**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Ticket to Work Program: An Aligned Mission with WIOA**

**Wednesday, September 12, 2018**

*Transcript by*

*Noble Transcription Services*

*Murrieta, CA*

JENNIFER JACOBS: So again, we want to welcome you to today's "Ticket to Work Program: An Aligned Mission with WIOA" webinar.

And now without further ado, I'd like to turn things over to our moderator today, David Jones, Workforce Analyst for the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. David?

DAVID JONES: Great. Thanks, Jen. And I hope everyone is enjoying these final days of summer. Today's webinar received strong interest with over 1,000 registrants, and I have to say we are very pleased to see these numbers on this very meaningful topic.

So thank you for taking the time to join us today. As you may recall, back in 2017, ETA issued joint interagency guidance on One-Stop Operations for the American Job Center Network. And in that guidance letter, we noted the role of the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program as an additional workforce system partner.

Today's webinar is to further highlight how we can work across government programs to be more aligned in support of WIOA as well as support the important mission to help people with disabilities return to work. So let's get started.

As many of you know, our country has been experiencing an increasing trend of the number of people applying for disability benefits. As of September 2017, it is estimated that 13.7 million people in the U.S. currently on SSDI or SSI disability benefits are eligible to participate in the Ticket to Work program.

This table currently before you puts a spotlight on the total number of ENs and the total number of workforce system ENs to administer the Ticket to Work program. In comparing the two columns, you will note the number of workforce ENs, total income, and tickets assigned have a significantly smaller margin within the overall total number of all ENs.

So we have an opportunity before us. Specifically, there is a unique opportunity for the American Job Center Network to become employment networks to address a national systemic challenge.

Today's webinar objectives are very straightforward. First, understand the goals and mission of the ticket program. Second, understand the administrative role of ENs and multiple different options available to administer. And, finally, understand the benefit to the American Job Center Network administering the ticket program.

To help us meet these objectives, we recruited a talented panel for you today. And in providing a macro perspective, we have two presenters. First, we have Ana Morales. Anna is an EN Development and Ticket Manager at the Social Security Administration. She leads a team of consultants providing training to ENs in state VR agencies across the country. Ana also plays a key role in helping strengthen the innovative Partnership Plus model across various states.

And we have Kevin Nickerson. Kevin is co-director of the American Dream Employment Network, also known as ADEN. And he is also a consultant to ETA. Kevin has over 20 years' experience providing support to the public workforce system and helping disability beneficiaries find jobs.

We will then drill it down to the important field level to highlight three different EN models that administer Ticket to Work. Lauren Parker will highlight the single-entity EN model to administer the ticket program. Lauren is currently a senior director for the SkillSource Group, a nonprofit serving the northern Virginia area where she served eight years supporting the Ticket to Work program. In this role, Lauren is responsible for ticket program management, reporting, and provide direct support in work incentives counseling.

And we have Brandi Brooks. Brandi will highlight the administrative EN model. Brandi is from Columbia, South Carolina where she joined the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce in 2014 as an intake coordinator. Earlier this year, she was promoted to become program manager, coordinator for the Ticket to Work program, and congratulations Brandi for that promotion. You should all know that Brandi is actually joining us offsite from her work location due to Hurricane Florence. She assured me she is currently safe and she really wanted to join us today. Brandi, thank you for your commitment and our thoughts and prayers are also with all of those in the path of the hurricane.

Now, today, both Lauren and Brandi both take a similar approach in their presentation by addressing questions to give us insights on their experience with the Ticket to Work program.

And, finally, we have Nancy Stensgard, who will highlight the EN provider affiliate model. Nancy is a disability resource coordinator at the Rural Minnesota Workforce Center in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. Nancy creatively applies her background as a social worker to serve as a bridge between people with disabilities seeking employment, with educators, state agencies, and local businesses. In Nancy's remarks, she will describe how her agency was phased with an operational transition and a decision their agency made to choose an EN model to meet their needs. Again, thank you to all of today's presenters.

At this point, I would like to turn it over to interagency leadership team from both the U.S. Department of Labor and Social Security Administration to also share opening remarks. First will be Patrick Mannix, who serves as senior advisor in DOL's ODEP office. And then we will have Robert Pfaff who serves as deputy associate commissioner at the Social Security Administration. Thank you both for joining us today. Patrick?

PATRICK MANNIX: Thank you, David. And thank you to the Employment and Training Administration and the WorkforceGPS team for inviting me to participate today. It's great to have today's webinar dedicated to such an important topic.

As David said, I am with the Office of Disability Employment Policy, or ODEP. ODEP is part of the U.S. Department of Labor. We are a nonregulatory federal agency. ODEP promotes policies and coordinates with employers in all levels of government to increase workplace success for people with disabilities.

Indeed, coordination is central to what we do. And two important examples of this are our partnerships with the Employment and Training Administration and Social Security, including and related to the American Job Centers and the Ticket to Work program.

In some ways, I like to think of ourselves as a bridge between two aligned missions, the AJC Network, funded by ETA, which, as you – we said is part of the labor department, exists to serve all job seekers. And the Ticket to Work program serves job seekers with disabilities in particular.

It only makes sense to align these efforts to be more efficient and more effective at the same time. It's about moving to a universal approach to employment and training services and workforce development, one that serves the needs of all Americans, one that empowers all Americans.

Becoming a public workforce employment network broadens in AJC's ability to fulfill its mission, and we know these employment networks have produced positive results for job seekers with disabilities, likely due to increased access to resources. Plus, workforce ENs clearly reflect the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's mandate to better coordinate employment programs and services.

They also reflect an important policy priority for this administration and that is increasing labor force participation among people with disabilities. At ODEP and the Department of Labor at large, we work to ensure that all Americans can gain skills and put them to work for the benefit of their families, their communities, and our nation's economy.

Related to this, last year we funded the evaluation of initiatives to improve adults employment opportunities for young recipients of supplemental security income, SSI. Through this project, we aim to build on existing research and lessons from the CEOs.

Specifically, we want to identify what new and follow-up research is needed as well as potentially replicable models for existing use SSI recipients or those at risk of becoming SSI recipients, transition to sustained, gainful employment.

Our goal is a strong and robust workforce and that means helping people find the path that's right for them. The Ticket to Work program is a key ally in this regard and a clear bridge between Social Security and Department of Labor's missions.

Now, we're going to hear more about how the program can help us both achieve our aims and better help Americans with disabilities contribute to our workforce and economy. At this point, I'm going to turn it over to my colleague, Robert Pfaff, at the Social Security Administration. Robert.

ROBERT PFAFF: Thank you, Patrick, and hello to you all. I am Robert Pfaff, Deputy Associate Commissioner at the Social Security Administration's Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support. I want to thank all of you for your participation today and I would like to especially thank the Department of Labor's Jennifer Sheehy, Patrick Mannix and David Jones for their incredible partnership in putting together today's important event.

