being done in practice in day-to-day operations from our state presenters. We are thrilled to have presenters from Illinois and Nebraska where they will share their innovative work of how they've taken -- developed their MOU and put operate -- put it into practice and seeing how -- you will see how they have leveraged -- the MOU has helped into the day-to-day operations and how you can use that within your own state.

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The framework for today's webinar is from a little -- a product that you may have -- some of you may have had a chance to look at that was released earlier from the LEAD Center titled "Memorandums of Understanding for the One-Stop Delivery System," strategies for strengthening coordination among partners to increase outcomes -- access and outcomes, which you see in the chat. But this short brief helps set the framework for today's discussion where it tells -- talks about what are MOUs, effective factors with building partnerships and developing MOUs. And you will learn more about it in -- later in today's discussion. And I encourage to take a look when you have the opportunity. But, before that, we are thrilled to have our partners from the Employment and Training Administration to help set the foundation and where you will learn how -- practical strategies of putting an MOU into practice to help leverage accessible service -- accessibility to services and coordination. The key themes you will learn from today's webinar is integrated systems, efficient coordination, and shared accountability, three main pillars of the America's [inaudible] Report and use -- and how MOUs directly align to those three pillars. Once again, I want to thank you all for joining today. I want to thank our presenters for sharing your expertise. And I want -- and I encourage you, as you listen, to please share some of your practices you're noticing in your own state and share so others could take it back from -- take away from this [inaudible]. But, with that, I will turn it back to Sarah to kick our discussion off.

>> Thank you so much, Ben. I appreciate that. Thank you for sharing the opening remarks. We can move to the next slide. All right. So our next speaker is LaMia Chapman, the senior policy adviser at the Office of Workforce Investment at the Employment and Training Administration with the U.S. Department of Labor. Like Ben, LaMia's bio will be shared in the chat box. LaMia, I will hand it over to you now.

>> Thank you, Sarah. Good afternoon, everyone. As Sarah said, I am LaMia Chapman, senior policy advisor within the Office of Workforce Investment within the Employment and Training Administration. OWI serves as the central office overseeing policy development, guidance, and technical assistance for WIOA Title I programs as well as the Job Center Network. Essentially, the one-stop delivery system that many of you help operate, staff, or collaborate with on a daily basis falls directly within our portfolio and sphere of responsibility. I want to express my appreciation to the Office of Disability Employment Policy and the LEAD Center, ODEP's partner, for the work of developing the resource we're highlighting today and for hosting this webinar. I'm glad to be here on behalf of ETA to share a few thoughts about why we value strong Memorandums of Understanding and how we can assist. Next slide. A well-crafted MOU transform a collection of separate programs into a coordinated system that truly serves the people. When MOUs are effective, job seekers enjoy a seamless experience, avoiding the need to repeat their story at every desk. Costs are shared more fairly, negotiated in advance, and reconciled equitably.

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Staff are clear on their roles leading to consistent, high-quality service. Ultimately, the system becomes stronger supporting certification, funding, and better outcomes. We know this is real work and we appreciate everything our partners are already doing to get these agreements right. Next slide. Accessibility is not an afterthought. It is an integral part of the one-stop system. Centers are meant to be accessible by design. Local boards assess them against that standard at least every three years. And the certification criteria are set to align with the state's infrastructure funding policies. So accessibility and funding decisions stay connected. When your MOU plans for accessibility clearly, it supports the whole system from how centers are designed through how they are certified and funded. Next slide. To illustrate, here's an example of what that looks like in practice. WIOA specifically includes assistive technology for people with disabilities as a part of infrastructure. In the sample MOU found on WorkforceGPS, this item is highlighted as its own line in the budget complete with a cost pool, allocation base, and a share for each center carried over into the funding agreement like any other cost. Now, these dollar figures used are examples from a hypothetical local area. They demonstrate the principle. Naming it, budgeting, and revisiting accessibility makes the commitment real and sustainable. Next slide. The State Plan cycle. There is a built-in cycle that helps maintain these commitments. The governor's infrastructure guidance is developed with state and local boards. Two time frames are important because they run on different clocks. The state updates certification criteria, the standards, every two years as a part of the State Plan cycle, while the local boards assess their centers against those criterias at least every three years. Thus, there is a two-year cycle for standards and a three-year cycle for assessments. And your MOU and funding agreements reflect the standards they're certified against. So, as you strengthen the accessibility standards in your certification criteria, your MOUs and your State Plans grow stronger together. It's a natural place to keep progress moving. Next slide. Strong MOUs. A strong MOU works for all Americans including people with disabilities. American Job Centers support a diverse group of job seekers, many of whom require accommodations like assistive technology, plain-language forms, interpreters, and/or accessible facilities. When MOUs clearly plan for accessibility, the entire system is better equipped to serve. Next slide. So, in the spirit of partnership, here are a few practical steps to keep your MOU functioning. First, keep it current and in use. Regularly revisit it with partners so it remains a living agreement rather than becoming outdated. Second, clearly identify accessibility commitments, specify roles, timelines, and include a dedicated budget line for people with disabilities. And, third, integrate strong, accessible language into your State Plan and action plan, ensuring that commitments are reinforced by one another. Next slide. Please remember you are not alone in this work. Your ETA regional office is available to provide direct technical assistance.

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The sample MOU and Infrastructure Cost Toolkit are on WorkforceGPS, offers a practical model, mythbusters, address common questions, and ODEP and LEAD Center resources, like the one highlighted today, will also shepherd you through questions about accessibility. If you want the source material, the joint federal guidance and the key citations are on this slide, but we will put them in the link. So please reach out. We're glad to support the work you are doing. Next slide. In closing, thank you for your ongoing efforts to strengthen these partnerships. Strong, accessible MOUs reinforce your State Plan, help build the workforce system that works for all Americans including people with disabilities. ETA and ODEP are pleased to support this important work so please contact your regional office as needed. Thank you. And I hand it back to Sarah.

