

# Experiences of AJCs in Service Alignment

An Evidenced Based Approach



August 5, 2020



# Presenters



**Dr. Robert Stensrud**



**Doug Keast**

# South Central Connecticut Panel



Charlotte Copenhaver,  
*Bureau of Educational  
Services for the Blind*



Barbara Green,  
*Workforce Alliance*



Roxann Robinson,  
*Bureau of Rehabilitation Services*



Jill Watson, *Workforce  
Alliance*



# Related Priorities Identified by Illinois LWIBs and Local Offices/Programs

- (#4) Communication Occurs across One-Stop Programs (20 Areas)
- (#3) Cross-Training is Provided to Staff (14)
- (#1) Use Customer Input to Design and Deliver services (9)
- (#9) Processes are Streamlined and Aligned (7)
- (#13) Customer Information is Shared (7)
- (#12) Partners Share an Understanding of Career Pathways (5)
- (#8) Services are Delivered by Function (4)
- (#7) Staff Collaborate on Customer Assessment (3)
- (#10) Service Plans are Living Documents (1)

# Common Work Plan Activity in Illinois

- Shared vision of customer service
- Develop activities to establish a stronger sharing culture
- Job seeker service team of front line workers
- Develop shared database/case management system
- Share Integrated Career Plan for customers during referral
- Create a universal consent form
- Create work group and set partner meeting schedule for cross-training
- Cross Training - LMI, Career Pathways, AJC orientation

# Objectives

- Knowledge of how professionals in other AJCs consider co-enrollment, and how it impacts customer service.
- Perspective on local customer service priorities in light of experiences and approaches in other centers.

# Methodology

- Round One Questions
- Identified Sites
- Round Two Questions
- Thematic Analysis
- Conclusions

# Round One Questions

- Identify VR Administrators Recognized for Being Well-Informed Innovators of WIOA Implementation
  - Identified 21 State VR Administrators
- Conduct Focus Group on National Advances in Promoting Co-Enrollment
  - Recommend States Demonstrating Best Practices in Co-Enrollment
  - Recommend Focus Group Questions of Local AJCs to Learn What They Do
- Ask Nominated States to Recommend Local AJCs for In-Person Focus Groups
  - Invite Recommended AJCs to Participate and Schedule Meetings

# Round Two Questions

1. Please describe your process and culture for collaborative customer service in your American Job Center. How do you respond to all customers as they come in and engage the expertise required for each job seeker in meeting their career objectives?
2. How would you define co-enrollment? What would be evidence of effective co-enrollment?
3. How would you evaluate yourselves on your effectiveness in co-enrolling customers?
4. How important to effective co-enrollment is your ability to communicate easily, often, and informally?
5. How important to effective co-enrollment is having an information system that promotes easy data entry and sharing?
6. How important to effective co-enrollment is the support of regional managers? State administrators? Federal requirements?
7. What makes you effective at successfully supporting customers in becoming eligible for the appropriate services? Managing their caseloads? Getting them successfully employed?

# Thematic Analysis

- Recorded Responses
- Presented Summaries to Participants for Validation
- Reviewed with WINTAC Team
- Wrote Summary Report

# 1. Describe Your AJC Culture

- *“We put customers first and make personal connections across partner agencies so service is personalized for each customer,”*
- *“We trust each other to be doing what they believe is best for the customers,”*
- *“Customer service begins with informal communication among personnel that extends from casual conversations,”*
- *“Share information on intra- and inter-agency activities and updates,”*
- *“Follow up on referrals formally and informally,”*

# 1. Continued

- *“Sharing lunches and other social events promotes trust and collaboration,”*
- *“Co-location promoted fast and informal referral of customers from reception through direct services,”*
- *“AJC supervisor collaboration and support promotes staff interdependence,”*
- *”Clear lines of communication based on how customers moved into and through the AJC.”*

## 2. Define Co-Enrollment

- *“Staff from all agencies working together to personalize and coordinate services to each customer,”*
- *“Personally walking customers to specific personnel from other agencies and “having customers be treated like I would want to be treated if I were a customer,”*
- *“Supervisors defined co-enrollment as the capacity to integrate intake, planning, service coordination, and reporting into a single system rather than separate systems that do not connect.”*

### 3. Effectiveness of Co-Enrolling Customers

- *“Most successful when a customer came to the AJC with an understanding of what services were available and with a clear expectation of what assistance they wanted,”*
- *“Uninformed referral sources complicate planning and coordination,”*
- *“Well-informed reception area regarding what questions to ask incoming customers and which individual within which agency should receive the initial referral,”*
- *“Much of the effectiveness due to supervisory support and collaboration across agencies at the supervisory level,”*
- *“Collaboration among mandatory partners was easier than with strategic partners,”*
- *“Primary barrier to effective co-enrollment was the inability to share data across reporting systems and the subsequent need to improvise interpersonal information sharing strategies.”*

## 4. Importance of Communication

- *“Participants enjoy their jobs. The people with whom they worked made their jobs enjoyable and found informal ways to build and solidify their social networks,”*
- *“Communicating easily, often, and informally was essential,”*
- *“This was also important among mandatory and strategic partners,”*
- *“Feeling of being supported by regional supervisors and state administrators allowed engaging in such communication so service gaps could readily be addressed.”*