I know I have a short amount of time, but as the SSA representative for the Ticket to Work program, I want to state how important this webinar is for returning our disabled beneficiaries back to work. A lot has changed in the Ticket program over recent years in terms of automation and other program enhancements.

Suffice it to say, it's not the Ticket to Work program you may have known in the past. Your organizations provide extremely valuable employment supports and services to the American public including SSA's disabled beneficiaries. SSA is committed to collaborating with your organizations to greatly expand the current number of quality employment network organizations providing these services.

I want to emphasize that we are here to support your participation and assist you in any way we can. Thanks again for your participation, and without further delay, I will turn it over to Ana.

ANA MORALES: Thank you, Rob. Good afternoon everybody. This is Ana Morales. I'll be co-presenting today with Kevin Nickerson.

KEVIN NICKERSON: Hi folks. Pleasure to be here with you today.

MS. MORALES: So let's go ahead and start with the overview of the Ticket to Work program. So what is the Ticket to Work program? It was established by the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999.

The goal of the program is self-sufficiency and reduced dependency on cash benefits, specifically social security, disability insurance and supplemental security income. Participation in the program is voluntary and free of charge to ticketholders.

Services for ticketholders are provided by employment networks and state vocational rehabilitation agencies. There are key stakeholders in the program and front and center is – are the ticketholders. These are beneficiaries, recipients of SSDI and/or SSI between the ages of 18 through 64. We have Social Security Administration, and specifically the Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support that oversees every aspect of the program.

We have employment networks who are entities approved by Social Security to provide or coordinate the delivery of employment-related services to ticketholders and state vocational rehabilitation agencies that automatically participate in the program since the beginning to serve ticketholders. And these particular organizations may choose to get paid under the program through cost reimbursement or operate as an EN.

And, finally, we have the ticket program manager, which is Maximus, the company that I'm representing. We manage the day-to-day administration of the Ticket to Work program for social security. Kevin, how would you describe the typical Ticket to Work customer?

MR. NICKERSON: Well, thanks, Ana. So who are the folks that are stepping up to the plate to try to achieve self-sufficiency? We're continually surprised by the talented individuals we serve, many of which have post-secondary education.

I would say well over half the individuals we're currently serving through ADEN have a college degree. I don't think any EN operator would disagree that more individuals have received disability benefits, SSDI, use Ticket to Work services.

I was able to pull some stats on this measure and nearly 78 percent of the individuals we serve through ADEN receive SSDI benefits. I'm sure this is in part due to the confidence they might have returning work given their previous work histories, which is how individuals become entitled to SSDI benefits.

Beneficiaries that use their ticket are most definitely motivated to achieve personal financial goals. The Ticket to Work program requires that individuals commit to the goal of self-sufficiency which ultimately leads to forgoing disability benefits.

As such, people are quite motivated to maintain work after leaving benefits roles and are quite happy to have increased income to count on which allows them to start saving, again, for their financial goals. Having worked as a certified work incentive advisor for many years, I know the primary concern of beneficiaries is loss of health care.

Knowledge of work incentives is extremely helpful in guiding beneficiaries who are making life-changing decisions about work and benefits. Many don't understand all the great incentives available to them through SSA including certain protections from Medicaid and generous periods of coverage for Medicare even after termination of benefits.

What we find is that when beneficiaries understand these incentives, they're more likely to pursue full-time work. If you're wondering if beneficiaries will use your services at the AJC after you become an EN, I can assure you they will and already are using your services.

Mathematica did some research in four states in 2001 to determine the rate and success of individuals with disabilities using AJC services, known as One-Stop services at the time of the study. What they found was interesting, and to summarize some of the key findings, I have a couple excerpts from the study I wanted to share.

First, average earnings of working SSA beneficiary One-Stop users were much greater than the average earnings of working SSA beneficiaries nationally. This bodes well for centers that become an employment network as this aligns so nicely with the earning goals of the Ticket to Work program.

Another important finding I thought I would share is that One-Stop users also left SSA disability roles at relatively high rates during the 12 months after exit from services. This is another indicator that potential success all workforce entities would have if operating as an employment network since the primary goal of the program is self-sufficiency.

To be clear, as an employment network, the goal is to help individuals lead the disability roles. This research showed that SSA disability beneficiaries using One-Stop services at the time of this study were achieving self-sufficiency.

Overall, the findings in this research suggest that although SSA beneficiaries represent only a tiny fraction of all One-Stop users, the One-Stop system is an important resource used by a large share of SSA beneficiaries interested in employment. Now, back to Ana.

MS. MORALES: Thank you, Kevin. So what are the benefits for the American Job Center Network to administer Ticket to Work? First, we have mission alignment. It is specifically assist with meeting the Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act requirement and is stressing the Partnership Plus collaboration with state vocational rehabilitation agencies.

SSA generates payments to employment networks for services provided to ticketholders once they've reached certain threshold, such as trial work level or substantial gainful activity. Flexibility, of course, by AJC to choose an employment network model that works best for them. No rigid cookie cutter approach when it comes to joining the Ticket to Work program.

AJC already service customers with disabilities and a percent of these customers are receiving SSA disability benefits. So no special outreach since you are already servicing these beneficiaries. We're going to move now to the employment network overview.

Employment networks are qualified organizations approved by Social Security to provide and coordinate services to ticketholders. ENs provide a variety of services but all of them must provide at least three core ones, which are career planning, job placement assistance, and ongoing employment support which are key for a beneficiary to return to work and stay employed.

Some examples of a public workforce EN could be an American Job Center, a state workforce agency, a state workforce development board, a local workforce development board, a vocational rehabilitation agency and the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Agency.

And as indicated before, at the end of fiscal year 2017, the program had 560 employment networks and 111 of them were workforce entities. As mentioned before, there is no cookie cutter approach when it comes to choosing a model and be part of the program.

Organizations can become a traditional EN, which is a standalone organization responsible of all the administrative duties when it comes to Ticket to Work programs plus the provision of services ticketholders.

Another option is the administrative EN, which is an organization that may or may not provide direct services to ticketholders but is in charge of all the administrative duties and direct interaction with Social Security. This EN of record has provider affiliates under its umbrella that provide the services to ticketholders. There are several administrative ENs that function under this capacity and we have a directory on yourtickettowork.ssa.gov, which is in the slide. You can explore their services and supports.

We also have the option of an administrative EN provider affiliate and this is a great option for organizations that do an excellent job providing services to individuals with disabilities but for some reason don't meet the basic qualifications to apply on their own for the program or simply prefer to participate in the program under an EN of record.

And, finally, we have Partnership Plus ENs, and these ENs are those that work exclusively with a VR agency to provide ongoing support after VR case closure. And today you are going to hear from different ENs and a provider affiliate that represents one of these models.

In order to become an employment network, AJC's workforce entities are already prequalified to join the program. However, an application still needs to be completed and submitted to Social Security for approval. TPM, or the ticket program manager, will work with you every step of the way and guide you through the application process.

