**Workforce 3One**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Workforce Employment Networks Supporting Career Pathways for People with Disabilities**

**Thursday, November 12, 2015**

*Transcript by*

*Noble Transcription Services*

*Murrieta, CA*

ERIC BELLINO: Thanks, everyone, for joining us, and we're going to kick things right off here. If you need anything, let us know through that welcome chat or through the chat window that's on your screen. And we're going to go ahead and move over to our presentation format so we can kick things off today.

I do want to welcome you to today's Workforce Employment Networks Supporting Career Pathways for People with Disabilities webinar. Again, I'm going to bring that welcome chat back up. In case you need anything, let us know in that welcome chat, but also make sure you introduce yourself before we move to the main portion of today's event.

Again, just go ahead and let us know where you're located, how many people are joining you, your organization or group, and how many happen to be with you today, if you are in a group.

All right. Without any further ado, I'm going to turn things over to our moderator today to kick things off. Our moderator is Kim Vitelli, the deputy administrator with the Employment and Training Administration. Kim, take it away.

KIM VITELLI: Thanks, Brian, and hello, everybody. Employment networks under Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program provide employment and training services based on the needs of an individual with disabilities who receives Social Security benefits, in other words, the things that American job centers already do.

With division of WIOA and the requirements of WIOA such as unified planning, integrated information, integrated services for customers, the employment networks provide a greater opportunity to bring in funds, ticket payments, to your center.

Successful Ticket to Work programs and employment networks can help you expand the capacity of your center to include more of your community and work in career pathways. If your career center's focus is on customer service and the successful inclusion of people with disabilities and employment and training services and career pathways offered through your center, then the ticket payments generated by the Workforce Employment Network will strengthen your job center.

Workforce areas are already doing this now, which our presenters will be covering. If your career center's focus, however, is just on making money for an agency or as a program, then it's more difficult, but we trust that your focus is on customer service. Workforce employment network operations are most successful when the focus is on patients, partnerships, and customer service.

With that I'd like to hand it over to Miranda Kennedy who's our director of training and technical assistance for the Disability Employment Initiative grantees who have been piloting, incorporating Workforce Employment Network operations into the career centers. Miranda?

MIRANDA KENNEDY: Thank you, Kim, and hello, everyone. We're so pleased to have so many of you joining us from across the public workforce system and across the country today.

As Kim shared, we'll be presenting today on Workforce Employment Network supporting career pathways for people with disabilities. This webinar is based on the lessons we've learned over the past five years in our work through the Disability Employment Initiative, incorporating the Ticket to Work and employment network operations into the flow of customer service in the American job centers that serve as our DEI-implementing sites.

In addition to focusing on career pathways, this is an approach that will certainly support the increased focus under WIOA to address the specific needs of people with disabilities who may experience additional challenges to employment. We're really looking forward to sharing what we've learned with you today.

So here's what we hope you can expect to get out of this webinar, information on how your Workforce Employment Network, EN, activity, if you already have one or if you're considering becoming on, strengthens access to career pathways. Additionally, information on how you can use the flexible resources generated by your EN to address gaps in your service system. That's right, folks. These are flexible resources. This is great stuff. And finally, of course, very, very importantly, the importance of benefits planning and asset development in career pathways.

So during today's presentation my colleague Doug Keast with a little bit of support from me and some final words from Kim in ETA, we're going to be walking through this agenda. The first item on our agenda is Workforce Innovations and Opportunity Act vision and career pathways. Then we'll be talking about lessons learned in Workforce Employment Network operation. Of course we'll be talking about customer service and making connections and then finally how success as a Workforce Employment Network will increase access to career pathways for others.

So now, I'd like to introduce my colleague and our key presenter for today, Doug Keast. Doug is the project lead for the National Disability Institute with the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center, which is capping his career in the employment and disability arena since 1979. He started his career working in sheltered workshops and coordinated a supported employment program for seven years, and Doug provided technical assistance to county officials operating cooperative funding projects with vocational rehabilitation services to expand supported employment in Iowa.

When WIA was implemented, Doug served on the team in Iowa that developed the local WIB, facilitated strategic planning, and developed the memoranda agreement between WIBs and the service entities in their communities. He's also served as the Ticket to Work coordinator on the National Disability Institute's DEI – that's the Disability Employment Initiative – team providing support to our DEI states and projects that are operating employment networks.

As a member of a collaborative state agency initiative, Doug participated in the implementation of grant projects from CMS, RSA, SSA, and DOL. He coordinated Iowa's implementation of the work incentive grant, the Disability Program Navigator Initiative, the work incentive planning and assistance, and the Disability Employment Initiative.

And through this process Doug has shared that what he has learned is that it's more important to be together than to be right. And in the course of these initiatives Doug has been involved with the growth of the Ticket to Work and the Workforce Employment Network as an important strategy to build capacity within the workforce system in meeting the objectives of workforce boards to include individuals with disabilities in the industry of their communities.

And at NDI Doug serves as a specialist in employment network operations. He also happens to have a graduate degree in vocational rehabilitation placement from Duke University.

So really I tell you all of this about Doug because I think it's important for you to know that Doug's walked a mile in your shoes, and he brings with him a deep understanding and appreciation for the mission that you all are tasked with both under WIA and now WIOA related to serving people with multiple challenges. And he's here today to bring you a strategy incorporating Ticket to Work and employment network services into your customer flow, which can help you achieve your mission.

So with that, I'd like to I believe hand it over to Doug.

DOUG KEAST: Well, thank you so much, Miranda. And it's great to be here and of course to see so many of you that are both old friends and new friends as we look at the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act.