>> Thank you so much, LaMia, for that information, what you were talking about. You are so right that nobody is alone in this. And it was remain -- it was reminding me of my years working in an American Job Center knowing that, workforce professionals that are in those job centers, you are probably one of the greatest resources that someone has who's acquired a disability to be able to retain a job or remain in the workforce. Many people who acquire disabilities will believe that they don't know about accommodations, they no longer think they can stay. You have a really great opportunity and a strong MOU can really reflect that. So thank you so much, LaMia. Next slide. Now it is my extreme pleasure to introduce my colleague Yvonne Wright. She is the co-project director for the LEAD Center with the National Disability Institute. Like LaMia and Ben, her bio will be shared in the chat. Yvonne, I am so excited to hear your presentation.

>> Thank you very much, Sarah. And thanks to all of you for the opportunity to speak to you a little bit today. And, as Sarah mentioned, I'm the co-project director for the LEAD Center. But, before I came to the LEAD Center, I actually served as the deputy director for the Missouri Office of Workforce Development and for many years was the -- and for the first year of the state planning and for many years was the State Plan submitter. So everything that LaMia just talked about really hits home with me, LaMia and Sarah as a matter of fact, because we did -- we worked with a lot of people developing and implementing MOUs not only at the state level, but also in the local regions. So go ahead and go to the next slide. So the key lesson that I have from my years of experience in working with MOUs is that the value is not in the document itself, the value is what the partners do because of it. So it's really about ultimately delivering better services and better access for everyone including people with disabilities. And, you know, when we do MOUs, it's easy to see that the success of an MOU is really negotiate it, sign it, and you're done. But the signed MOU is really just a starting point. The real question is, "What does the agreement make possible?" Does it change how partners work together? Does it make problem solving easier? Does the customer experience the system differently? And that's where a really good MOU starts to matter. And that begins with creating a foundation for partnership.

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So next slide. So the MOU gives partners that common framework. It's a shared understanding: What are we collectively trying to accomplish together, what does each partner bring, and what are we committing to together. So we know that programs naturally come from different places, different funding sources, different eligibility, even different performance expectations. But the MOU gives us a place to establish that common ground. So, for people with disabilities, customers shouldn't have to know who funds what or which agency owns which piece. That's our system to navigate, not theirs. And that MOU can help us navigate it better together. So next slide, please. And agreements alone don't create good partnerships. Really, relationships do. That MOU process creates reasons for people to communicate regularly and partners can learn about each other's services. And, in turn, that builds trust and it helps break down the silos. So what we're talking about is getting away from the reference of "call this other agency" to "I know who can help you. Let me connect you." And that becomes a very different customer experience. Next slide. Relationships also let us move from knowing each other to working together. And that can lead to shared referrals, braiding funding and services, cross-training, joint problem solving, and coordinated outreach. And this is really where partnerships become operational. So we know also that a person with a disability may need workforce services, VR services, training, transportation, even accommodations, and other supports. And not one program provides everything. Customers should not have to be the one to assemble those pieces together. The question should be shifted to not "What can my program provide," but "What can we collectively make possible?" That is the power of collaboration and that is what MOUs can help make happen. Next slide. Strong partnerships create room to innovate and it allows us to look beyond how services have traditionally been delivered. So one partner may have the resource, but another has more of a customer relationship so the barrier that one organization can't solve, partners may solve together. And this is especially important for people with disabilities because we know one-size-fits-all often does not work. We have to have that flexibility in services and coordination. And, even though a strong MOU doesn't prescribe every solution, it helps create the relationships and structure that will allow us to find those solutions together. It can help identify where partners are duplicating effort and it allows for coordination instead of doing the same work separately. Ultimately, it's a better use of our partner time and resources. Next slide. And this is where everything before that I've talked about is leading toward, that better customer experience. Customers shouldn't have to understand workforce system structure. They should experience coordinated services, clearer pathways, fewer barriers, and greater access to opportunities. And, for a person with a disability, it's not about having to retell their story over and over, it's about getting a warm handoff instead of just another phone number, and it's about partners filling gaps for one another. You know, the customer may never know that an MOU made it possible. And, frankly, they should not have to. But what they should come away with is that the system worked for them. And next slide.

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So just a reminder again that the MOU value goes well beyond compliance, it's about setting the foundation for relationships, collaboration, innovation, and problem solving, all of it designed to make for an easier-to-navigate and more responsive workforce system. And, as I have written on this slide, MOUs create the partnerships that support a more integrated and coordinated workforce system for Americans with disabilities. And I'm excited that, next, we're going to get to hear from some real-world examples of what that can look like in practice. So thank you. And, Sarah, I'm going to turn it back over to you.

>> Thank you so much, Yvonne, for that. Oh, this really is making me nostalgic for the days of working in the job center directly with individuals. You are right, we are better together, your outcomes are better together. And, you know, shocking news flash, I would gather and wager that the partners and stakeholders that you would be working on MOUs with are already working with individuals and customers that are coming into your job centers every day. You can go to the next slide. So it is now my pleasure to introduce, hold on a second, our next speaker from Nebraska, who -- Ronesha Love, Ed.D., operations manager with the American Job Center in Lancaster and Saunders counties in Lincoln, Nebraska. Like the others, her bio will be shared in the chat. She has some great real-world experience in MOUs to share with us today. And, Ronesha, the floor is now yours. Welcome.

>> Okay, thank you. Okay, we can go to the next slide. So, again, Ronesha Love. Thanks for having me today. Although I currently oversee the WIOA program here in Lincoln, I previously worked as the One-Stop operator and so a lot of what my daily job was was working the MOUs that we have with the partners within the center and really trying to strengthen that relationship so we can provide better service for the customers that come into the resource room. You can go to the next. Yep. So just kind of a brief overview of what I'll discuss today. So we do have a customer flow map that I helped create for our partners for us to be able to use and for all the staff within the resource room to kind of understand, you know, how is it going to flow getting customers the services they need, but referrals over to the partners. You know, with our current funding for our MOUs, it's used to provide one navigator position, which they help check our customers in and get them to the appropriate partner, our One-Stop operator position, and then also the technology. So we rely heavily on our MOUs to be able to provide just the daily resources that we have inside of our resource room. And then I'll kind of go over -- since I do cover two counties, we'll go over kind of the experience that we have had in those satellite locations, and then kind of go over the relationship that we've had in the partners, so just some things that I have done to kind of strengthen the relationship with our partners, and then just some takeaways that I have. Again, every location is going to be slightly different, but, just from my experience, this is kind of what I have learned over the years. You can go to the next slide. All right. Oh, perfect, okay.

