

# Promising Practices...

## Supporting job seekers with multiple challenges to employment

*"July 26 marks the 19th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)...the ADA's provisions include the right to seek, obtain, pursue and maintain employment without being hampered by physical or attitudinal barriers. I believe that having a job is a civil right. Those who are qualified for and want to work should not be denied that right because of an inaccessible building or an outdated set of assumptions about what they can or cannot do. Unfortunately, the employment rate for people with disabilities in this country is unacceptably low: 22.6% of individuals with disabilities in our country are participating in the labor force, compared to 71.9% of persons with no disability."*

Statement by Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis  
July 24, 2009

Disability Program Navigators (DPNs) across the nation create valuable support strategies for job seekers with disabilities, both within and outside of the workforce investment system. The Promising Practices series provides insight into these strategies, as well as methods for you to foster more successful partnerships and to assist more people with disabilities achieve positive employment outcomes.

### Working toward Shared Employment Outcomes

Since the inception of the DPN initiative in 2003, DPNs have focused on the coordination of integrated services to job seekers with multiple challenges to employment. With considerable knowledge on resources within the workforce investment system and in the community, DPNs often see the “big picture” or the many pieces needed to form the puzzle. By bringing together multiple partners across service systems, DPNs are helping to build teams who work together to combine resources and help job seekers reach employment goals.

### Integrated Resource Teams

An Integrated Resource Team (IRT) represents one option that a local area may use to provide an increased level of support to a job seeker with multiple challenges to employment. An IRT is made up of representatives from various community organizations and partner agencies that meet specific employment needs of a job seeker. Just as each job seeker has a unique set of goals, each IRT is comprised of different service systems. A team may consist of several members from the following systems (but not limited to): the Workforce Investment system, Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health services, Public Education (e.g. transition programs), Work Incentive Planning and Assistance programs, Centers for Independent Living, Supported Employment service providers, Community and Faith-Based organizations, the local Housing or Transportation system, Reentry programs for persons with criminal history, the TANF agency, and Veterans' programs.

#### Contact Us

For a list of DPN contacts by state/territory, visit [www.doleta.gov/disability](http://www.doleta.gov/disability)  
For more information, including tools and resources, visit [dpnnavigator.net](http://dpnnavigator.net)

While the primary function of an IRT is to improve resource coordination and increase opportunity for employment, the teamwork involved also promotes systems change. By “bringing people to the table”, there is opportunity for cross-agency education, team problem-solving, and leveraging of resources and funds to meet employment challenges head-on. An IRT not only boosts coordination of services and supports to a job seeker, but can also positively shift how the different systems work with each other. Although DPNs may initiate and facilitate IRTs, it is the job seeker and partners who ultimately drive the team towards the end goal. The shared accomplishments of addressing challenges and reaching positive employment outcomes can have a powerful impact on all involved.

### **Integrated Resource Teams**

- Bring together a number of different service providers to work toward a shared employment or training goal.
- Improve cross-agency communication and collaboration to better leverage available resources.
- Result in enhanced coordination of services and supports to a job seeker with a disability.

## **Spotlight: The Oregon DPN Experience**

*The Challenge: To increase access to Workforce Investment Act (WIA) services to job seekers with multiple challenges to employment*

In the initial stages of Oregon’s DPN initiative, it was evident that many challenges existed for job seekers with disabilities and/or multiple resource needs. They would have to successfully access and coordinate expertise, resources, and services within many different systems in order to reach training and employment goals. To determine the right program or job match, the focus seemed to be on the **challenges** that the job seeker experienced. An understanding of how to remediate those challenges and/or accommodate job seekers in training or work was lacking. This created yet another hurdle for job seekers who needed multiple resources to accomplish career objectives.

Since enrollment in WIA funded services seemed most challenging to job seekers with a variety of resource needs, the Oregon DPNs unified to increase the accessibility of this system. Some job seekers were considered “not ready” for WIA services because of unaddressed challenges such as lack of accessible transportation or an understanding of how disability benefits may be affected by work earnings. The One Stop Career Centers did not have the appropriate resources to meet these challenges and referring out to other systems was not entirely effective for job seekers with complex situations and high level of immediate need.