To start with I'd like to mention that within the vision of the Workforce Investment Act or WIA it was inherent that all job seekers would be engaged in a common labor exchange service system that would be service rather than program oriented. All would have access to the same services and the same employment opportunities. This includes individuals and what we came to call our targeted populations. Disability and poverty tend to co-occur in almost all of the targeted populations that we speak of.

Because the vision of the Workforce Investment Act was not achieved with the implementation, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act or WIOA has made it clear in the language of the act that its intention is to fully include people with disabilities in all of the activities and services of an American job center.

Within the act itself it is suggested to local workforce development boards that they consider establishing a board committee to include disability and workforce experts to advise the board in strategies to increase the inclusion of people with disabilities in employment. There's also stronger emphasis on physical and program accessibility in the job centers, charging the state offices to monitor access annually.

WIOA also requires states and regions to use quarterly performance data to evaluate success and including people with disabilities successfully in employment. This means not only will workforce development boards be looking at performance data for all customers but also for those who've disclosed disability separately.

Unified planning is established to support the vision of WIOA through the establishment of common strategies and activity oversight and reduce the sense of separate accountability by program that tends to galvanize the steel in the walls of the siloes.

Should the unified planning across agencies result in shared objectives and strategies among those agencies as well as a common service flow, the inclusion of targeted populations and job center services will be more likely as everyone coming in the door is seen as our customer and not a question of who to refer them to.

All told, the vision of customer service in WIOA is a wonder to behold for those of you who have worked with targeted populations that have not only found the warm reception in job centers in the past. States and regions that recognize the guidance in this vision as an opportunity to strengthen the job center will be successful in approaching that vision, but those who focus more on compliance will not.

Miranda, looks like it's poll time.

MS. KENNEDY: All right. It does look like it is poll time. So all right. Our first polling question out of three polling questions to get some audience participation today, the question is, how many times is the word disability or disabilities mentioned in WIOA? So either the singular or the plural, the combination of the two, what do you think? So here are your options. The first option is 28 times. The second option is 105 times. The third is 323, or the fourth is 412.

MR. BELLINO: All right. And it looks like most of you have already discovered how to vote in a poll or you've done this with us before, but feel free to go ahead and click the radio button next to your choice. We want to know how many times is the word disability or disabilities mentioned in the WIOA. Go ahead and choose 28, 105, 323, or 412. Looks like many of you have already voted, but if you haven't, go ahead and vote now by clicking one of those radio buttons. And Miranda, I'll pass it back to you to comment on what you're seeing so far.

MS. KENNEDY: OK. What I'm seeing so far is that many of you are recognizing it was probably mentioned more than 28 times, and I will give you a hint and say that is correct. Sorry for the two of you who thought it was maybe 28 times. It's quite a bit more than that, which we're happy about, anyway.

So it's actually – you know what, I'm impressed because, yeah. The majority of you are getting it right. We've got – it looks like we've got 37 folks who are saying it was option number three, 323 times, and that is true. Disability is stated 99 times, and disabilities is – (inaudible) – 24 times. So Doug, if you want to make any comment about that, but I think I'm impressed. Maybe some of you counted it, and that's how you know. Probably not.

MR. KEAST: Well, no. No. That is really, really significant that it is mentioned a lot, and I think a lot of times we do – we did through WIA a lot talk about thinking if we talk about all customers, that includes people with disabilities. But I think we learned over the years with the WIA implementation that we really did need to make a little bit of an extra effort to make sure that the job center is responsive to those job seekers with disabilities as well. So thank you very much.

MS. KENNEDY: Yes. Thank you, everyone, for participating in that with us. And yeah, 323 times.

So we think that speaks to the importance of this. We do want to talk about here the proposed rule a little bit. I know Doug talked a little bit about WIOA, but we felt like this was worth covering a little bit again for all of you to just set the foundation and leading into the employment network and how this fits in.

But here's an excerpt from the proposed rule, which is, as all of you know, what ETA is thinking and what's been proposed so far. It's being commented on, so here's the excerpt from that summary, and we feel that it's important.

So the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; joint rule for unified and combined state plans, the performance accountability, and the One-Stop system joint provisions; Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

So it says here that, "WIOA strengthened the alignment of the workforce development system’s six core programs by imposing unified strategic planning requirements, common performance accountability measures, and requirements governing the One-Stop delivery system. In so doing, WIOA placed heightened emphasis on coordination and collaboration at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure a streamlined and coordinated service delivery system for job seekers, including those with disabilities, and employers." So again, including those with disabilities and employers.

So think about this. This is part of WIOA that's very different than WIA. Wagner-Peyser, workforce, VR, and education are going to need to reach consensus around unified strategic planning and common performance and accountability measures. How many roadblocks to services are encountered by customers with multiple challenges to employment because providers don't communicate with each other and because the timelines and outcome structures don't align?

How much of your time and customer service has been spent struggling with these issues? More than that, how relevant can your service delivery components be toward the development of a service delivery model in which the strategies and the outcomes are aligned? The opportunities for you to effect this change in this kind of environment could be off the chart, but let's continue by taking another look at the next slide here.

Now, this is a clarification of WIOA Section 188, a section that should be familiar to some of you. Hopefully many of you will be becoming more familiar with that from WIA, and it had a very similar section of the same number. So let's read this piece here.

So "How are One-Stop centers and One-Stop delivery systems certified for effectiveness, physical and programmatic accessibility, and continuous improvement? They must also include evaluations of how well the one-stop centers ensures equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities to participate in or benefit from One-Stop center services. These evaluations must include criteria evaluating how the centers and delivery systems take actions to comply with the disability-related regulations implementing WIOA Section 188, set forth at 29 CFR Part 37."