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So, starting off, when a customer arrives to our office, like I said, we have a navigator that mans the front to be able to welcome and greet the customers as they come in. We do have a parking garage that's located above our building and so we do have to validate the parking. So that's one of the first things that we do because our Park & Go staff team, they're really great, but they will give somebody a ticket right away, even if they've been there for 10 minutes. So one of the first things that we definitely have to do is confirm their parking. You can go to the next -- to the next slide. And then we want to determine their reason for their visit, check them in to what we call our Vos Greeter, which is just simply through our system to be able to check them in, and then also determine if they're a veteran or not because, obviously, in our center and I am sure in many others, veterans do get priority in services with all services through the HAC. The way that our computers work, so if we determine that they want to get on a computer, we have codes. There are two-hour codes that they would enter into the computer that allows them to job search for about two hours. We do this just because we do have a limited amount of computers available and we do want to make sure that we are serving everyone that's coming in and there's not really a long wait, especially since we have some individuals who are applying for unemployment, we have some that are partners and they're, you know, trying to utilize the system, and then some that are just trying to job seek. So that just allows us to be able to serve everyone on a day-to-day basis. All right, we can go to the next slide. All right. So one of the first things that we do try to do is verify if they have an NEworks account. Again, that is kind of our main system that us staff work out of, but then also, you know, if they're applying for unemployment, they're able to do that. If they're needing to job search, they can also do that. But a lot of our partners -- well, I will say WIOA and Wagner-Peyser specifically work out of NEworks and they -- we utilize what's called a common application. So, when we are getting ready to enroll someone into a program, they do have to complete that common application for us to move forward, so validating that they have that NEworks account is helpful. But, also, let's say, you know, maybe they don't want services from one of ours -- one of -- sorry, from WIOA or from Wagner-Peyser, all of our MOU partners have an NEworks account and that's how we send our referrals. So, even if they're not going to receive their referrals in our resource room that day, this gives them an option to be able to get the referral from another partner to be able to be enrolled into their program as well. Also, we use it for document uploads. So, you know, with WIOA, Wagner-Peyser, there's some documents that are a little bit -- that have that PII information that's needed specifically with WIOA so we do allow -- we do have some scanners on some of our computers to allow for customers to just directly upload their documents so, that way, they're not lost in that situation. So we can go to the next one. All right. So, again, our big push is referrals. Like how our resource room is made up is through our partners. And, you know, the best way that we can make sure that the job seekers are getting the -- their needs taken care of is by doing referrals.

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So some ways that that might go is, you know, we do have some workshops so there may be direct referrals for those workshops. Again, it could be to Wagner-Peyser services, WIOA services, so, that way, they're helping with resume . We do have -- not required partners, we don't have an MOU with them, but we do have some partners that can provide some computer literacy so they can get assistance that way. It may also be for education services so our local community college is in there as well so we can make the referral. And then also, you know, if we have any events that are going on, we can send that as well. Through the AJC, so it's not through the entire state, it's just something that locally we had created through the city of Lincoln, we have what's called a Program Matcher. And so, if a customer comes in and they're not really sure what services they may qualify for or they just want to see -- or they want to see what services they might qualify for, they can answer the questions to the Program Matcher and, based off of how they answer those questions, it will list what MOU partner they may be eligible to receive services from. So that is another way that we can use to be able to send referrals as well. All right, we can go to the next one. And then, lastly, so I will note that the way that our center is set up, our resource room and WIOA are contracted by the same agency, and it has been for years, so many of our partners believe that we're all the same. And we're not. When I was one-stop operator, I tried really hard to make sure that, you know, we kept it neutral in the resource room. And, even though, you know, I'm a co-worker with someone from the WIOA program that, you know, when we're looking at the other partners, they weren't favored by any means so everybody was kind of treated -- all partners were treated the same. But, as you'll kind of see in this diagram, just based off of how it was created, one of the major things that we search for is, you know, "is the job seeker eligible for WIOA." And, if so, then, you know, we will look to schedule them for their next appointment. If they are not, which is seldom that somebody would not be eligible, we would also look at, you know, is there another partner that we could make that referral to or maybe that they prefer to go to. So that's kind of the end of where our -- kind of our steps for the -- are for our process. So we can go to the next one. So, with our satellite locations, so Ashland and Gretna are the two bigger cities that are in Saunders County. So, for quite a while, we used to go to the libraries. And then we did have some discussions with Community Action, which holds the community block grant here in Nebraska, about collocating there. Unfortunately, it didn't really work out. And we didn't see a lot of customers that were coming to the satellite locations when we went. So we've now switched to do more virtual appointments. So, even if it's just the resource room and they were needing just some basic assistance with getting on the computer and learning how to job search or whatever the case may be, we also provide those virtual appointments. So they're available. Specifically for WIOA, we are able to do that as well. And then also meeting the job seeker at alternative locations. So we partner with a local youth center that we do work experiences with so being able to go over there and work with them. I have also -- you know, when I was one-stop, I also went to the local library.

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So, you know, we tried to make our location central. And there's a bus stop literally right outside of our location. But sometimes it's still not feasible for our job seekers to come downtown to do that so having that alternative site to be able to provide those same resources that we would in the resource room is something that we have tested out. So we can go to the next slide. So when -- again, when I was one-stop, and still now, you know, I have had the opportunity to, you know, train and work with our current one-stop operator, there's just always been this big push of relationships with our partners. That's really key into what we've seen making the MOU work. You know, some partners will question, you know, why do I continue to sign, why do I continue to pay, like where is the benefit for me, and so, outside of referrals, we still want to give our partners the opportunity to be able to, you know, take advantage of our center because we see a ton of different customers coming in, job seekers coming in, and many of them can qualify for a lot of our partner programs, but, if they're not down here, then it's hard for those clients to get enrolled. And referrals are nice and so, you know, we have our system, but always trying to follow up with, you know, an email, but sometimes it can get lost and then there's no follow through because of that. And so inviting our partners into the resource room has been pretty big. So ways that we have worked to engage our partners. So we have a -- we had monthly partner meetings. And, in those meetings, instead of just the one-stop operator hosting those, we've encouraged each one of our partners to host one. That's an opportunity where they can talk about their current services or they could pick a topic that means something to them to be able to engage the other partners in. I created a 12-Days of Partners, which we -- it's around Christmastime so we start usually around December 1st up to the middle of December where we just highlight those partners however they want to be highlighted. They are more than welcome to come into our office, provide documentation -- or, sorry, flyers to be able to, you know, promote their services. But it's a day that's strictly for all of the partners and nobody else is able to come in during those -- on those days. We also have done partner spotlights whether it's in our resource room on one of our screens or, you know, on our website. We've kind of done a combination of both where, again, we're just trying to make their presence seen inside the resource room. Whenever we're attending career -- or whenever we're hosting career fairs, we're always inviting them to, A, help us in participating that -- participating in the career fairs or attending. So we've had both. So, one year, we did have one that was focused with job seekers with disabilities and so we were able to bring in our partners, so Voc Rehab and then the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, to come in and help with making sure that, you know, is there training that we can do for the employers, help with kind of setting up that career fair and other events. And then also a big thing that we try to do is present to our partners and allowing our partners to present to us. So whether it be a training, again, about how someone can enroll into services or just overall working with their specific job seekers, we have kind of offered both options.