*The Solution: Offer all job seekers the opportunity to “map” career goals, challenges and resources*

DPNs became familiar with other demonstration projects in the state including a series of Medicaid Infrastructure Grants (MIGs) and the U.S. Department of Labor’s Ending Chronic Homelessness through Housing and Customized Employment program (CEP 4). All projects aimed to expand the accessibility of WIA services to all job seekers. By building on the work begun by these programs, DPNs worked closely with several One Stop Career Centers to implement a core service workshop on Career and Resource Mapping.

In the workshop, job seekers outlined the steps needed to reach employment goals and received assistance in identifying resources to meet challenges. The plans generated from the workshop were used by WIA staff as tools in creating training and employment plans. By offering the opportunity for self-assessment and support in “mapping” out resources, job seekers with disabilities have greater access to valuable information and services to remediate challenges and meet career objectives.

*“The Career Mapping Workshop helps people who are unclear on an employment goal to identify a strength based goal, and to identify transferable skills. Because of the way the workshop is presented, we can refer people no matter what barriers to employment they experience and know that they will reach the outcomes associated with the workshop and feel excited about moving forward. The use of the Resource Plan helps job seekers to access more significant Career Center services, such as certifications, workshops, and training, and to incorporate community resources into their employment plans. By giving a goal specific explanation of available resources, the Resource Plan helps the customer, Career Center Staff, and community partners, to coordinate and maximize available resources.”*

-- Cathy Kreisman, Career Specialist

### *The Challenge: More effective teamwork and communication needed between community systems and partners*

With career and resource mapping workshops underway in several Oregon One Stop Career Centers, more job seekers with disabilities and/or other challenges to employment were accessing the WIA system. However, this revealed a greater need for enhanced service coordination between the different partner agencies. Some plans generated from the mapping workshop involved numerous puzzle pieces that would need to fit together in order to address all challenges and meet career goals. This would require more intensive communication and teamwork among the various service systems.

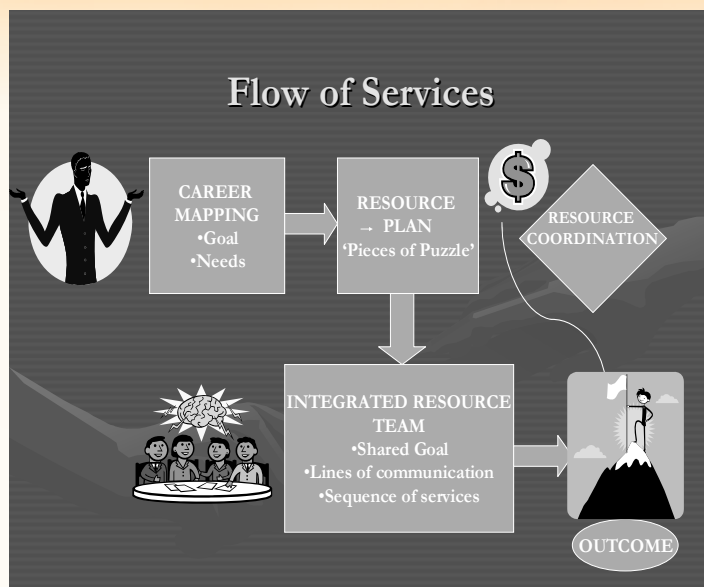
### *The Solution: Improve resource coordination through Integrated Resource Teams*

The IRT approach provided an option for this level of seamless service delivery to job seekers with multiple resource needs. The “roundtable” approach would open up the lines of communication between different systems instead of passing on job seekers from one resource to the next. The Oregon DPNs first worked to build an understanding of the IRT process and benefits within the One Stop Career Centers. With the implementation of the IRT model in several Oregon workforce investment areas, more job seekers with disabilities and/or other challenges to employment were able to enroll in WIA services. Additionally, the community partners who participated on the IRTs learned how to more effectively work together to leverage funds and resources in order to achieve positive employment outcomes.