So I think you're probably all starting to see what the lead up is here with the employment network piece. From this excerpt we can glean that, like providers who receive WIA funding, WIOA providers will have a set of accessibility standards that will need to be complied with in order to receive WIOA funding.

And those of you who had the opportunity to participate with your EEOCs around the Section 188 inspection process at the center or regional level will know just what this is referring to; right? But for those who might not have a hands-on experience, let's continue to look at the guidance.

So according to NPRM, such actions include, but are not limited to, one, providing reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities. That's upon request and this is quite like WIA, but, as some of you know, this is deceptively simple statement that refers to a complicated process that's unique to each customer and endlessly challenging to apply in a consistent and effective way.

But let's move on to number two, making reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures, where necessary, to avoid discrimination against persons with disabilities. Additionally, administering programs in the most integrated setting appropriate and communicating with persons with disabilities as effectively as with others and then finally, providing appropriate auxiliary aids and services, including assistive technology devices and services, where necessary, to afford individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in and enjoy the benefits of the program or activity.

Probably that final one about the auxiliary aids, the assistive technology, these kinds of accommodations, that might be what most of you are familiar with in terms of serving people with disabilities in the career centers. But I'm going to hand things over to Doug at this point.

I think this hopefully helps set the stage a little bit with WIOA in terms of where we're going to be going with how the employment network operations can be incorporated into your customer flow and part of your services, not a set-aside, not a separate program, but integrated into that and help you achieve all of these things.

So Doug, I hope I've set you up OK, and I'll hand it to you.

MR. KEAST: Well, thank you so much for that background, Miranda. I really appreciate it, but I'm going to have to start off with a little bit of a caveat here. We all know now from kind of looking at the list of those of you that are on this webinar that there are people with us that already know a lot about the Workforce Employment Networks and quite a few of you who maybe are just starting to get acquainted with what the Ticket to Work is all about.

One thing I wanted to mention is on this webinar we're not going to be showing you how your job center can become an employment network or go into a lot of the technical details about what employment network operation is all about, but we do have some excellent resources to share with you to support you with those steps.

As you know more about the Ticket to Work program in the collaborative service delivery vision of WIOA, you will recognize that this connection will allow your job center leadership to increase the capacity at the job center to increase employment outcomes for job seekers with disabilities and all job seekers, for that matter.

This will be through the generation of a new flexible funding resource that will be generated to start with from outcomes that you're already achieving with people that you're already serving. Wise investments of these resources will add tools and expertise to your job center that increases ability to serve more individuals in your community.

We've listed a couple of resources here at the bottom of this slide, and they're listed again with a couple of others toward the end too. And if you're looking at how to get started operating as an employment network, this is a good place to go, these links.

As a job center established through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act, we do want you to be aware that you're already qualified to operate as an employment network with the Social Security Administration.

MR. BELLINO: I'm sorry to interrupt. Could you just speak up a bit?

MR. KEAST: Oh, OK. OK.

MR. BELLINO: That's good. Yeah. That's very much.

MR. KEAST: Yeah. Thank you. We will, though, hit on a few basic things before getting into WIOA. These terms and references, EN or employment network, ticket, so a Ticket to Work, and Ticket to Work payments all come through the Ticket to Work legislation that allows the Social Security Administration or SSA to become a significant partner to workforce boards and job center leadership and job center operation.

SSA will provide payments to employment networks that assist beneficiaries in becoming independent of their disability benefits. Beneficiaries of SSA disability benefits between the ages of 18 and 64 and a half will generally have tickets or be considered ticket holders. There are already many of these ticket holders coming into your job centers for assistance to go to work, and you are already helping them.

To become an employment network or an entity recognized as one that they can provide payments to as folks that they serve become independent of benefits your job center can enter into an agreement with the Social Security Administration. It takes a while to develop the collaborative local partnerships that make the job center as a whole responsive to these ticket holders and effectively integrate the employment network tracking and ticket assignment processes into the job center operation.

But within a year or so your job center can start receiving payments from SSA as ticket holders go to work and meet personal milestones. SSA does provide these payments to the job center with the idea that they can be reinvested into the center to build the capacity to serve people with disabilities, but the funds come to the center with no strings attached. Those that invest wisely will see their payments grow. Those that use them to buy carpet and chairs for the conference room probably won't.

A major structural component common throughout all titles of WIOA is the career pathways. With WIA the emphasis was on the job center becoming the lifelong resource for job seekers and industry. With the construct of the career pathway, an outline is established for stronger labor exchange strategy that will support the growth of local industry and more successfully engage citizens of the community in that industry.

In WIOA workforce development boards are supported in identifying the key business sectors tied to the economy of their regions and in developing strategies that will support their growth and success.

Defining the pathways within those sectors becomes a shared responsibility of workforce and education so that the resources that will support the development of both experience and preparation are clearly identified and shared as desk aids for employment specialists of all community employment agencies. This is important because a common means of supporting the success at these businesses across agencies is more effective and improves the quality of access to job opportunities for targeted service populations.

As your board and workforce and education leadership builds the career pathway through the guidance of the businesses in your career sector, a range of roles and occupations within that sector define themselves in terms of experience and education needed in order to perform in specific jobs.

Your employment counselors and specialists will understand the same off ramps and onramps in that career pathway. In healthcare, for instance, it is common to consider entry level positions and then what an individual can do later. Like if an individual becomes a certified nursing assistant or CNA, who employs CNAs and where can a person get that certification?

If a person wishes, they can then work as a CNA but also understand what you can do further up that pathway and how one can continue to travel it. Over the period of time, should one choose to continue, she can acquire a number of stackable credentials that will increase her work and career options. Now, I think it's time for another poll.