As a trusted partner, you do not need to complete a business plan during the application process or complete the Annual Performance Outcome Report that is required for each approved employment network. However, we should note that security clearance is required for each individual in direct contact with ticketholders' personally identifiable information. Kevin, can you share what is the ticket life cycle from the EN's perspective?

MR. NICKERSON: I sure can. Thanks, Ana. I think this slide provides a nice snapshot of how EN operations work generally. First, we have to find ticketholders. We have to continually reach out to ticketholders to engage them in the ticket program in order to successfully operate as an EN.

There are a number of strategies that ENs use to market to ticketholders. Next, we have to assess whether the person has goals consistent with the ticket program. This means we need to be sure beneficiaries we serve are committed to the goal of self-sufficiency.

Then we will serve our ticketholders. Our primary goal is to help beneficiaries obtain employment that will allow them to earn sufficient levels of income to make leaving the benefits roles worthwhile. We should be working with ticketholders to help develop long-term career paths.

Unlike most programs, we can support ticketholders long-term. Once the person is working, we will continue to follow up with them for many years in order to help promote long-term stability on the job. There are a number of services we can offer beneficiaries during this phase and payments continue as long as the beneficiary is gainfully employed.

Once the beneficiary is working at the requisite levels that allow for EN payments and after wages are verified by Social Security, the EN is paid. Remember, we have to continue to feed this cycle, so finding new ticketholders begins the cycle again.

I'm sure you have interest in learning more about how EN payments work so that's what we'll discuss next. In all the years I've provided technical assistance to the workforce system on EN operations, I've never had anyone tell me that funding is not an issue.

Given the audience we're talking to today and the research I highlighted regarding beneficiaries' use of the workforce system, why not capture some of the revenue potential of the ticket program if you're already serving these folks? I would challenge you to look in your systems at individuals who have disclosed having a disability, and depending on the data you track, those that might have disclosed getting SSA disability benefits.

This may help you see the revenue – (inaudible) – based on individuals you're already serving. The other thing I think you should know is that ticket revenue is flexible and could be used to support services that already exist in order to create new solutions for customers within the workforce system.

Of course, the hope is that this revenue will be used to support people with disabilities. While grants come and go, EN revenue is a great strategy for sustaining disability services. And many workforce entities are now supporting staff successfully through their EN operations. Now Ana will share with you more details about EN payments. Ana?

MS. MORALES: Thank you, Kevin. So we want to give you some statistics on the difference between all employment networks versus workforce ENs when it comes to ticket – (inaudible) – payments. And, again, all this data is based on fiscal year 2017. Workforce ENs ticket assignments where roughly 30 percent of the total ticket design nationwide, and 12 percent of the total payments made to ENs.

It's important to highlight the average income per workforce EN. $7.8 million divided by 111 ENs is roughly $70,000 per year. And like Kevin mentioned before, ticket dollars are flexible. This revenue can be used to hire support staff.

First one dedicated for Ticket to Work, invest in equipment or any other resource to provide services to other ticketholders. Payments to employment networks are performance-based which means ticketholders need to work and achieve specific earnings and specifically trial work level and substantial gainful activity.

There are two payment systems to choose from and there is a slight monetary difference between them as you can see in the chart. Outcome payments are only paid when ticketholders reach SGA and stop receiving cash benefits.

Milestone payments are based at either trial work level or SGA level and the ticketholder is still receiving cash benefits. So there are options in the program when you choose to join. And now Kevin will explain the provisional EN funding stream replace other funding sources.

MR. NICKERSON: Thanks, Ana. I have some good news – provide you about EN revenue. First of all, EN revenue is flexible revenue, as we both mentioned. Not program income. This allows you to be creative with how you use this new revenue. Again, we hope it will be used to support ongoing disability services and supports.

USDOL provided Training and Employment Notice 20-07 which clarifies the issue of EN revenue stating it will not replace existing funding sources. To further clarify, this means that it is additional revenue which you can use as you see fit.

To further illustrate just how flexible this revenue is, I thought I'd also mention that the centers for Medicare and Medicaid services also clarified in a state Medicaid director letter, number 10-002, that EN revenue does not conflict with Medicaid-funded services for the same person that might be utilizing Ticket to Work program.

I hope these notices help to clarify that EN revenue can be collected without concern of double dipping. And now I'll turn back to Ana to discuss whether your agency is a good fit to become an EN.

MS. MORALES: Thank you, Kevin. So at this point, you may be wondering if your agency is a good fit to become an employment network. And we have a group of consultants that will work individually with your organization to find the best fit for you. All you need to do is e-mail ENoperations@yourtickettowork.ssa.gov and we will follow up on your request.

There is also the Workforce EN Planning Guide, which is available to answer questions. And the link is also on the slide. So we're going to highlight two effective Partnership Plus models now. Partnership Plus is a collaboration between a state vocational rehabilitation agencies and employment networks.

VR agencies provide more intensive, up-front services to ticketholders to enter or return to work while employment networks, after case closure, provide long-term ongoing support to ticketholders to stay employed. This is a visual of the Partnership Plus collaboration at a national level.

Some states have formal agreements. Some of them include benchmark payments. And it's worth to mention that Partnership Plus is a collaboration. Therefore, we have four states that work together without any written agreement in place. There are still 22 states with no collaboration at all, so there is still room for improvement.

And I am providing this national overview, but now Kevin will share how Partnership Plus model collaborate with AJC's as the employment networks.

MR. NICKERSON: OK. Thanks, Ana. Now that Ana's broken down what Partnership Plus is, let's talk about how that might look for a workforce EN. I think the best way to make this real for our workforce partners is to give an example. Let's say that a customer receiving SSA disability benefits enters the job center for services and has employment goals that require training beyond the capacity of the center to provide.

You refer the individual to vocational rehabilitation while continuing to offer core services at the job center. When the individual uses VR services, their ticket is in use. Let's assume the VR agency is elected to be paid using the cost reimbursement payment method. This allows VR to be reimbursed for the cost of serving this customer by SSA, assuming they are gainfully employed for nine out of 12 months.

As most of you probably know, VR will typically close a case after job stabilization, which is generally three months after placement. When VR closes the case, the ticket is available to assign again to an EN for ongoing employment supports.

The EN's goal is to help the person remain gainfully employed which means they are working above the substantial gainful activity level. To be clear, this year, that amount is $1,180 per month unless the primary disability is blindness, in which case the amount would be $1,970 per month.

Assuming the individual remains gainfully employed, the EN can be paid for this follow-up support through EN payments. Partnership Plus benefits VR as the person is more likely to remain employed with long-term supports and less likely to return to VR for additional services.

This benefits the employment network as they can receive EN payments for providing long-term employment supports. However, the big winner in this scenario is the customer, who is more likely to succeed long-term with ongoing supports in place.