*“I have been truly amazed at what the Integrated Resource Team has been able to accomplish for Worksource [One Stop Career Center] customers. Previously, when working with customers experiencing a disability, I felt lost and unsure of the best way to serve them. The regional Navigator assisted in determining what resources were available and coordinating services from multiple agencies. As a WIA Case Manager, my work with the Integrated Resource Team has taught me much more about working with customers with disabilities. I feel more prepared for working with future customers experiencing these barriers.”*

-- Jesse Aronson, Career Specialist





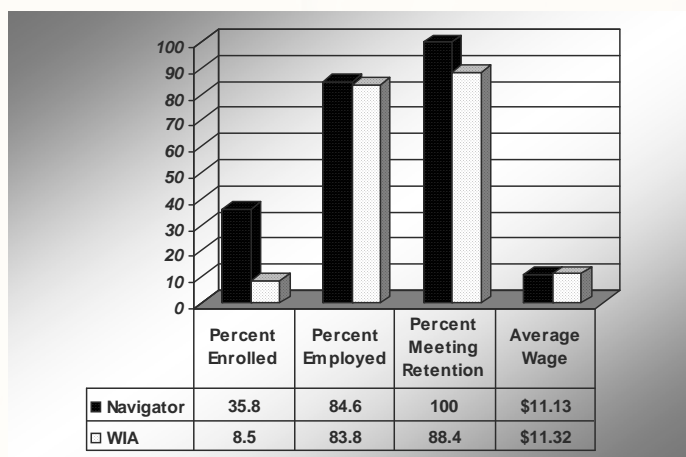
### Flow of Services Oregon's One Stop Career Centers

- Job seekers can attend a Career & Resource Mapping workshop to outline the steps needed to reach career goals and alleviate challenges.
- They also can develop a resource plan which outlines the need for any funding and/or supports by other agencies.
- Next, they can either seek out appropriate resources independently, or choose the IRT approach.
- With an IRT, assistance is offered in bringing together multiple partners to open the lines of communication and work towards shared employment goals of job seekers with disabilities/multiple employment challenges.

### The Results:

The impact of DPN activities in the Oregon workforce investment system was tracked using programmatic data collected by WIA providers through the WIASRD management information system. The bar chart below demonstrates the following, from left to right:

- » Job seekers who engaged in DPN sponsored activities (i.e., career mapping, resource planning and IRTs) were enrolled in WIA intensive services at a significantly higher rate than job seekers who did not participate in DPN activities.
- » Job seekers who engaged in DPN activities earned almost the same exact wage as those who did not seek DPN resources.
- » WIA enrolled job seekers who engaged in DPN activities became employed at a slightly higher rate than those without DPN resources.
- » The percentage of WIA enrolled job seekers who engaged in DPN activities had 100% job retention, whereas those who did not seek DPN resources had a slightly lower retention rate of just over 88%.



### Four Data Points are Charted

- Percentage of WIA core service applicants enrolled in WIA intensive services
- Percentage employed at exit
- Percentage meeting retention
- Average wage

The tracking system also demonstrated how DPN sponsored activities increased access to WIA services and outcomes to job seekers with a variety of challenges to employment including veterans, persons who are homeless or with a criminal justice history, and job seekers with limited vocational and technical skills (Not depicted in graph). Overall, three main factors emerged on the value and impact of the DPN sponsored activities of career planning, resource mapping and IRTs. The factors listed below influenced the Oregon State Workforce Investment Board to expand the DPN project statewide and replicate the career mapping process in all One Stop Career Centers:

- » DPN activities allowed the WIA system to provide intensive services to untapped labor pools.
- » DPN activities allowed the WIA system to meet—and in many cases exceed—WIA performance measures with these populations.
- » DPN activities allowed WIA service providers increased access to community-based services and resources for their enrolled WIA job seekers.