MS. KENNEDY: Oh, good. OK. Hi, everyone. So here's our next poll with your best, most educated guesses you can come up with. In 2014, in the state of Iowa – that's where Doug is from – 89,628 people came into job centers for assistance. Of those that disclosed disability, how many were ticket holders? So your options are 59, 235, 672, 912, or 1,367. And you can thank Doug for these fanciful numbers.

MR. BELLINO: All right. Great. And again, just like last time, go ahead and click the radio button now next to your choice of preference. So you have five options. Go ahead and choose the one that you think is the right one. It looks like many of you have voted, but if you haven't voted yet, go ahead and click that radio button now.

MS. KENNEDY: I got to just say with the preliminary answers coming in here, I'm so impressed that we've got a – you know what, there really is something to the wisdom of crowds, isn't there? All right, guys. I'll go ahead and let you off the hook. Does look like the majority is getting this right with the majority of folks saying it is number five. That is true, 1,367 or 1.525 percent of all job seekers coming into the center.

So the natural incidents of disability in the general population is roughly 18 to20 percent, and it's likely that the incidents of disability is greater among those that come into job centers due to the increased assistance needed to meet a career objective. Now, depending on disclosing, that's a different story; right? But a small part of that group of people with disabilities coming into the door would be SSA disability beneficiaries that are participating in the Ticket to Work program, but this would be more than you might think.

If your career center is able to identify these ticket holders, there's sufficient numbers to generate revenue and new flexible funding for your job center to increase its ability to respond to job seekers with disabilities and with significant disabilities as well. So I'm going to go ahead and, with that, hand things back over to Doug again. Doug.

MR. KEAST: Well, thank you very much, and I think you guys – I think some of you have maybe heard me talk about some of these things before because you're doing really good on the polls. The other thing I would add to that too is that, from that bit of research that we were able to do in 2014, we only checked the people that disclosed disability to see how many they were – how many of them were ticket holders. It's likely that there was more than that, but we didn't check folks that didn't disclose disability.

Anyway, moving on to your job center. A major structural component common throughout all titles of WIOA – oh, I'm sorry. Forget that part.

WIOA has identified core and required agencies for inclusion in the job center system, and certainly workforce development boards have flexibility to add more key community agencies to that system to strengthen the board strategies. The leadership of your community's education system and workforce system will be key in outlining and maintaining the local career pathways for all participating partners in that system.

It is important in meeting the business needs of your community to strengthen this pathway structure and support all community employment agencies in using it. It's important to think of labor exchange as a pipeline of talent and skill to meet the needs of the business sector in your community.

In the past separate agencies will all try to create their own pipelines separately with the business community, and problems with that have been twofold. Businesses have not been pleased with working with multiple placement specialists from multiple agencies, and some agencies have not successfully developed pipelines with some business sectors, so customers of that agency would not have the same access to the same jobs as others would.

If we substitute the pipeline metaphor with the career pathway and make it a common pathway for all job center partner agencies, we'll be more successful with our business customers and establish a system where all qualified potential job candidates have the same access to job opportunities.

For all agencies should be able to feed from the same trough, three things are advised. We suggest common desk aids for employment specialists of all partner agencies so that the career pathway information is common across agencies.

Integrated service flow, finding ways to have a common service flow in the job center through which the diverse expertise of the different partnering agencies can be effectively engaged. Engagement, rather than referral, should be what we work for. Counting referrals is like counting business cards that you give away. Until you're working together and sharing customers, it doesn't matter.

What is a job center in the WIOA vision? Is it the Wagner-Peyser services in the WIOA and all dislocated worker and youth services? No. It's the combined services of all of the WIOA required partner agencies coordinated through your local leadership into a service flow that is simple and easy to navigate by your job seeking and business customers.

In this vision the job center is also an employment network, rather than one of the partners being the employment network or the employment network being a separate service or program located within the center. This presentation will not go into the details, again, or technical components of the employment network operation, but we'll focus on its operation relative to the overall job center operation and relevant to career pathways.

Through the coordinative service flow established by your leadership, the partner agencies include SSA disability beneficiaries and their services, and the outcomes that they experience together generates a flexible funding resource that comes to the job center.

Using the diverse expertise of the different partner agencies and community leadership on the workforce development board, these resources can be invested in ways in which the job center will be strengthened in responding to the support needs of more job seekers in the future and prove to become more successful at including job seekers with disabilities in career pathways.

The Disability Employment Initiative has identified several key strategies that can be included as value added tools in the job center. These strategies can be added to job center activity without a DEI or Disability Employment Initiative as well.

MS. KENNEDY: OK. Is it up to me now, Doug, because I got to say I think that's a lot of great prelude and I can't wait for this next piece where we're going to talk about lessons learned and Workforce Employment Network, EN, operation?

So with that, I know Doug said that certainly these strategies can be added to the job center activity without a DEI as well, but here's what we've learned from the DEI. And just many of you hopefully have heard about the DEI. I'm going to give you a very quick high level overview of the DEI, and then we're going to get into these lessons learned through the DEI.

So the U.S. Department of Labor's been partnering with states to implement the Disability Employment Initiative with 43 projects in 27 states since 2010 to the tune of almost $110 million.

And through the experience of these states in operating employment networks, this is what we've come to in terms of the following promising practices that we've recognized. And the EN operation in the career centers was a required component for that. So with that, I'll go ahead and hand it over to Doug.