To be clear, Partnership Plus is a strategy that utilizes our current employment support systems in a coordinated fashion that focuses on the long-term success of our customers. If you like what you heard so far today but you're thinking this might be more complicated than you have time to sort out, well, I have an option for you to consider.

I'd like to introduce you to the American Dream Employment Network, or as we like to call it, ADEN. ADEN is an administrative EN, allowing you the option to join as a provider affiliate. I've highlighted some of the basics of our administrative EN that I thought you might find encouraging.

One attractive feature of an administrative EN is that you do not need to apply to become your own EN. You would be working under the admin EN contract. This allows interested parties a way to connect to the Ticket to Work program much more quickly and will jumpstart your EN process significantly.

ADEN also offers a sophisticated electronic portal for storage of sensitive information, including IWPs, case notes, and other information about beneficiaries we serve. The portal is secure and meets SSA standards for storage of PII.

The ADEN portal also provides its users a significant amount of statistical data which allows you to easily track your progress with us, including payments received, numbers of individuals working, average time to placement and many more stats.

One of the primary functions of ADEN is to provide member support with administrative tasks associated with operating an EN. Some of these functions include managing SSA audits, requests for information from SSA, billing for eligible payments which are then distributed to members, as well as ongoing quality assurance reviews of our records.

This gives time back to our members who can then do what they do best, help folks get back to work. Our administrative EN also offers ongoing technical assistance to members as well as core and advanced training that helps advance our members' knowledge and skill as EN operators. You can find out more about us through the link provided in this slide.

As Ana mentioned earlier, there are other administrative ENs and you can learn more about them through the ticket program manager. Next, I'll be highlighting what success looks like to an EN.

I could think of no better way to wrap up our part of today's discussion than to tell you about one of our recent success stories. Walter is a young man I came to know many years ago. In fact, I was the one who originally signed his ticket.

One thing that is notable about Walter and this particular success story is that he has a developmental disability. But this didn't stop him from moving forward with his goals. Walter has a family that is very supportive which I'm confident helped him to believe in himself and to know he could do what he aspired to do with his life.

Through the Ticket to Work program, we helped Walter understand work incentives and assisted him in advancing his employment goals. Ultimately, Walter wanted to work at Cornell, which is where he is currently working. However, there were struggles along the way.

I want you to read the story for yourself but I'm going to tell you something that was not in his story. Walter walked to work three miles one way when he first started his job at Cornell. This was due to the timing of his shift and lack of public transportation based on where he lives.

I tell you this because it reminds me of something he told me when I asked him what was most important to his success. He told me, "You really have to want it." I don't think he understood just how powerful that message was to me as a provider and to others around him.

Walter had two goals, one of which was to get his job at Cornell, which offers him great benefits, as well, including a retirement plan. The other goal was to have a home of his own. Walter recently achieved that goal too and is now a homeowner.

In summary, I think Walter exemplifies what it means to achieve success, despite the challenges that face us. I think he also challenges our notions as providers regarding what people with development disabilities can accomplish and how the Ticket to Work program can truly help people achieve self-sufficiency. With that, I'll hand the presentation back to David now. David?

MR. JONES: Great. Thank you, Kevin. And, boy, that story about Walter – very inspiring. And it does remind us the role of the workforce system to help change lives to help people with - individuals with disabilities find work.

Now, before we go into the next part of our webinar, we wanted to take a pause for a moment and do a poll. And we wanted to basically highlight or get information from this polling question. And the polling question is the following:

How would, or do you currently, if already an EN, use the income from SSA to administer Ticket to Work? And so we ask that you select one answer. Is it one, hire more personnel, two, support disability services, three, support new programming, four, invest in staff training certifications, five, further support the need of existing ticketholders who are working. Or other.

And if you do have other, perhaps you can maybe put it in the chat box so we can collect that information as well and your peers on this webinar can see it also. So let's see – let's open the polls and see what the data results tell us.

OK. I think at this point, how about we turn – shut down the polls and look at the data. And what we found was supporting disability services was the leading variable in this polling with 82. And it followed by hiring more personnel. So hopefully it does give you insight in terms of how SSA EN income can be supportive to your operations. So at this point, I would like to now turn it over to Lauren Parker. Lauren?

LAUREN PARKER: All right. Thank you, David. I, too, would have picked number two, support disability services. I would have picked them all if I could but I was definitely in the number two category. Quickly, a thank-you to DOL, SSA and Maximus for the opportunity to highlight what we're doing here in northern Virginia.

On this next slide, you'll see a quick snapshot or overview of our Ticket to Work program. There's the nice map there. SkillSource is the nonprofit entity of the Northern Virginia Workforce Development Board and we're one of 15 local boards in Virginia.

Our service area includes three counties and four independent cities within the D.C. metro area. We became an employment network in 2010. We – I actually was brought on-board as a part-time consultant and my role quickly transitioned into a permanent full-time position as we saw success.

Our service area covers Virginia, Maryland and D.C. We actually opted to expand our ticket services outside our immediate workforce area to include all of Virginia, Maryland and D.C. and this aligns nicely with our center operations as we don't have any residency requirements to receive AJC services and we often get customers from across the river in Maryland and D.C.

With that said, the majority of our ticketholders do still reside – are residing in Virginia at about roughly 84 percent of them. We also oversee seven American Job Centers. We're pretty excited. We just opened our seventh one in July. It's our second center that's co-located with our state workforce partner, the Virginia Employment Commission, responsible for UI benefits.

Our program totals there. Quick snapshot. We fielded over 1,600 inquiries from disability beneficiaries. We've assigned 295 tickets. We are currently serving 167 beneficiaries. The placements – we've seen 141 placements. And I'll just speak quickly to that.

This number also includes those beneficiaries who are working at the time of assignment. But it's only initial placements and doesn't include the beneficiaries we've supported in obtaining a second or third job. That often happens. We frequently tell ticketholders sometimes it might be easier to get the job. It's about maintaining the job.

But it also works into their work plans that we develop with them. They do have to identify a short-term and a long-term goal and sometimes those goals are different. So out of those 141 individuals, we have seen placements – I mean, sorry, payments on at – on 136 of them. So the majority.

The last bullet there are EN payments. We're pretty excited about this. We just reached a big milestone as we transitioned into our current fiscal year and reached over 1 million in milestone and outcome payments since starting the program.

Our average payment per beneficiary is approximately $7,000 and in the past three years, we've just – we've seen an average around $200,000 in unrestricted revenue that we've been able to reinvest into the program in supports for job seekers with disabilities.

So onto the next slide. So why did we initiate the Ticket to Work program? Well, really, it was about – we have a strong role of leadership here. SkillSource has a history of commitment to enhancing service delivery for individuals with disabilities. In 2008 and – between 2008 and 2010, SkillSource participated in the Disability Program Navigator Initiative sponsored by DOL and SSA.

In 2009, we were awarded a registered apprenticeship program grant through DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy. We also have a strong relationship at the leadership level between SkillSource and our voc rehab, which is the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services. And I will speak more to that in some of the following slides.