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Okay, and then we can go to the next one. So, again, some takeaways that I had with my experience is just being flexible and understanding partners have different needs and what may work for one does not work for another. So, you know, when I think about our 12 Days of Partners, for some of our partners, they decided not to show up because, you know, they're -- you know, the job seekers that are qualified for their program are very specific, and they're probably not going to find them in our office. And that's fine. So then we try to find other ways to engage them where, others, they're -- you know, job seekers are definitely in our office and so allowing that opportunity for them to connect. Not being afraid to try new ideas. So, again, the 12 Days of Partners was kind of a new idea and it's something that we have been able to continue to do since we kind of started. So the last few years we have offered that opportunity. And then also to include partners in decisions for the resource room when possible. So, you know, we have partnered with Voc Rehab and the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and multiple times I've had them come into our office just to check our accessibility technology to make sure, one, it's up to date and, two, to check to see if there is anything that we're missing because we want to ensure that, if their customers are coming in, that they -- their needs are being met as well, especially if, you know, they do not have staff that can sit inside the resource room to help any of the customers that they serve. So, all right, and that is the end. So I will pass it back to Sarah. Thank you.

>> Thank you so much, Ronesha. Well, your presentation brought so many quest -- excellent, excellent questions in the Q&A panel so really appreciate it. So I know we have time for the Q&A, but I was hoping, Ronesha, if you didn't mind, answering at least one of these questions before we move to our next presenter.

>> Yeah.

>> Someone asked, they said, "I'm currently in the process of trying to establish a partnership with my local WIOA coordinator to support young adults navigate the transition into stable careers. We are being developed as the intermediary to help coordinate around the young adult. How would you recommend I go about establishing a partnership/MOU?"

>> Yeah, absolutely. Ronesha Love again. Sorry, I have to announce it. But so I would definitely -- so I will say that all of our MOUs are actually public. So, if you wanted to visit the American Jobs Center website for Lincoln, Nebraska, you are more than welcome to do that. I know that when we have had conversations and when you specifically kind of look at our MOUs, we really want to see, you know, what is it that we will bring, what is it that the partner will bring to be able to establish that, and then make sure that there is an agreement for both of those.

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So I would definitely try to connect with their youth program, kind of see what it is that you're going to be offering that would be something that they would be able to connect with or to be able to agree upon. If there is a month -- like, if there is a dollar amount that needs to be attached to that, just making sure that that's agreed upon. I know that we've -- we have -- you know, outside of our required partners, we do have MOUs through our youth program because we have different areas that we need to cover with our youth specifically. And so, you know, when we were looking at mentoring as one of them, as mentors, as one of our MOUs, it's just making sure like it works out financial-wise that can be agreed upon, and then, obviously, the services that you're offering is kind of what that program is looking for. I really hope that answered your question. So I'm sorry if it did not.

>> That was awesome. That was great information.

>> Oh, thanks.

>> And there are several more questions that are in the chat that were directed to you. So excellent, excellent job. Thank you so much. We're going to move on now to our next presenters from Illinois, where I grew up, so I'm very partial, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. You can go to the next slide. I am pleased to introduce our speaker, Michael Baker, the manager of Strategic Planning and Innovation at the Office of Employment and Training at the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. He will be joining us today solo, but he's got a great presentation planned, you're going to learn a lot. And so, Mike, I will hand it over to you. Just one FYI, the bio is in the chat. Thank you, Mike.

>> Thank you, Sarah. Good afternoon, everyone. Mike Baker, again, Office -- from Office of Employment Training, Illinois Department of Commerce. I'm kind of like the Yvonne Wright of Illinois. Definitely involved in WIOA state and regional planning and hitting the big Submit button to send our State Plan off to DOL. So it looks like we have a lot of overlap in our roles in our respective states. Before I jump into this, I'd like to set the stage and provide some context for how we operate in Illinois because we've done it the most complex way possible. So, if we can make it work here, probably you could make it work where you're at. The four core partners of WIOA are housed in four separate state agencies. The Title I and Title II, you know, the WIOA -- traditional WIOA program, adult dislocated worker and youth training and adult ed, the Title I, the adult dislocated worker and youth, housed here at DCEO. The people doing the work on the ground are not Department of Commerce employees. They are employees of our WIOA formula grant, okay, so it's either a municipality or a county government typically. A Title II adult education, it's administered by the State Community College Board, same thing. They're not Community College Board employees administering the program, they're adult ed grantees, which, in most cases, are community colleges.