MR. KEAST: OK. Thank you. Well, now, we're going to talk about some of the promising practices from the Disability Employment Initiative that we've noted, and we realize that not everybody has had the experience of having a Disability Employment Initiative in their region and in their – we're going to be referring to some things that were resources through the grant or initiative that made possible to get some things started.

But we believe that by sharing some of the outcomes of those things that are able to be sustained by the ticket payments that come to them as they hit that sustainability level, you might be able to recognize through some of the suggestions we make towards the end of this presentation how you can start to build to a level to support those activities without a Disability Employment Initiative.

So the first things that we want to talk about are the things at the state level that we're seeing in specific states where there is sustainable DEI activity. And the promising practices start with a strong collaboration at a local level that will make the overall service system easier to access and navigate by people with disabilities can be easier to achieve if modeled and encouraged by state level agencies.

If the key state agencies for workforce, education, disability, and human services come together to provide guidance to local offices and workforce boards, it's easier for local staff and managers to build those bridges.

Since vocational rehabilitation agencies also operate as employment networks separately, they can still strengthen the job center's employment network by serving as an operating partner of the Workforce Employment Network, and they will benefit in the long run as well through their participation in the career pathway efforts in their region.

So of course this partnership begins with the activity of their state agency in developing a partnership plus agreement with their workforce partners that outlines how the service coordination and ticket assignment activity will work between agencies. The willingness of the state level VR leadership and representatives of the state workforce agency and other partner agencies to meet with local leadership to explore how this works to everyone's benefit, especially the job seekers, is a valuable investment of their time.

On this in the next few slides we list some of the practices we've noted in very successful Workforce Employment Networks. Having a single integrated customer service flow for job seekers makes the process less complicated for customers and staff.

Working to integrate the administrative processes of the employment network operation into the service flow rather than operating as a separate program generates stronger outcomes because ultimately it is the collaborative job center services that are the most important in supporting the disability beneficiary in meeting their career objective.

Having the investment to the workforce development board and the leadership of key job center and other community partners establishes a valuable resource in the diverse expertise of these various entities in successful EN operation and wise investment of the ticket payment so the job center continues to grow.

The most successful strategies demonstrated by successful employment networks in connecting with SSA disability beneficiaries lie in identifying those that are already coming in the door and in working with community partners to present accurate information in the community about work activities and disability benefits.

The role of the disability resource coordinator is important to the successful integration of the employment network into the overall job center operation. Having a disability subject matter expert operating as a part of the center's customer service team places them in the position to be a connector and problem solver for job seekers and to also be able to support the other team members in building their skills and confidence in using the new tools and strategies modeled in the DEI to more successfully include people with disabilities in services.

The DRC also facilitates the collaborative local leadership in their oversight of the EN operation as well as working to build connections between programs and agencies, making it possible for a job seeker to benefit from multiple services at the same time.

It is interesting that still with the guidance provided by all of the federal agencies, there are still some staff and some programs that do not believe it is their job to include people with disabilities in their services.

Part of the successful DRC activity includes providing orientation to job center staff of all programs with regard to the federal guidance on job center operations as well as information that supports them in more effective ways serving individuals with specific types of disabilities. Certainly this is critical in helping individuals with disabilities to access the career pathway opportunities in the region.

It is also widely recognized now that adding Social Security disability benefits planning and advisement skills to the ability of the DRC in the job center translates in successful Workforce Employment Network outcomes. Most of the DEI Workforce ENs that have proven to be able to sustain their DEI activity after the grant have added this expertise to their DRC role.

The same things that support a job center in embracing the DEI strategies collaboratively also impact the outcomes of an employment network. If the disability resource coordinator and job center leadership have the opportunity to orient all job center staff on the use of assistive technology, access to service in WIOA Section 188, tips in serving specific populations, and demonstrated DEI strategies, people are more comfortable including people with disabilities in their services.

Where the partner agencies established a common strategy to meet the needs of the businesses in the community, instead of each agency approaching businesses separately, we expect to see greater opportunity for individuals in partnered populations for employment options.

The areas in which asset coalitions have been developed and established financial coaching resources in job centers have added value to the services of all job customers. Along this line, many job centers are looking at increasing financial literacy into their job seeker workshops as a survival skill.

All of these promising practices add values to the supports of the job center. If the center can establish common tools for the access of the career pathway, then the opportunities are available to everyone.

And then I'd like to add just a few more thoughts as we wrap up the policy and practices section here. Workforce regions have demonstrated that the strategies of the Disability Employment Initiative can be sustained without grant funding, but it takes a local employment network about five to six years to get there. So patience and long-term planning is important.

When a job center establishes a culture of sharing customers, resources, and information across programs, the WIOA performance measures then reflect the efforts of all of the partners in the center. For more information on employment network operation, technical assistance can be found with the Social Security Administration's team of EN specialists at enservice@ssa.gov.

MS. KENNEDY: All right. Now, we're going to talk about customer service and making connections as we move into our next agenda item. And I guess, Doug, a quick break to take a sip of water before he dives into this. Here you go, Doug.

MR. KEAST: Thank you, Miranda. Just like the WIOA vision, it's all about customer service.

The objective is to use the same tools and resources in the job center for those with disabilities that everyone else uses, and they have new ones that prove to be beneficial as you develop new resources within your employment network operation and connecting future job candidates to the career pathways of their choice. We've got a couple of examples we want to share with you, and we want to start with Martha in New York.

Martha came in to the job center and had an opportunity to meet with Lorraine Bush, who works on the center service team. Martha tells Lorraine that she wants to reenter the workforce but in the healthcare career pathway. She does have a work history, but it is in the human services field. In her last position she developed some mental health challenges and left her employment, and now she hasn't worked for 11 years.