The second bullet on there, financial support and additional funding stream. Kind of to just reiterate what you've already heard earlier in the presentation, this is probably one of the main attractions of the Ticket to Work program. We definitely wanted to capitalize on that potential to receive unrestricted dollars and it was something we found worth exploring.

It was also an opportunity to initiate a program that could be self-sustaining and independent of any grant funding. That third bullet on there, continuation of the Disability Program Navigator Initiative, I wanted to just put that – throw that up on the slide again because this was really an integral piece of why we transitioned it to Ticket to Work.

We saw it as a way to continue what we were seeing through that VPN initiative. What we did see was having a dedicated resource on disability in the center was key and we didn't want to lose that momentum. In fact, one of the navigators helped prepare our initial Ticket to Work application. That was a few months before I was brought on board.

And it's given us the opportunity to reach more job seekers in need of employment supports. So going onto the next slide. What challenges did we overcome and how? The first bullet up there, SSI and SSDI work incentives knowledge and counseling. And I always like to tell a quick story about this.

My first day on the job, I was already – I had a – I already had a beneficiary that was coming in to meet with me. I was ready to talk to him about career exploration, his resume, job search planning and so forth. And his first question to me was, "How will work impact my benefits?" And I had no idea.

Of course, I quickly learned what the local resource was which was the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Project and got him connected. We then developed a pretty close relationship with our local WIPA project to provide those services over the next couple of years.

But I mention this – it's not so much of a challenge but really a success as it brings such vital information to the job seekers we serve in our American Job Centers who receive Social Security disability benefits.

We eventually have the opportunity to bring that expertise in house and we've trained all of our Ticket to Work staff to have certification and work incentive planning and we also were able to train to get certified some American Job Center staff as well including a WIOA adult counselor and a WIOA youth counselor.

The next bullet on there is rapid growth. This was really a challenge because perhaps due to our – the location and size of our workforce area, we've had a steady stream of inquiries into the program over the years. Initially, when we first got started to get the ball rolling, we did partner with our Medicaid office to send letters out about the program.

But we have always had a steady stream of interest in Ticket to Work. But one of the difficulties we faced early on was how to balance caseloads and continue serving new ticketholders. Because beneficiaries can be in the program for seven years, caseloads can get high quickly.

And with steady growth, we have been able to turn some of those revenues we've received into additional positions for case management. In 2013, we hired a second full-time case manager and just recently we were selected as a treatment site in Virginia's DEI Round 8 and we were glad that we were able to hire a third full-time case manager.

We're currently still looking at ways to approach case management collectively. It's one strategy we're looking into to see how we can continue serving new beneficiaries while managing staffing costs and maintaining service quality.

The third bullet on there is the WIOA dual enrollment barrier. This has been a significant challenge for us. It's actually an issue that surfaced because of our Ticket to Work operations. The majority of our ticketholders we serve receive DEI benefits as Kevin, I think, mentioned earlier in the presentation. We – around 70 percent of our caseload are receiving SSDI.

With that, those earnings are counted as income under WIOA Title I services. And so we were seeing that it was difficult to enroll folks into WIOA. My initial conversations with neighboring workforce areas was it was a nonissue and that was because I perhaps had other funding streams to serve those job seekers.

But we recently discovered, through talks with DEI leadership and the National Disability Institute, that the issue is more widespread than Virginia. Recently, with Virginia's latest DEI initiative and continued dialogue, with the state we've seen some movement which I'm pretty excited about. We're looking forward to a forthcoming policy guidance letter from the state that will clarify priority service versus eligibility.

This is a really big win for us and I'm really excited about it and we are – which takes me into our next slide about other successes that have been achieved. So introducing job seekers with disabilities to the public workforce system.

So in that full – that first bullet, early on in the program I found that we were serving all of the – the majority of the beneficiaries we're serving, I would ask them if they were familiar with our job – our American Job Centers and the answer was no. They had never heard of the Public Workforce System. They were coming to us from Social Security or community partners.

We've essentially been that – their first door into the services available to them through the AJCs. And I think that in itself is a worthwhile reason to consider becoming an employment network. We also were – have been able to provide up-front case management.

So if somebody walks into the center and they receive disability benefits from Social Security, they can be connected immediately to case management services without the need to be enrolled into WIOA Title I services. Of course, we'd like them to be dual enrolled but this way we are able to streamline those services for them and help them navigate those other workforce services.

The second bullet up there, creating capacity for ongoing disability awareness and system improvements. This is a big one. The outcome payments we receive are going back into improving workforce services for job seekers with disabilities and the accessibility of the workforce programs and services we deliver. Most importantly, it's made accessibility an ongoing priority in our customer service model. And I kind of want to highlight that especially.

For example, we've been able to continuously do staff training, we've been able to purchase software, to make our centers more accessible. We offer on demand video remote interpreting and so forth.

Ticket to Work is a standalone program and independent of grant funding is a key component in our efforts to creating sustainable change within our workforce systems, so much so in fact in December 2014, our workforce board approved the creation of a disability services subcommittee.

That subcommittee acts as an advisory group and provides oversight into the operational and service opportunities who are supporting individuals with disabilities. I will note quickly that that happened ahead of the WIOA guidelines from DOL to create a standing sub – disability committee.

The last bullet point on there, collaboration with voc rehab and Partnership Plus. I'm actually going to speak quickly to the Partnership Plus half first. I think this is really where AJCs have an advantage when it comes to Partnership Plus since voc rehab is one of the six WIOA core partner programs, at least as far as getting an agreement in place.

Turning that agreement into a flow of customers from VR to workforce EN takes a little bit more work. We've found that it takes a lot of counselor to counselor or case manager to case manager relationship building in order to see those ticket handoffs. With that said, though, the collaboration we've had with VR has definitely strengthened over the years and that partnership has turned into opportunities for us to also improve our workforce EN services.

I definitely credit the strong leadership and proactive partnership at DARS, our Virginia VR agency, and SkillSource leadership that has resulted in several opportunities over the years to enhance our workforce services including staff training. They funded our initial work incentive certifications for the Ticket to Work staff.

So when I mentioned earlier how we brought that expertise in house, that was done through partnership with VR. And we also are a vender on their list and can – which enables us to invoice them for counseling we provide to their consumers. Other staff training includes financial empowerment training and motivational interviewing.

We've also been able to streamline our operation. So the partnership has allowed us to, for example, if we need to unassign or assign a ticket, we can do so with relatively ease between our two agencies. We also have the opportunity to participate in the pilot to obtain snapshots of benefits from Social Security in a much more timely fashion, which has been a huge help in our service delivery.

So with that said, definitely the partnership that we have with VR has been strengthened by our Ticket to Work operations. In conclusion, as you can see, Ticket to Work has had a tremendous impact on our services and is an integral part of the Northern Virginia Workforce System.