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Title III, however, housed at the Department of Employment Security, those are state employees. Title IV housed at our Office of Rehab Services. Again, those are state employees. So that matters because, in some instances, the lease for the brick and mortar store or the one-stop is controlled by Title I. In other cases, about half the cases, it's controlled by Title III. And, in one case, at least until last year, one of the one-stops was -- the lease holder was Voc Rehab. So that comes into play in how things are administered. And I'll give you a real-world example of that going forward. Here, in Illinois, we have 22 local workforce areas and we have 26 comprehensive AJCs. So that's a lot of paperwork each year to put together MOUs by our local workforce boards. So, at the state level, you know, we don't see the customers eye to eye. You know, we're not looking at customers across the desk and trying to help them out. Our job is to develop the governor's guidelines and help the local workforce boards and the required partners. You put together and follow a framework that leads to efficient delivery of services and effective delivery of services. So what we do at the state level is we provide guidance to everyone. We make sure that we've built in checkpoints along the way to make sure that things are moving along and progressing as they should be before it gets to the end of the process. And we have a standing technical assistance team. So that's one of the key takeaways that we'll have today with this with how we do it is that we strongly recommend that you have a body in place that can deal with things as they come up. And then we also have an MOU template both for the Shared Services Agreement, you know, the narrative piece, and the Infrastructure Funding Agreement. Okay, next slide. So the rationale for having a team put together and that meets regularly is that it starts to build relationships. And that's really what all of this is about. My experience has shown me that you can have the best process in place, but, if the people don't know each other and don't get along, it could very easily blow up anyway. But you can have -- you know, vice versa, you can have kind of loose guidelines, but, if the people all know each other and have good relationships, they will find a way to make it work. So the trick is trying to be prescriptive enough to give people a framework to operate under, but not be so overly prescriptive that it locks them in and doesn't give them flexibility to deal with issues that come up on a day-to-day basis. One of the things the State Technical Assistance team does here in Illinois is that we look at the MOUs, we talk to the local partners and the local workforce board staff, and we can kind of get a feel for how most everybody does things. And it provides us with best practice examples that we can share with local workforce boards that may be struggling to make things happen as well as they might. So it kind of gives us a way of collecting information and collecting data and pushing that back out to the local workforce boards so that everybody can operate more effectively and more efficiently. Okay. Next slide. One of the things that we also do is that we -- in establishing these relationships, we deliberately bring new staff in and brief them on WIOA in general, but also give them an indoctrination in how we collaborate. Honestly, in Illinois, the program that has the most turnover is Voc Rehab.

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It seems like every year or two we've got a new person coming into the mix that may or may not know anything at all about WIOA so we have a process established so that when new people come on from whatever program they might be from that we can share with them and we have slides put together to brief them on "here's what the law says we have to do, here's how we go about doing it here in Illinois." And we provide resources to them so that they're not flying blind and feeling like they're out on their own. This team also kind of harking back to the point that LaMia made originally about alignment between MOUs and WIOA plans, this team also is responsible for reviewing and approving the WIOA regional and local plans. So the MOU review and approval comes right after the local and regional plan approval and reviews so we can very easily look to see that the MOUs are aligned with the WIOA plans in a particular local workforce area. And where we find that they're not in alignment, then that's a conversation we have with the local workforce board and the partners to understand why. And most times it's just an oversight and then they adapt to bring things into [inaudible]. Okay. The law requires the governor to establish guidelines so that's what this group is responsible for doing. And we have found that there are lessons learned practically every year so we typically tweak the guidance on an annual basis beyond just changing dates. But issues come up and, as they do, it gives us an opportunity to provide refined guidance to help people avoid any pitfalls and not repeat and help avoid issues of concern as we learn together and go through the process. And let's go on to the next slide. Okay. So one of the -- a couple of examples of how this group has operated, most importantly, is we learned that we wanted to provide more lead time for local workforce boards and the partners to hash through issues. And, as new partners come and go, you know, some of the questions and issues come up that have been talked about already like, "Well, why do we have to be there? Why do we have to provide funding to help support this?" You know, it's a very common question that comes up from partners. And, occasionally, we've had to -- or come close to having impasses because a new partner came into the mix and just wasn't getting it. But, by moving our due date up a little bit, we gave us more lead time to help resolve those issues as they come up so that, you know, we lower the risk of documentation not being submitted on time and the negotiations, you know, not being completed in time. Okay. We had a interesting example in -- when COVID hit. This is where the "who is the leaseholder" question comes into play and became very important. Because half of the centers were leased by a state agency, when COVID hit, our governor, in an abundance of caution, said, "We need to close down the offices. Lock the doors, you know, stay at home for a few days and we'll figure this out." Well, in the offices that were state lease held, that's what they did. They locked the doors and sent everybody home including the Title I staff. In areas where the Title I program leased the office, well, they weren't directly bound by the governor's guidance so some of them locked the doors, some of them didn't. In those centers, the state workers stayed home, but the Title I staff, in most cases, showed up.

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So, believe me, it was a very labor-intensive effort working through these issues with all of the local boards, all of the required partners, and our governor's office to reopen the centers after the COVID crisis started to ease a little bit, and position our one-stops to be able to provide services. And, you know, that conflict actually drug out far longer than we would like it to have, but, by having this state team together, it provided a forum and it provided a mechanism for the governor's office and the state agencies to communicate with and from the local workforce areas to help, you know, feel our way through the crisis together. Okay. So our advice for other states is if you can have a body such as this that is put together and meets regularly, you're building a process that allows for give and take and so that, you know, this -- it makes the whole process go much more smoothly. Okay, next slide. Okay. So -- There is a time in the life of every problem when it's both big enough to see, but small enough to handle. So what we have done is to kind of embrace that philosophy and build in early deadlines and checkpoints. for instance, we have them submit a Pre-Year Planning form by the end of December. And, on that, we ask them, "Okay, who's involved, who's going to be your lead negotiator, what is your plan for scheduling negotiation meetings?" And we just -- we kind of force them to think about how they're going to go through the process of developing their MOU. We ask that. And by "ask," I mean we require a draft budget, any waiver requests of the governor guidelines and other issues of -- that they might have questions about to be submitted no later than April 15th. And then the final document is due to us at the end of May. So, by building in these early checkpoints and milestones, that helps us keep our finger on the pulse of who is making normal progress and who might not be. And, of course, you know, we encourage them to ask for assistance at any point throughout the process, but those folks that may not be so eager to ask for state intervention, you know, if they fall behind on meeting one of these required benchmarks, that gives us entr e to open up a conversation with them and say, "Hey, we noticed this document didn't come in when it was supposed to. How is everything going?" And, depending on their answer to that question, that might, you know, either position ourselves to just kind of keep an eye on the situation or we might have a more involved intervention to help bring things together where it's deemed appropriate. Okay, next slide. So part of the thing that this group also did was to create templates. We have a three-part template: One for the narrative agreement, you know, the text; we have a spreadsheet that everybody uses to highlight both the infrastructure funding and the shared system costs; and one-stop operator costs. And having templates like these I think is very helpful because, one, it allows us greater ease of providing technical assistance. Way back in the day under WIOA, we really didn't give any guidance on this at all and MOUs would come in in 22 different formats. You know? So finding the -- making sure like all of the required pieces are in place, it just makes the review so much more quicker and cleaner by being able to go -- you know where everything is supposed to be, you know, because all of the MOUs look just the same from area to area, at least in the format and the order that the information is presented. You know?