Lorraine provided some initial assessment with Martha and identified Martha as a ticket holder. This means that Martha was on Social Security disability benefits, in her case SSDI or Social Security Disability Insurance. And there are a lot of rules around the benefits and how they're impacted by income.

As Lorraine has been trained to provide counseling and support to disability beneficiaries seeking employment, she was able to provide benefits advisement to Martha so that Martha would understand the impact of income on her benefits and the various work incentives and healthcare options available to her. Martha established a work plan with Lorraine and identified her career objective in healthcare.

Because Martha's been out of the mainstream for a while, the first part of her plan was to establish opportunities for her to be out and around other people more. As Martha was completing a skill-based job search in healthcare opportunity, healthcare recruiting came up. She landed the job as a part-time healthcare recruiter with a staffing agency.

Now, it should be noted here that Lorraine is a member of a job center service team and she has background in disability but Martha is served by a team of folks from different agencies. As a result of Lorraine's presence, the other staff have gained confidence in including individuals with mental illness and other disabilities in their service.

Now, we'll get back to Martha here. Once they found a position as a part-time healthcare recruiter, they then identified roles that she could grow into from there. Martha's work as a part-time recruiter led her to some adjunct teaching assignments at a local college, which in the end helped her with her recruiting job too because she could recruit some of her students.

Martha was still on a career pathway, however, and completed training to become a certified medical coder. She received assistance from the job center to complete online courses and complete the certification testing. She parlayed the combination of that skill and her previous experience to secure a job as a clinical educator and is now making $75,000 a year.

Martha was fortunate to visit a center that sustained value added tools and expertise to activity generated from their operation as an employment network. The job center identified ways to engage Martha in the healthcare career pathway using a variety of stepping stones or onramps and off ramps over a period of several years.

She used these trips on and off the career pathway to meet her career objective as it is for now. Should she wish, she has the options to go further down this pathway. As a result of the ticket assignment, the job center will generate up to $25,000 over the next four years. These outcomes, along with those of other ticket holders served in the center, will be reinvested to increase the capacity of the job center to include people with disabilities in career pathways.

Now, we're going to talk about Joe in Iowa. Joe came to the center with an interest in skilled trades. He is 25 years old. Joe had a head injury when he was 19, and his communication style is still the same as if he was 19 years old. He also had an OWI, operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated. At the center Joe met Brian Dennis who has some disability subject matter expertise and coordinates the integration of the employment network into the job center services.

Joe established a service plan at the center, which included benefits planning assistance provided by Brian he assigned his ticket. Like Lorraine in New York, Brian's presence on the job center service team provides the other partner staff the confidence to include individuals with disabilities in their services. And the services provided to Joe are provided by a team, not just Brian.

Given Joe's interest in the building trades, the service team supported him in getting a part-time position at Lowe's where he would be working around building materials and have direct interaction with people working in skilled trades. In addition, the opportunity to be working part-time supported him in paying off his fees and getting his driver's license.

Consultation with building trades apprenticeship programs revealed that having an OWI in his background would not be a barrier for him in finding work or completing the program, but not being able to drive would be a barrier. A lot of work that apprentices start off with at the job site involves driving, such as going to Lowe's to pick up materials.

Joe connected with the plumbers and steamfitters and now has a plumber's apprenticeship and is in that career pathway. This is early in his service history, about nine months, but his work activity will start his path to self-sufficiency in addition to his career objective.

As noted before, one of the results of Joe's disability has been that his communication style is still consistent with a 19-year-old, complete with the use of sometimes expletives inappropriately during periods of stress or frustration. There is a little bit more tolerance of this in the building trades than maybe in a life insurance office but at the same time he has been immediately corrected by team lead members when his reactions are out of place and Joe's responded very well to this correction.

Brian continues to support Joe with the benefits planning assistance, and they're looking at over the next five to six years the workforce board will generate $25,000 from the Social Security Administration as a result of Joe moving off of dependency on a Social Security Administration disability benefits. The board and the leadership team will invest these incentives back into the job center system in order to expand its capacity to include more people with disabilities in the region's career pathways.

MS. KENNEDY: All right. So now, we're going to talk about how success as a Workforce Employment network will increase access to career pathways for others. And apparently, according to our graphic, the sky is the limit here, Doug. Let's see.

But first of all, we're going to do another poll. This is our final poll with all of you today. So here's the polling question. How many states have regions that are at or close to the ability to sustain a full-time disability resource coordinator? I'll give you a clue. We had 27 states that have had Disability Employment Initiative grant funding.

OK. So out of those 27 states, how many have regions that are at or close to the abilities to sustain a full-time disability resource coordinator and use the DEI strategies of integrated resource team and asset development to support career pathway access using Ticket to Work payments? That's quite the question there. Your options are 0, 1, 5, 8, or 12.

MR. BELLINO: All right. You should all be polling experts by now. So impress us again with your savvy, and go ahead and click the radio button next to the choice of – that you think is the correct choice. And again, many of you have already voted, but if you did not yet vote, please vote now.

MS. KENNEDY: Oh, looks like it's kind of close to a tie in the last two. Oh, let's see. All right. Yeah. You guys won out by another slim margin. The wisdom of the crowd, it is true. The correct answer is 8 out of our 27 states that we are aware of. Now, this information comes through data reported by states in the DEI. So there were four states out of our 28 – or 27 – sorry – New York, Tennessee, Florida, and Iowa, that had regions operating at this level by the end of their initial DEI grant.

So that was by the end of their three years of grant funding under the DEI. Four more, Alaska, California, Massachusetts, and Virginia, have regions that have picked up momentum since the end of their DEI initiative because, like Doug said, doesn't take three years to get this up and running. It takes a little longer than that; right? And so they're showing the potential to become sustainable and continue to grow this resource to increase the capacity of their centers to respond to job seekers with disabilities.