*Lessons Learned: Supporting job seekers with multiple challenges to employment*

- » Inform job seekers with disabilities and/or other challenges about all available programs and resources, including WIA services.
- » Identify motivated job seekers with disabilities and/or other challenges who would benefit from enrollment in the WIA system.
- » Develop a process in One Stop Career Centers for all job seekers to gain assistance in “mapping” career goals, challenges and resources.
  - Include in this process a chance for the job seeker to develop a timeline of services that allows a WIA counselor to maintain the progress of the employment plan.
  - Include in this process a chance for the job seeker to identify resources and engage partners, using the IRT model as one option for enhancing communication and coordination of services.
- » Identify job seekers who are experiencing multiple challenges (some may be labeled “hard-to-serve”) and assist in mapping career and resource plans.
- » Learn more about the IRT process and help to build an understanding of the benefits within the One Stop Career Center.
- » Advocate for the IRT model to be implemented in the One Stop Career Centers as an option to serving job seekers with disabilities and/or multiple challenges to employment.
- » Identify resources and reach out to other service systems that have available resources.
- » Explain the option of working with an IRT to job seekers, to ensure the need for this type of resource coordination and understanding of shared information between agencies.

*NOTE:* The IRT may be a culture shift for agencies who are accustomed to referring job seekers to other systems instead of providing services in tandem. However, as more success stories are shared and support for the model increases, this shift can happen.

## Case Studies

### *Focus on Mr. B – “Identifying the Challenges & Coordinating Efforts”*

Mr. B had a Bachelor’s degree in design from a state university in Oregon. During a meeting with a WIA counselor at his local One Stop Career Center, Mr. B divulged that he has autism and has had trouble keeping a job in the design field. After consulting with the DPN, the WIA Counselor referred Mr. B to a Career and Resource Mapping workshop, which is offered to all job seekers as a core service. The workshop provided the opportunity for Mr. B to explore his career path and identify the challenges preventing him from maintaining employment. Through the process, Mr. B discovered that the lack of formal structure and temporary nature of most entry-level jobs in the design field were the primary challenges to his success. .

In sharing what he had learned with his WIA counselor, a new employment plan was created. They discussed the possibility of working with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to create a highly structured job description in a field related to his design training. This would provide Mr. B with a more permanent position with more structure, while also giving him the chance to gain valuable work experience. By building his skill set and on-the-job experience, he would potentially position himself for a job in the field of design later down the road.

Mr. B was in agreement with this new path to employment. The DPN and WIA Counselor agreed that direct communication and working together with VR would increase Mr. B’s opportunity for successful employment, so they accompanied him to meet with the VR Counselor. The discussion focused on Mr. B accessing a community college’s Occupational Skills Training Program in an area related to his design background. Through the program, students attain training certification and are placed on a worksite with a local company. The customized nature of the training would allow for accommodations to be built into the curriculum.

Using the IRT approach, the WIA and VR counselors worked together to identify and strategize how their combined services and resources could fully support Mr. B’s goals. VR agreed to provide job development to locate a business both suitable and willing to participate in the Occupational Skills Training Program. The WIA Counselor agreed to use training dollars to pay for the program through an Individual Training Account (ITA). With help from the DPN, the WIA Counselor would also assist the community college to provide Mr. B with any needed accommodations.

Mr. B enrolled in a training program with TRI-MET, a mass transit agency in Oregon. He learned to apply his computer-aided design skills to routing and maintaining TRI-MET’s bus fleet. The WIA Counselor worked with the community college liaison to negotiate a weekly meeting between Mr. B and his trainer/supervisor. The set nature of this meeting was a critical accommodation, since it addressed Mr. B’s anxiety around social interactions and performance expectations. Mr. B regularly wrote down any questions or issues he had and e-mailed them to his supervisor/trainer between weekly meetings. The meetings were always at the same time and all questions were addressed. This accommodation led to Mr. B’s increased comfort and better performance in the training program. Mr. B went on to attain employment with another local company. His increased understanding of how to accommodate himself in the workplace has given him a significantly better chance at maintaining employment.