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Now, how they answer the questions, of course, varies. But, if we want to look for a particular element, we always know that's on page three for example. And, again, you know, that just helps us provide better technical assistance because, you know, we can easily find, you know, the key elements. By requiring this information, also, you know, we connect the one-stop operator agreement to the MOU. We encourage everyone to include non-required partners as well in these MOUs. However, that may or may not always work out, they may have a site MOU with a non-required partner. But we really encourage them to put it all into the one document. That way, everybody can kind of see better what's happening and who's involved in providing services at the local level. We also ask them to highlight how they provide direct linkage and document how those services are provided. You know, we have some partners who it's physically impossible for them to be at the one-stop center in full-time capacity. But we want to make sure those services are available to anybody who might walk in on any particular day so we require them to tell us, "Okay, if you're not physically there, how are you arranging that a customer can reach you in real time as they might come into the office?" And then also it allows us to make sure that, you know, what they say they're doing actually is what they're really doing. And we have, you know, monitors that go out and look at these sorts of things. But, also, if, you know, the local areas actually are very, you know, willing to come to it and say, "Hey, you know, our MOU says this, we're having an issue with one particular partner kind of not meeting what they've signed off on," and, you know, we work with them to help resolve any issues that come in as they go along. Okay, next slide. So the key takeaways I would provide -- or offer that you might find helpful is, you know, look at your guidance regularly and update it as needed. Here, in Illinois, you know, we do that almost annually. You know, your situation or your experience may vary. But the point being guidance should be evolutionary, it should evolve and be improved when it's deemed appropriate and necessary. You know, just don't let it be a document that just sits on the shelf and doesn't adapt to a changing situation in the field. We would encourage folks to do, you know, milestones and checkpoints along the way. Again, the key there is identifying problems when they are smaller and more easily dealt with and when you have time to actually negotiate and work through proposed solutions rather than waiting till the deadline when you've got a full-blown crisis. And then, by keeping a team that's active year round, our team meets monthly and on occasion, if the need arises, we can meet more frequently than that to work through particular issues. But we do meet at least monthly to check in and keep the team apprised of next steps coming up and also dealing with any issues that may have arisen from one of the local partners. So that's our presentation here from Illinois. So I'll kick it back to Sarah.

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>> Thank you so much, Mike. You had so much great information and so relatable. One thing you said that I loved was you talked about like, well, the work changes, we have to change. And that's such an obvious thing that we sometimes often forget. But you touched on something and there was a question that was put up in the Q&A box that I thought, if you don't mind, just take a minute to respond to before we go to the -- everyone in the Q&A. Someone had asked, "How should an MOU handle that staff turnover so partner commitments and communication can continue?"

>> You're talking at the state level or at the local level?

>> That was the question. I would say both. What's -- can you -- how about both?

>> Okay. Well, at the state level, when new staff comes on, we invite them to view a presentation and have a briefing on WIOA in general and the role each partner plays and particularly the role that their partner has played in the past and what the expectations are of them both in participating in our state technical assistance team, but also in them providing guidance to their local staff and their local representatives that are active in the one-stops. I would say that same process or same concept could work at the local level. When you've got a new partner coming on board, you know, have that briefing and don't just say, "Hey, here's a bunch of stuff, you need to read this" and, you know, expect them to get up to speed. But there needs to be some very deliberate handholding and giving them the opportunity to ask questions and, you know, give them a safe space to learn and don't just kind of throw them into the deep end of the pool and hope they swim because that's kind of a recipe for disaster.

>> Yeah. I used to have this sort of like desire that, you know, vocational rehabilitation, for example, when they are getting their graduate degrees, there should be a class on WIOA, that they should understand like how these things work, how benefits work. You know, like these -- it's those logistics that can become -- my apologies, it's those logistics that can become really tough. And, you're right, they need time and space to learn. So great answer. Thank you so much. So we've got a few minutes to answer some questions. And feel free, if you haven't already, to put your question in the chat. We would be happy to respond to it. We had a lot of great questions here. And, speaking of VR, Cassandra wrote, "Before I was in my role in state VR, we had several MOUs with partner agencies. However, we have now transitioned to interagency agreements. What are the reasons that one type of agreement might be chosen over another? And does the money attached to an MOU carry more leverage for establishing partner relationships?" So Mike or Ronesha, anyone want to tackle that question for Cassandra?

>> Well, I can answer for Illinois and how we do the MOUs.

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>> Sure.

>> So, because state agencies are involved, all of our MOUs have to go through our state comptroller's office, which oversees all of the contracts and payments made by state agencies. So our MOU is viewed as a valid and an enforceable contract, at least for the state agency payments piece of it, by our comptroller's office. So, you know, all the partners have to sign off and it's considered a binding contract. I think, you know, whether it's an MOU or an IGA, you know, I'd have to know the particulars of each, you know, to really speak to advantages or disadvantages. But, in Illinois at least, our MOU is considered a binding contract so, you know, when folks commit to making infrastructure funding, you know, commitments, you know, we actually include a 10% overage to help with that. So, if an agency's final bill was within 10% of what the amount is in the agreement, then we don't need an amendment and they can -- are, you know, free to go ahead and pay up to that amount. So that's how we do it here.

>> That was excellent. Thank you so much, Mike. All right, we got another question here and I would imagine this is something that probably is pretty common. Someone anonymous wrote, "Great concepts and best practices today. Curious how other states or local areas handled difficulties in obtaining some partner signatures on MOUs. We've had a few where local areas have sought assistance from the state in securing signatures and we've been able to provide other contacts to try. But, if a partner is outside our authority, sometimes it's been hard to convince them of the relative benefits they receive. And then we hit snags with monitoring when we test sample MOUs that are missing signatures." So how do we do -- we don't track people down. The whole point of an MOU is a partnership. So, Ronesha or Mike, was there anything you would be able to respond to that?