So in addition, we've talked with DEI leads and other members of state leadership in additional states that have made strong progress in the past year and will soon be joining the ranks of those eight states in building the capacity of workforce centers through the integration of employment network activity because, again, like Doug said before, this is not a separate program. It's not a silo. It's part and parcel of the services at the career center, and it's incorporated throughout. Right, Doug?

MR. KEAST: That's right. And one of the really reinforcing things for us is, when we started the Disability Employment Initiative, it was a theory that you could – that a workforce board could use an employment network to sustain this kind of activity. But it's being established now that there are a number of Workforce Employment Networks that are doing that now and doing it successfully.

And I know Miranda mentioned eight states. There are a few others that are picking up some momentum with the activity that they started as well too. So that part is fun to watch. Thank you, Miranda.

Getting back to paying it ahead to increase opportunities, of course the focus of this is how does it fit in with the career pathway efforts and strategies of your workforce board and your workforce leadership?

And of course in these two examples with Martha and Joe, they've helped demonstrate how two different workforce regions in two different states used the services necessary for the employment network success to engage people with disabilities in local career pathways. This success creates new unrestricted resources for the workforce development board to make it possible for others like Joe and Martha to access the same or other career pathways that are in those regions.

As you get started with your center's employment network operation, there are some things that your leadership team can consider investing in right away as the payments start coming in. Generally, we suggest that you hang on to the payments generated during the year so that you can look at the total amount in June or July and develop kind of a budget that you can use for the next year. And ideas that you might consider for your first project year, we've put them together here.

You can provide physical and program access training to all of your job center staff. There are many great reasons for doing this. Of course there's compliance with the Section 188, which is very important, and with your job center certification, but even better reasons are the impact that it provides your center's ability to include people with disabilities as a result of the shared discussions that follow a good presentation of this information.

And this training can be followed by presentations from community partners on disability awareness and knowledge development that should be targeted to increase the comfort of all of our staff, including people with disabilities, and our services and our confidence that we can do it well.

If there's enough in resources that you can engage a partner staff person with this ability expertise to operate on the center service team and support the team and engage with people with disabilities and job center services in the operation of the employment network within the service flow, that is also shown to be beneficial in job center employment network operation.

You can look at your outreach information and indicate in it that your job center is an employment network. You could establish a leadership or a workforce development board committee that addresses the inclusion of people with disabilities in the region's career pathways, job center services in general, and with the employment network operation.

This committee can be where the contributions of all of the key partners and strategic community agencies can contribute to an employment network operation that results in the mutual benefit for the whole community.

You can look at how financial skills assessment is included in your center's staff assisted core service activity. The recognition of the importance of this focus for all targeted populations is growing, and we know that this personal skill and awareness is very important for Social Security Administration disability beneficiaries.

As you get going and the resources coming into your center start to increase more, your leadership might choose to add assistive technology to the center services that increases service accessibility for specific populations.

Work with the community services and financial institutions to utilize their expertise as an asset development to coalition. Establish workshops and community outreach events that focus on getting accurate information about income and Social Security disability benefits out to disability beneficiaries throughout your community.

Often it is the misinformation about income and the benefits that cause a beneficiary to decide to remain dependent on their benefits and continue living at a poverty level rather than to pursue a meaningful and rewarding career pathway. Through your leadership team, expand the customer sharing strategies across agency like the integrated resource team strategy. That will enhance the service economy and effectiveness of the impact of the separate agency services with your customers.

Once your Workforce Employment Network is really cooking, we encourage you to consider many of the DEI strategies that will continue to strengthen your capacity to include people with disabilities in career pathways and in your job center services in general. You can look at establishing a full-time disability resource coordinator on your service team, and then another thing that's strongly indicated by those regions that are sustaining that activity is to add disability benefits planning advisement to your job center services.

Even though there may be other community agencies that can provide the service, having this value added service available right in the center and used in the community outreach efforts and hand in hand with ongoing service engagement has proven beneficial in service outcomes with those DEI regions that are sustainable in their activity after the grant.

One of the benefits of a strong asset coalition can be the creation of financial coaching as a job center service. This is another value added tool that can benefit or be a benefit for all job seeking customers in terms of a successful career strategy.

And here we go to summary.

MS. KENNEDY: All right. Thank you, Doug, and thank you, everyone. Here we are. So just to kind of recap what we have covered so far and then we'll talk about resources and hand it over to Kim to give us some final words from ETA. But we covered quite a bit of ground in the last hour and four minutes.

We talked about the Workforce Innovations and Opportunity Act vision and career pathways. We talked about the lessons learned in Workforce Employment Network operation. We talked about customer service and making connections and had examples of those as well as how success as a Workforce EN will increase access to career pathways for others.

At the top of the hour Doug was talking about how this isn't a webinar to tell you how to become an employment network, but we do have resources here for you in case you're interested in that, in case that's not something you currently have in play in your career center. There are a number of really good resources to go get more information about becoming an employment network. There's the choose work site.

There's an introduction webinar to becoming an employment network. There's a guide to payments under the Ticket to Work program, which you may know you'll be interested in, as well as the payments at a glance resources. So please do download today's PowerPoint. That information will be there for you. And with that, I'd like to hand it over to Kim Vitelli for any final words she might have for us from ETA.

MS. VITELLI: Thanks, Miranda. Everyone, American job centers are already providing the services that Social Security Administration expects from their employment networks, particularly as job centers are increasingly using career pathways to help move all people but especially including people with disabilities into self-sustaining employment.