It has strengthened our partnerships, it's increased our capacity to serve job seekers with disabilities, and it provides a mechanism to continually monitor accessibility and improve accessibility. So with that said, I will hand it off to Brandi Brooks from South Carolina and get you started. There you go.

Brandi Brooks: Good afternoon and it's a great day in South Carolina. I say that because this is how you're greeted when you contact any state agency within the state of South Carolina. Even though we're here preparing for Hurricane Florence, the sun is shining. Yesterday, I actually celebrated my fourth year at the Department of Employment and Workforce.

I'm honored to speak to you all today about the Ticket to Work program from the administrative employment network perspective. As David mentioned earlier, I was promoted to program coordinator in July and I would like to actually commend my predecessor, Ms. Camille Fola, in creating such a strong foundation for the ticket program.

My views will actually be coming from the employment coordinator level, and that's the local level where we actually deal with our participants. And then the program coordinator level from the state perspective.

An overview of the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce, as an employment network, we started back in 2010 with only two pilot centers. Since then, we have broken our state down into 12 regions where we have an employment coordinator assigned to each region to help develop the plan and meet the needs of the beneficiaries and provide services at that level.

At the state coordination level, this is where all the administrative duties, including ticket assignments – (inaudible) – assignments and payments are coordinated. We have 45 American Job Centers and we also call these our SC work centers. This is where our program is administered from.

Program totals. Since our conception, we have had 370 assignments, we have had 156 placements with employment, and throughout the years we have earned a total of $800 – I'm sorry. $843,955.

Why did we initiate the ticket program? Our agency's mission, the mission of the Department of Employment and Workforce is to promote an effective customer-driven workforce system that facilitates financial stability and employment prosperity for employers, individuals, and communities.

We also initiated the program to increase the number of programs and resources available to job seekers in our centers along with already having the WIOA, the Trade Act, the ability to file for unemployment insurance and veteran services. We decided to go ahead and add this along so that we can serve more people, more citizens of the state of South Carolina.

And also, we initiated the program to increase our clientele. What better way to get the numbers that we want as far as how many individuals are unemployed than by getting out there and increasing our numbers of South Carolinians served. We also adapted this program for financial support. Through the financial support that we gain throughout the years, we've been able to provide training, marketing, and outreach for the Ticket to Work program. We've been able to pay for services such as interpreters and we've been able to purchase assistive technology equipment for individuals that we serve.

What challenges did we overcome and how? Basic knowledge of the program. As you can see, it's a lot of information that goes along with the Ticket to Work program. And it's very necessary for someone at the state coordinator level to learn everything that there is to know about the program.

And we do that through training and webinars provided by Social Security. It's also good to know everything that you can about this program in order to maintain the program objectives and to provide instruction and guidance to your employment coordinators at the local level.

And we have an employment network coordinator by the name of David Bailey who gave us some best practices in order to administer the program as a caseworker. So we have to ensure that our coordinators understand the program, understand what it is, understand the purpose and what it's designed to do.

We have to understand that there is a lot of paperwork involved and make sure that as a case manager, you are documenting everything. We also have to understand the process. The EN coordinators need to know what happens from when you enter the door asking about the Ticket to Work program to the time that they find employment and you provide your ongoing services to them.

It's also been a challenge to help the beneficiaries find the appropriate employment network to assist them. Even though we often meet with people and develop relationships with them, it's kind of hard to let them go to another employment network. But we also have to keep in mind we need to send the beneficiary to the place where they can best be served.

Most of the people who come to our employment network are job ready which means they don't really need any additional training or services in order to get back into the workforce. So sometimes we have to choose between which employment network they're going to – (inaudible) – but it's OK. We always choose what's best for the beneficiary.

What success has been achieved? We are known as one of the top employment networks in the state of South Carolina. And I would like to thank the Social Security Administration for that because when they send out their notifications, they often inform the beneficiary of the agency and the actual employment coordinator for the area that they're in. So we would like to thank Social Security for that.

We also administrate – we also provide administration of the program through our SC work centers, also our American Job Centers, and that's a great move for the job seeker. Because in our centers, along with providing the career counseling for the Ticket to Work program, we have computer access. We have job seeker workshops. The beneficiaries are the first to know about hiring events and we also have partnering agencies that are there including the Department of Social Services and also voc rehab.

And in our job centers, we also provide testing and training as needed. Along with the success that we've gained, we've also recently collaborated with voc rehab and the Partnership Plus agreement. We haven't had any hand-offs but we are excited about the partnership and looking forward to assisting the beneficiaries with going back to work and maintaining their employment.

All right. In closing I would like to say that we are extremely excited about being an employment network for the Ticket to Work program. And being that I have been in the helping profession for most of my career, I'm extremely excited to be the program coordinator for this program and helping individuals get back to work and gaining self-sufficiency. I will now pass it along to David, our moderator, for the next slide.

MR. JONES: Great. Thank you, Brandi, and Lauren. OK, folks. We're going to try another poll and we are really interested in learning what concerns you may have in becoming an EN within the American Job Center Network. So please pick two of the following.

Are your concerns, one, difficulty with the application process, two, security clearance process is challenging, three, EN administration is time-consuming, four, the staff capacity to operationalize, five, concern we will not find beneficiaries willing to commit to self-sufficiency. Or six, other. And if you select other, perhaps you can put in the chat box what your concerns are. So let's open the polls and see what the results are.

And, again, you can pick two instead of one. OK. How about at this point we stop the polling so we can read the survey results? And at this point, it looks like the leading response is staff capacity to operationalize, the second leading concern being that we will not find beneficiaries willing to commit to self-sufficiency, and third, much lower down, is EN administration is time-consuming.

And I think these poll results will be a nice segway into our next presenter in which she can talk about some solutions to some of these challenges that have been identified here. So at this point, I would like to transition it over to Nancy Stensgard. Nancy?

NANCY STENSGARD: Thanks, David. I'm excited to join everyone today and talk about our experience making – recalibrating our Ticket to Work program and our process in selecting our choice to be an EN provider affiliate of an administrative employment network.

So just a little bit about us. Rural Minnesota CEP is a nonprofit and we are in our second round of the Minnesota Disability Employment Initiative Grant, which has been a means to increase the number of SSA beneficiaries participating in career pathway services leading to self-sufficiency.

Our organization this year is celebrating its 50th anniversary providing an array of career pathway services, and we are also a workforce agency guided by a workforce development board. We cover a large predominantly rural geographic area in Minnesota. We touch the central to the western border of Minnesota and up to the Canadian border so we're pretty broad geographically and extremely rural.

And because of that, we established a mobile presence in the north to provide a better level of service to the most remote areas in our 19 counties. So we have eight locations and then we also are willing to meet job seekers in other locations as necessary.

Our other stakeholders are co-located with us at most of our offices allowing for interdependent services and a really nice flow of referrals. So Rural Minnesota CEP exudes a no-wrong-door philosophy. And I think part of that is just because of the length of service in our area and our reputation for collaboration with not only federal, state and county partners, but also community organizations throughout all our service area.