>> Ronesha. So, yeah, I guess, with ours, we have our business manager that tracks down everybody for signatures and she's really good at it. And so I know that, yes, it can be really difficult. And, again, I kind of mentioned in my presentation that there's question as to, you know, "why do I continue to sign these" or, you know, whatever the case may be. And, again, it's just trying to show, at least with our partners that we have the MOUs with for the resource room, you know, how important it is for us to maintain that, and then being able to help them see how that service is going to benefit their company as well. So we also have a lot of collocation -- or a lot of our partners who are collocated so they rent space. And so we actually just within the last three - four years moved into a new bigger space and we really tried to get at least one representative from all of the partners there, again, just trying to get somebody there in the office, and then making it make sense with that MOU that's attached.

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And so sometimes it can be a love/hate relationship. But, again, it's just trying to -- and that's why Ed put such a big focus on making the partners also feel welcomed, just like we do with the customers, to help build that relationship and, hopefully, get away from some of that struggle when it comes to the signing and tracking them down or the money portion as well, so.

>> Oh, I could not agree more. I often tell workforce professionals, "The idea is to come with your hand full and not your hand out."

>> Yeah.

>> "What can we do for you?" "How are we going to make your job easier and better?" We're already sharing customers, I want to make this easier for all of us. Yeah, that's such great advice. Thank you, Ronesha.

>> You know, I can add to that also for Illinois from --

>> Sure.

>> Okay. So you've got to make it easy for folks to sign. So, in some cases, you may actually have to print out a document and drive over to their office. But, you know, that's -- you know, it's much more labor intensive, but, like some of our more rural places, we have partners with board members or EDs that are very rural and sometimes we just -- you know, the people gathering signatures have to drive out and pull somebody off their tractor and say, "Here, please sign here." Fortunately, that's the exception rather than the rule. And the hardest signatures to get in Illinois seem to be actually from the state agency partners. So how we work that is, first of all, we have a very strong relationship with the secretary and the Office of Human Services. And so two of the required partners, Voc Rehab and TANF, reside under that office. So, if new staff come in and they're not quite understanding the sense of urgency to get these signed, it's a simple matter to call the person at the top, who we have a great relationship with, and have that person kind of, you know, apply a little pressure and give them a reminder that, "Hey, actually, this is important and you need to do it in a timely fashion." And, if that person weren't there and everybody were new, we would -- you have to go to the governor's office then. But, you know, we've never had to do that because having this team in place has allowed us to establish strong relationships with leadership at the top. And, again, as that leadership changes, we make sure to brief them on what this is all about and why it's important and so, if an issue like this does come up, we're not hitting them blindsided out of the blue with something, it's something that they at least have a general notion about because we've briefed them on it.

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>> Excellent, excellent, excellent. These are such great -- such great information. And you're definitely getting some relatability about what you're talking about, the state partners, so others are agreeing with you in the Q&A in the chat box. So let's move on. That's more time for some more questions. So this is a great one because this is a practical operational question we've got here, "What does a strong partnership between vocational rehabilitation, community rehabilitation providers, and the local one-stop look like in the MOU and day-to-day work, referrals, staffing, cost sharing, joint services?" Obviously, you know, we can talk about MOUs in a theoretical, you could have a great written MOU, but how would you know it's successful in that day-to-day operational aspect? So I would -- anyone that [inaudible] take that on, I would love to hear what you think.

>> Well, so, for our voc rehab partners, they -- we -- they actually collocate. So there's actually two staff members -- well, actually, three that sit right outside of my office. And so I think -- and one of the first ways is like we're all people, right, so it's like acknowledging them and knowing them and saying hi when they come in, checking in and seeing how they're doing. I think that kind of starts there. And then, you know, including them in the different -- we -- so, although we have our program, so we have our adult dislocated worker and our youth program, we have programs within that. So one of them is a summer youth employment program that we partner with the city of Lincoln and the Lancaster County agencies where we offer work experience for the summer. And so one of the big push was making sure that our staff member from voc rehab that focuses on the youth population that, you know, he was aware that we had this opening for youth to participate and sending that over to them. So, again, it's making them kind of feel included, but also building just that personal relationship when you see them come in as well. I think that makes a big difference and that helps with any agreement that you have them sign or anything that you -- you know, anything that we do outside of work is just making sure that you have that personal relationship with them. And we're just fortunate enough to have them in the office with us.

>> Excellent. Thank you. That was a great answer. Yeah, there is something to be said to being a likable person, to you being somebody that people feel they can trust, that they know is, you know, like the real deal, that is going to be engaged and help you, that there is so much value to that. Thank you so much. Ronesha, this question -- actually, stay on. There is a question directed for you directly. It says, "Question for Ronesha. Do partners use a common participant database? And, if so, which partners are involved?"

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>> So here, in Nebraska -- so the answer is no. We tried. We actually -- the state of Nebraska did try to come with a -- basically, a common app that we could use through a database. And, just based off of the information that all of the programs needed, we were unable to do that. Now, the closest thing that we have would be -- like I mentioned, we use NEworks, which is technically our unemployment program -- yeah, program, but also what we use as staff members for our applications. And so the only two partners that utilize that would be Wagner-Peyser and WIOA. Everyone else has their own system that they use. But we definitely have tried, it just -- it didn't work out based off of what everybody else needed, so.

>> Excellent. Thank you so much. All right, we've got a few more questions and, actually, I also have some questions from registrants. But we'll get to this other one right here if you feel like you can answer it. It says, "With the updates on community engagement requirements, has there been any exploratory MOUs with Medicaid health plans as partners?" This person's asking as a curious staff from a health plan where there's been workforce efforts for over three years.

>> We have not. So I would say, in Nebraska, we have not. So I can't speak on that one, yeah.

>> Yeah. Well, I'd be curious, are there -- are there any sort of ways that MOUs will change or new partners you'll want to bring in now that there will be these like work requirements that are coming in.

>> So, as it relates to SNAP I can speak on, so, for SNAP E&T, which is that now, so -- and I don't know about with other states, but I know Nebraska, we had a pause on it. They're just bringing it back here as a requirement. And so, actually, I oversee that program as well here. Now, there's multiple programs across the city of -- or agencies across the city of Lincoln that will also offer SNAP E&T, but -- and so we are -- actually, we are just starting to get together and meet and decide how are we going to do that co-enrollment piece. As it relates to Medicaid, that one's -- like the requirement just here in Nebraska, it was implemented in mid- to late-May, so it's very new. There's really not a provider that's right now technically fully providing it, like not as it relates to the same as like Snap E&T or anything like that. So we don't have just a partner that's working with that. But it's very possible that, you know, once they kind of, you know, figure out that process that, yes, there would be an MOU that we would be able to create with them as well and have that process down, so.