The models of career pathways and the models of employment networks really complement each other, and you don't have to be a DEI grantee to make this work. You likely already have the ingredients for success already in your job center and in your local service delivery strategies.

As states and local areas are developing customer-centered service designs and are more closely integrating multiple programs that serve people with disabilities, you'll be exceptionally well-prepared to be an employment network. And more importantly than just becoming an employment network, you'll be really well-prepared to achieve what we and Social Security are trying to achieve, which is self-sustaining employment for people with disabilities.

So I'm so gratified that Miranda and Doug were able to share a lot of the explanations about how these two – how all these different systems knit together to provide consistent and complementary services to people with disabilities.

You heard us mention career pathways a lot, and you're likely already very familiar with the career pathways framework. But if you'd like to learn more, you can also look on Workforce3One under communities and check out the career pathways community of practice. Thank you all for your work and for your attention, and we are really looking forward to seeing the fruits of all of your labor in the new world of WIOA.

I think we're moving soon into the question and answer period. So I'll let Brian explain how you can pose questions for all of us, and we'll be here waiting.

MR. BELLINO: Sure thing. Thanks, Kim. So we are going to invite you to ask any questions relative to today's content, if you have them. So we're going to move over to a format where we can address any questions related to what we talked about today.

So if you have those questions – I know we saw some comments come in, but we want to make sure we're addressing questions that go ahead and relate to the content of today's event. So if you have those questions or comments, go ahead and type them in now. We'll give you a minute to do that, if you have questions related to today's event.

Also, I want to remind folks that we do have – we are recording today's event. So if you'd like to come back and review this content, that will be posted in about two business days. Today's slides are available now from within the webinar room, and also we'll be posting a recording and a transcript on the Workforce3One website in about two business days. So definitely be on the lookout for that.

All right. Great. So I'm going to pass it back to the team just to go over anything we want to review here. I see one potential question here. A couple coming in. So thanks for that. Again, if you've got questions that you'd like to address to the team relative to what we talked about today, please go ahead and type those into the chat now.

MS. KENNEDY: All right. It looks like we have two questions here in the queue, and I'll go ahead and throw those out to Doug to share. We have about seven minutes left here. One individual asked, "Can you elaborate on what it means to be a ticket holder? This is a new term to me."

MR. KEAST: Well, that's a good question. With the Ticket to Work Act in about – this is 1999, 2000, Social Security Administration was starting to recognize that there were a lot of disincentives for people that were disability beneficiaries to go to work, and a lot of them was how complicated the rules were. So they made a lot of efforts to try to provide clear information to beneficiaries and to employment agencies that could be their partners in helping Social Security disability beneficiaries move off of benefits, recognizing that a lot of them could work but were nervous about going ahead and doing it.

What they did was they gave tickets to Social Security disability beneficiaries that were working age, both SSI and SSDI beneficiaries. And working age is considered 18 to 64 and a half. And upon receiving a ticket, those beneficiaries could turn around and assign it to an employment agency that was considered an employment network through an agreement with the Social Security Administration.

And in the last few years a number of workforce boards or workforce center systems have come together, have established themselves as employment networks, which is kind of a cool thing because with that vision of WIA and WIOA, they're already an employment network and been establishing that agreement with the Social Security Administration to take the tickets and work with those beneficiaries to support them to become independent of benefits in their vision.

MS. KENNEDY: And we have about three more minutes, and I just want to get to these other two or three questions real quick, Doug.

MR. KEAST: OK.

MS. KENNEDY: One question – and I'm going to skip to the last question we have because it piggybacks on the question you just answered. "How do you become an EN? Is it hard to be certified or workforce development boards are automatically an employment network?" I bet you can answer that pretty succinctly.

MR. KEAST: Yeah. Yes. It's pretty much a slam dunk for you, but you do need to contact one of the EN specialists at enservice@ssa.gov.

MS. KENNEDY: Great. The other questions – OK. I'll shoot this one to you. "What would a Workforce EN charge for CWIC services" – so that's certified work incentive coordinator services – "if these customers are not part of their customer base?"

MR. KEAST: Well, I'm not sure how they would not be part of their customer base because a job center is established to serve anybody looking for work in the community.

MS. KENNEDY: Right.

MR. KEAST: And I wouldn't suggest pursuing a course where you would be seeking to charge for those services.

MS. KENNEDY: The last and final question it looks like we have, "Do you have any ideas or insights as to why the four states have been so successful?"

MR. KEAST: I'd like to encourage you to talk to people from those four states about how they're doing it, but the promising practices that I talked about on those four or five slides, one of the promising practices at the state level and the other three or four on promising practices at the local level hit on things that are common among those successful employment networks. And that would be where I'd look.

MS. KENNEDY: Well, the other thing is the person who submitted this question is in luck because I just spoke with her this morning, and I work with two of those four states. I'd be happy to talk to you about this further. But yeah. For others who are interested in that, do check that out from Doug.

And also I think we have the contact information we can go to, Brian, on the slide there for anyone who wants to reach out with any additional questions. And any other questions that we have here that we might not have gotten to or had time to get to, if you want to shoot your e-mail to us with those questions, we'd be happy to follow up on that. And I think we can probably post that with the training from today.

And with that, seeing as how we only have one minute left and we definitely would love to get your feedback in the post-training survey which should only take you just a minute to complete, but that feedback is really important to us and helpful to us and we appreciate your time doing that.

So I'm going to hand it over to Brian. And thank you again, Doug and Kim, for today and for all of you for joining us for this discussion. We look forward to learning about what you do moving forward with this, and thank you for your time today.

(END)