So we align our career pathway services through multiple entry and exit points and a lot of that leads to co-enrollments in other programs that could fund postsecondary or career and technical education as well as work experience. Something that really aligns itself well to Ticket to Work is our WIOA programs and state youth programs that lend themselves to connecting with transition-aged youth on SSI at that age 18 redetermination.

We already have relationships with students with IEP case managers and when we get close to that age of 18, students on SSI, we already have relationships started, integrated resource teams if those students are involved in some of our other youth programs. And if they're not, they can kind of be referred to us at that time as well.

And the key to that is our collaborative relationships, whether they're with other professionals or community members and families. In my personal work, I have found that people often fail to pursue something beneficial or meaningful for lack of good information. So we have the privilege of bringing that information in the right way and at the right time.

I once got a ticket referral outside of Dairy Queen just passing the time with someone waiting for their ice cream cone order. So when you're excited about the work you do and people just inquire just as a courtesy, like, what do you do? Or you're just kind of exchanging pleasantries and you share, the work you do, it – sometimes it can be a really wonderful opportunity to present a really neat option for someone.

To meet a key DEI grant outcome, Rural Minnesota CEP needed to recalibrate our Ticket to Work program on a very tight timeline. This took us through a process at both programmatic and systems levels. We had been operating since the Minnesota DEI Round 3 as a provider affiliate under the state EN model through the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

And they had made a decision to no longer continue that role as a state EN and so we had a decision point to make to either select a single-entity workforce EN or become an EN provider affiliate under another administrative EN.

So our previous grantee experience had served as a stepping stone as we started researching the different options. We used the workforce EN planning guide to explore EN – various EN models. That's available on the WorkforceGPS website. And we used that to look at our agency goals and our capacity, such as infrastructure, staffing, and procedures.

We got DEI technical assistance through the grant and the ticket coordinator from the National Disability Institute, which happens to be Kevin Nickerson who's in this webinar today. We viewed WorkforceGPS lead center and NDI webinars on a national level and then we also participated in our Minnesota DEI monthly phone conferences and connected with the DEED EN lead at the state level.

We listened to our partners through all levels of the – of our organization from frontline staff, leadership and management, our youth council members, our Rural Minnesota CEP board and the Workforce Development board. And, most importantly, we learned from our ticketholders and families through community outreach and collaborative advance.

One example was arranging for a Social Security Administration public affairs specialist to speak at a community transition interagency committee family workshop on SSI and transition-aged youth and that webinar was titled Family Voices.

It generated a lot of interest from parents and also community partners and I think started a process for families to start the learning process about SSI benefits for their student and what Ticket to Work might mean going forward as they transition out of high school.

This process reinforced our commitment to focus on participant services to maximize the career trajectory of our ticketholders. And so becoming a provider affiliate under administrative ENs gave us that ability.

We wanted to find the right fit. And through the DEI grant, we had seen tools and resources created by NDI. We visited – through that, we visited the ADEN website and some other websites as well. We connected with NDI and Kevin Nickerson through phone consultations. We scheduled personal – scheduled a personal visit to our administrative office to assist in a couple of planning sessions.

And shortly within that initial contact, NDI provided a framework of timelines, a comparison of workload and other considerations along with SSA working aged beneficiary statistics that we use to prepare a proposal to our workforce development board to move in the area of becoming a provider affiliate employment network. There were no up-front costs and we were poised to move forward to meet our strategic goals.

Together, we crafted a roadmap to meet the DEED DEI goals unassign the current tickets by December. We worked on a process together, both our ending employment network and ADEN and ourselves to make it a seamless experience for our ticketholders.

By the end of January – at the first of January we unassigned all previous active tickets. By January, we had nine active tickets reestablished and a thoughtfully orchestrated process to educate and support our ticketholders in the reconnection with the career.

Through this model, we were – our staff were able to take place in sequential trainings through a webinar platform to acquaint us with all the tools and processes that ADEN had developed. And this proved really invaluable. And those webinar trainings and tools can be revisited any time as archived webinars.

Throughout – without the administrative support of ADEN, we would have had to create a lot of our own tutorials, participant tools and other materials that ADEN already had in their library of member resources. And the training platform and member resources make our staff turnover less disruptive.

I think most of us know that Ticket to Work is an extremely complex yet rewarding program. But there's a lot of compliance that goes with that and having a platform to help navigate staffing changes and even changes in the agency makeup, this was – is definitely a benefit.

We also are able to get up-to-the minute information on changes within Social Security Administration itself. So what are – the services that we get are – with the administrative EN model that we chose, we are able to engage in the ticket program more quickly. We completed the suitability and security clearance process for some – initially some key people right away in the first month and that was expanded then to include other eight certified work incentive practitioners that we currently have on staff.

The member tools and resources have accelerated our cycle of learning. There are so many details related especially to the benefit and work incentive advisement and one key tool is the benefit analysis report which is a roadmap of discussion points and timelines that we review with ticketholders so we don't miss anything that might affect their benefits.

The portal provides wonderful parameters to meet the compliance while allowing us to maintain our focus on person-centered services. We can update demographic and employment information to give a snapshot of timely progress and ensures our benefit and work incentive advisement is reviewed at key milestones.

The dashboard gives us current and relevant data for quick view and we can create other customized reports as well. When we're able to show our Workforce Development board the number of working age beneficiaries in our service area, it confirmed the value of becoming the EN provider affiliate to earn that unrestricted revenue and continue our legacy of services to job seekers.

Layered training and professional development builds our body of knowledge and allows us to address the unique circumstances of each beneficiary. In 2018 in July, the National Disability Institute relayed that nearly one in three Americans with a disability lives in poverty.

That's a pretty impactful statement. So when we incorporate DEI best practices, WIOA programming and ADEN tools and resources to grow the Ticket to Work program, we contribute to lowering those statistics, deciding to recalibrate as an EN provider affiliate under an administrative employment network gave us a jumpstart which is already reaping rewards for us for ticketholders and for business partners.

And when you're – if you're asking yourself why become an employment network, the Ticket to Work program done well can support positions in your agency with the revenue it generates. You can use creative and analytical skills for benefit and work incentive advisement to empower ticketholders to achieve self-sufficiency. And, most importantly, you have an opportunity to revive dreams and expand the future for experience-rich and skilled job seekers. Back to you, David.

MR. JONES: Great. Thank you, Nancy. And what we would like to do is open it up to the floor for questions. And I'm pleased to report that during the webinar, we have been receiving a lot of insightful questions. And one of them was actually – a lot of them were related to Partnership Plus. And so this first question is for Anna. In a Partnership Plus situation with the state VR office, would the EN only take the beneficiary at the SGA wage level or would they provide services and supports for all beneficiaries closed successfully?