### *Focus on Mr. C – “Partnering in Support for Career Advancement”*

A VR Counselor contacted a local One Stop Career Center to arrange interpreting for a job seeker who was deaf and interested in accessing WIA funded training. After consulting with the DPN, the WIA staff contacted the VR Counselor and suggested the option of holding a joint meeting with the job seeker, Mr. C, and both counselors present. The One Stop Career Center would provide an overview of all available services and Mr. C would have the opportunity to complete paperwork depending upon his level of interest. In addition, both counselors could explore the option of working together to better coordinate resources and increase Mr. C's chance for successful employment. The VR Counselor agreed to this approach and offered to provide the interpreting for Mr. C's initial orientation at the One Stop Career Center.

In the introductory meeting, the WIA Counselor learned that Mr. C had been working for 15 years in a glass manufacturing plant since his graduation from the Oregon School for the Deaf. He was interested in receiving training in a field that would allow him to advance and earn higher wages, as these opportunities were not available in his current position. Upon receiving an orientation of all One Stop Career Center services, Mr. C expressed his motivation and interest in WIA funded training in order to reach his employment goal.

Mr. C was referred to the Career and Resource Mapping workshop, a core service offered at the One Stop Career Center. This process allowed him to explore areas of strength, transferable skills, preferred learning styles, and overall career objectives. With all of this information, Mr. C determined an employment goal of a “Machinist”. The staff from the One Stop Career Center and the DPN assisted Mr. C in completing labor market research in this area of work and he was enrolled in intensive WIA services.

A solid resource plan would need to be developed which addressed Mr. C's communication needs from enrollment in the WIA training program through his retention on a job. An IRT meeting was convened by the DPN to discuss these communication needs, as well as training and placement strategies. The local college's Office for Disability Services, the training program instructors, and the American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting team from the community college were brought together to discuss accommodations with Mr. C and his WIA and VR counselors. Through these face-to-face meetings, it was agreed upon that the Office of Disability Services would provide ASL interpreting services for the duration of Mr. C's training and internship. They also agreed to regularly coordinate with the DPN and VR Counselor on Mr. C's progress and placement into an internship with an interpreting team. VR would pay for any needed interpreting for 90 days after Mr. C's placement on-the-job. With assistance from the DPN, the WIA Counselor would monitor the progress of the employment plan, facilitate all IRT meetings, and act as a distribution point for information exchanges between all partners.

Mr. C was registered in a Machinists Certification Program at the local community college. He completed the training certification successfully and is currently working with the training provider to set up an internship with a local company. The internship is the primary placement strategy, since most students who complete the temporary position are hired by the hosting company. The DPN will work with the training provider to ensure that successful communication strategies demonstrated in the classroom are provided to the student in the workplace as well.



# Resources

## *DPN Resources*

- » [www.doleta.gov/disability](http://www.doleta.gov/disability)
- » [www.dpnavigator.net](http://www.dpnavigator.net)

## *IRT-Related Resources*

- » DPNavigator Site Index: “I”—Integrated Resource Team  
<http://www.dpnavigator.net/pages/siteindex.html>
  - Training; February 2008 — Integrated Resource Team Webinar
  - Integrated Resource Team Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (.doc)
  - Integrated Resource Team Frequently Asked Questions PowerPoint
  - Examples of IRTs from DPN Project (.doc)

- » Video -- Disability Program Navigators: Making Employment Connections for Job Seekers with Disabilities

### URL

This video is part of a series of videos and information briefs, entitled, “Disability Program Navigators: Making the Connections For Job Seekers with Disabilities,” to disseminate promising practices to expand the capacity of the One-Stop Career Center system to serve customers with disabilities and promote positive employment outcomes of people with disabilities.

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