>> Excellent. That was a great answer. Thank you so much.

>> Yeah.

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>> So, let's see, there were some questions that people at registration asked that I would love to see if we can get some -- like some responses for, too. We have a few more minutes. I think we can do a couple more questions. Let's see here. There's so many great ones. "What works keeping a partner involved over time?" That's a great question. So it's one thing to get them on board, get the value, how do you keep them engaged over time? And I would -- I would add to this especially if maybe there hasn't been, it's been very successful at a local level or at an operational level. Maybe there was an issue. You know, how do you keep the -- keep that partner engaged and help them to be willing to keep going and trying to work with you all?

>> Well, this is Mike from Illinois. I mean, what we encourage local boards to do is show the value, you know, track referrals both -- you know, both ways, you know, referrals from a partner, referrals to a partner, and be able to have some data to demonstrate, "Hey, this is the value back to your organization," whether we're sending customers to you or you're sending one of your customers to another partner to get additional services so it's value for your customers. So that's the lowest hanging fruit. That's the easiest thing to do. Where the data shows, "Hey, it's maybe one or two people a year," well, then you pull out the law which says you're a required partner, so you're here for the --

>> You're here. You're -- we're just -- we're stuck with each other, so --

>> Yeah.

>> -- let's make the best of it.

>> Exactly.

>> Yeah.

>> But that's a last resort. You know, you don't start with that. But --

[Inaudible]

>> Obviously. It definitely works better that -- when you -- and you can have a positive, happy working relationship. But, all right, so let's see, there's another question here about roles. I think this can sometimes be a little bit of a confusing situation sometimes when you're working together. "How can community organizations, continuums of care, and other nonprofit partners have clear and useful roles in a WIOA MOU? And how can a new organization get started and show its value?"

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>> Well, my -- this is Mike from Illinois. My suggestion would be, if you are in that position, reach out to your one-stop operator or your local workforce board staff and, you know, make the pitch, "Here's our organization, here's what we do, here's the value we bring to the table," and see where it goes from there. But the key for making that relevant is to be able to speak to what services you provide, you know, what value you bring, and what -- you know, either -- if you're going to be making referrals or receiving referrals or both. You know, not just, you know, what you would be doing, but how you would be able to go about it and would you be able to be physically present at the one-stop. Just, you know, start the conversation. This is an inclusive group, you know, by nature so it's not about you keeping people out. If somebody approaches and asks, "Hey, I think I could bring value to this and work with you to help people," I would say 99 to 100 out of 100 are going to, you know, be open to furthering that conversation.

>> That's a great answer. Thank you so much. All right, I think maybe one more question and then we'll wrap things up for the day. There's just so many great questions that we received at registration. All right, let's see, what's not been already responded to. You know -- oh, here's an interesting one. Somebody's asking about virtual services or -- and I would add to this even just technology. You know, how should an MOU explain virtual access, virtual services? You know, technology is rapidly changing our workforce system. We're doing so much more nowadays online offering whether that's like job -- from job fairs to registering online to orientations, even workshops. So how do you explain these virtual services to partners that are maybe not physically at your one-stop [inaudible], including those service expectations, response times, accessibility, proof of participation. As we move to more and more virtual services, and I would say that's vice versa, whether it was one-stop or the partner you're MO -- you're doing this MOU with, is there anything unique or special that you try to do to talk about virtual services?

>> Yeah, this is Mike in Illinois. We have a document as part of our process that the local workforce board is required to fill out that tells us how any partners are providing direct linkage, which is another term for virtual services. So we ask, you know, who's the partner, what is the program, what particular services are provided virtually or through direct linkage, and how those are implemented. So we have a very clear process in place to describe that for every partner that's using that form of service delivery.

>> Ronesha, do you have anything else to add?

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>> Yeah. So I mentioned kind of the virtual services that we offer. So, with the -- we do have the direct linkage as well that we use with our partners, too, so very same -- looks like we have the very same formats for those MOUs. But, again, we don't have a lot of partners that take advantage of it. Technically, WIOA is the only -- the partner of the -- of our MOUs that are paying in that would take advantage of that. But, you know, we have had situations where we've had a partner that maybe they were supposed to come in to be able to meet with a job seeker, but they were unable to so we do try to set up that technology so, if the job seeker did come in, because maybe they don't have a laptop, but they're meeting with -- so example would be CSEP, the main office is out of Omaha, which is about an hour away. They don't always have someone that can cover the Lincoln office so being able to set up the technology within our -- one of our interview rooms for them to be able to connect online with someone if they're not local, that's kind of an example of how we've actually used it. But we don't see it very often, but it is available, you know, if our partners are needing to take advantage of it.

>> Yeah, I think that's a great -- that's a great example you shared, Ronesha, with the CSEP. I would say that, you know, maybe in the future this could be used even more because I do think that's a really great advantage, especially if they are located in a more rural community or they're further away. Also, I think, too, you know, not everybody has the right high-speed internet connections and access organizations may have and that, you know, can maybe play a role in it as well. But that is such a great value add that you've brought. And I foresee that more people will take advantage of it. That will be my prediction. But so many, so many great questions. Wish we could have gotten to them all. Ronesha and Mike, I really appreciate you joining us today. And, LaMia, thank you for sharing that great information from ETA. Thank you, Ben, for the opening remarks. If you want to move to the next slide. Just a reminder that we are the LEAD Center, the National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities. We are a workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act technical assistance center funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy through the U.S. Department of Labor. We help states, workforce development professionals, and American Job Centers implement WIOA in service to Americans with disabilities. Next slide. We have so many tools on our website, we do so many different things. We want to increase career pathways for people with disabilities to ensure employers have access to skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. We also do a lot of work related to financial literacy and training and economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities, and improve coordination and collaboration of the workforce development systems and partners contributing to a more effective system. And we do that in a number of ways, including webinars like today's. Next slide. So we would love you to connect with us.

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