MS. MORALES: Thank you, David. And I think this question, it all depends on the state and it all depends on the employment networks. Like mentioned before, it's a collaboration. So some ENs may be willing to take a ticket, a closed ticket for a person that is not working at SGA level in particular but has already some work history and is already engaged in that employment situation and eventually will get to that SGA level that an employment network will need to get – (inaudible) –

MR. JONES: Great. Thank you, Ana. And this next question is for Kevin and it relates to – from an employer angle. And the question is the following. Do you know if Ticket to Work can be coupled with WIOA OJT program to further incentivize the employer partner?

MR. NICKERSON: OK. Thanks, David. I think I know where you're going with this and I could be going astray here, and if I am, put something in the chat. But in truth, at least the way we operate, in most cases, the employer would never know that that person is working through the ticket program.

In other words, we're sort of that silent advocate for the person behind the scenes. Now, to your point, I think you could use EN revenue to do whatever you think would incentivize an employer to hire somebody. And you could be as creative as you want because we already discussed how this revenue is flexible.

So in that regard, I think you could use the revenue that way. But in terms of the ticket program itself, at least, again, how we operate, the employer wouldn't know it exists so it would be mostly what you decide to do with the revenue.

MR. JONES: Thank you, Kevin. And this next question is for the field panels and it relates to partnerships. And as we all know, WIOA is all about partnerships and making it a seamless experience for the customer. And if there is one leading partner that has been most effective in supporting you to serve your customers in Ticket to Work.

Because the reality is we can't do it alone. We need partners. So for each of the field panel members, can you identify one partner that has been most effective in supporting you? And how so? Briefly.

MS. PARKER: This is Lauren. I'll go ahead and start. I think probably it won't be a surprise if I mention our state VR. But I also – just because of all the opportunities that we've had through that strong partnership. But I do want to give a quick shout out to our One-Stop operator, Fairfax county, who has been diligent and working with us to make sure that we are able to get the services Ticket to Work beneficiaries need. And yeah. Then I'll turn it over to others.

MS. SENSGARD: This is Nancy. Actually, just yesterday, I had a call from someone from the state VR. And because there is a current waitlist, they want to have a dialogue and talk about developing a sustainable way to refer their waitlisted SSI eligible youth to our agency for support and services.

So outside of the normal Partnership Plus, we have another means of getting referrals and able to serve people that would most likely sit on a waitlist or not be eligible for the VR priority of service. That was pretty exciting.

MS. MORALES: And this is Ana. If I can just emphasize the points that she just mentioned. Partnership Plus is not necessarily after disclosure. If some states have a Partnership Plus in place where that collaboration can happen before that case is even open like she mentioned in the case of order of selection or waitlisted. So that is a great way to partner with the VR agency as well.

MR. JONES: Great. Thank you, Ana. And, Brandi, were there any remarks you wanted to share on your end on the previous question?

BRANDI BROOKS: Oh. No remarks. They pretty much said everything.

MR. JONES: OK. Great. Thank you. And, Ana, this question is for you and this relates to EN induction timeframe. And so suppose there's an American Job Center out there that is really interested in becoming an EN based on what we discussed during today's webinar. What is your observation on the average time for an entity to become an EN against the different EN models? Is it all about the same or are they different? What has been your observation?

MS. MORALES: Kind of a tricky one but it all depends. If there is a complete application with all the dots and everything that is needed, supported documentation and it's good to go, it can take a couple of weeks to get approved. And that's why PPN is offering this assistance to work one-on-one with the organizations to get ready to apply with the complete package so they can get approved and there are no hick-ups along the way.

MR. JONES: Great. Thank you, Ana. And I would like to close with a final question to Kevin. And, Kevin, this relates to disability insurance amounts in a lifetime. And you recently shared with me an approximate estimate of the total amount of disability award SSA would pay to beneficiary over one's lifetime. And so could you share with the group, to our listeners today, what that estimated amount was that you shared and that significance?

MR. NICKERSON: Yes, David. I can. So really that came from some comments from Robert Williams, the former associate commissioner of SSA. Different program department name at the time. But he mentioned, it was in congressional testimony, that the average award – and this was many years ago, so I'm sure it's more now, but was somewhere in the neighborhood of $250,000 to $300,000 over the lifetime of the person receiving benefits.

So I think that's significant just to know that it doesn't take huge numbers of people to make a really big difference not only in a person's life but in terms of what we're doing to try to support the trust fund and keep that solving. So I thought that was pretty significant.

MR. JONES: Thank you, Kevin. And what I would like to do is I'd like to proceed with the next slide as we begin to – as we wrap up the webinar. And on the next slide, we wanted to share a few resources that we have that can continue to support you in following on this webinar today.

And this page is basically a screenshot from ETA's disability and employment WorkforceGPS page. And this is in collaboration with ODEP. And you'll note under featured content, the word ticket in a puzzle piece, because in ETA we're always trying to connect the pieces.

And, basically, if you go to that link, you'll find resources about Ticket to Work and we encourage you to check out that page as well as explore the WorkforceGPS page. Should we go to the next slide?

Now, at ETA we're not only trying to connect the pieces in the present but we're also trying to connect the future pieces. And one of the ways in which we are doing this in collaboration with ODEP is a cohort challenge.

And basically, folks, cohorts are innovation labs that are convening people together to brainstorm and test ideas of what might be possible. And we're soon going to be launching another cohort challenge and there are going to be three cohort groups; accessibility, customer service, and employer engagement.

And, again, our goal is to bring together core WIOA program partners to address these systemic issues. And so they will be tackling challenge questions. And if you go to that link, you'll see what those challenge questions are.

Over the coming days, we expect to – we hope to provide the applications and we hope to begin our first cohort meeting late October. So we wanted to give you a heads up so you can begin planning in your local or state area of a cohort team and possible the cohort assignment that you would like. And we hope you can participate. Next.

Now, at ETA, this is a week of learning. After today's webinar, around 4 p.m. eastern, my colleague, Cheryl Martin, will be moderating a webinar that will include focus on understanding the benefits of data collection in community college workforce planning.

Tomorrow, there will be a webinar highlighting the application of a competency model, again, meeting the challenges of the water sector, and that's going to be at 1 p.m. And on Friday at one, there will be a webinar providing the overview of the final phasing requirement of the EEO regulations for apprenticeship.

Now, there have been a lot of questions we could not address due to time constraints. But we do have e-mails. And I know one of the questions received from an audience member was, can I see the agreements in place? And so if you are interested in seeing the agreements in place, you may reach out to Ana. Possibly she may have those insights. So this page is for Ana and Kevin Nickerson and on the next page we have the contact information for Lauren Parker, Brandi Brooks, and finally Nancy Stensgard.

And we encourage you to reach out to them if there is something that you feel they can share with you to support your work.

And finally, on behalf of ETA and with ODEP, we really thank you for joining today's webinar as we continue to examine the innovative ways to support the mission of WIOA as well as explore the solutions to help people with disabilities return to the labor force. Again, we hope you enjoy these final days of summer and thank you for joining.

(END)