## 5. Effective Information Systems?

- *“An information system that promotes easy data entry and sharing was highly important, especially when plans and funding streams were being developed,”*
- *“Participants relied on their informal communication channels to compensate for the lack of reliable information systems,”*
- *“Participants believed their regional managers and state administrators recognize the limitation of communicating across some platforms and were trying to find solutions,”*
- *“Without the active informal communication across agencies, the AJCs would seem more like a shopping mall.”*

## 6. Importance of Administrative Support

- *“Critical. These individuals created the sense of a collaborative culture in which people could trust that everyone was working for the best interest of customers and could take risks to address failure points in the value stream,”*
- *“Regional managers worked together to provide clear communication to staff regarding state and national expectations and policy changes.”*

## 7. What Makes You Successful?

- *“Success relied on peers and managers trusting that everyone was working toward the same customers’ goals and providing high quality seamless service,”*
- *“Success relied on trusting the competence of peers and managers and the willingness of people to admit mistakes and learn from them,”*
- *“Success relied on trust in people to ‘go the extra mile’ and take risks when failure points occur rather than attempt to pass blame onto others.”*

# Collaborative Partnerships to Provide a Higher Level of Services for Job Seekers with Disabilities



*Please describe customer service for Job Seekers at the AJCs in South Central Connecticut/How would you describe the customer service culture for programs?*

- Job Seekers with disabilities are **integrated**, not isolated, within the center...they receive the same services, support and resources as job seekers without disabilities;
- Extensive **staff training**, ongoing **technical assistance** and **collaboration with VR** has **informed** and **enabled** job center staff to **comfortably and confidently** serve job seekers with disabilities and **provide any necessary resources** or **accommodations** to help them succeed.

Please describe customer service for Job Seekers at the AJCs in South Central Connecticut/How would you describe the customer service culture for programs? (continued)

**ACCESS:** Universal Design, Large Print Materials, Automatic Door Openers, Online Materials, Entrance Ramps, Signage, Levered door handles, grasp bars, emergency call buttons, contracts with ASL interpreter organizations are a few examples.

**IDENTIFICATION, DISCLOSURE and REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS:** Incorporation of opportunities for self-disclosure and requests for reasonable accommodations upon enrollment and thereafter;

*Please describe customer service for Job Seekers at the AJCs in South Central Connecticut/How would you describe the customer service culture for programs?*

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY:** VR-informed purchases of Assistive Technology visible and readily available in each center; ex: JAWS/Zoom Text Fusion; Dragon Naturally Speaking Software; Handheld magnifiers; Talking Typing Teacher, Adjustable Height tables, Large Font Keyboards

## *How has COVID 19 changed your service alignment or customer experience?*

- AJC/VR staff continue to work **remotely** most days;
- AJCs recently opened to the public on an **appointment only** basis with limited hours and priority given to those without adequate technology
- AJC/VR **collaboration continues** via email, phone and virtual meetings (I.e. Zoom)
- **Disincentives/Barriers to Job Seeking** because of COVID:
  - Stimulus funding
  - Extended and additional Unemployment Compensation
  - Protections from housing evictions
  - Parents need to provide childcare
  - Fears of becoming infected

## *Do you have an approach or procedure that encourages co-enrollment?*

- **WIOA, the Disability Employment Initiative and the 1-Stop Certification process** have driven us to seek and produce a **higher level of services** for job seekers with disabilities and **increase enrollment** numbers;
- Each organization needs to become familiar with each other's **systems**: eligibility, service flow, services provided, resources, etc.
- Success of **DEI IRT/Case Conferencing/Collaboration** Model is now incorporated into new initiatives with plans for expansion to additional AJC programs.

*Do you have an approach or procedure that encourages co-enrollment? (continued)*

- VR/AJC **Co-facilitation of Workplace Readiness Training Program** offered at the AJCs to all customers (not only those with disabilities)
- VR/AJC **partnership** established to offer **Industry Specific training programs** designed by employers and extend to all job seekers, with and without disabilities.

## *How is "leadership" established or reflected in service delivery?*

- Senior management from each agency must have **buy-in** and provide **support, staff and resources** for successful implementation of co-enrollment services.
- VR management are active members on the **Workforce Board**; Workforce Board staff serves on the **State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)**.
- VR staff are key stakeholders on the **1-Stop Certification Team** and their expertise has guided us towards ADA compliance, Universal Design, Accessibility, and the purchase and use of Assistive Technology.

## *How is "leadership" established or reflected in service delivery?*

- **Co-location** of VR Staff at the AJCs (MOAs and IFTs)
- Workforce Development management established and facilitate regular **Regional Partnership Meetings** with VR and other community organizations who share many of same customers.....increases interagency knowledge and referrals to AJC, VR and community resources.

# Thank you!

***Kymbel Branch***, Manager of Career Development Services, Workforce Alliance

***Jill Watson***, Manager of Special Grants and Projects, Workforce Alliance

***Barbara Green***, former Disability Resource Coordinator, Workforce Alliance

***Jessica Corneau***, Regional Director, Southern Region, CT Dept. Of Aging and Disability Services/Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)

***Charlotte Copenhaver***, Vocational Rehab. Counselor, CT Dept. Of Aging and Disability Services/Bureau of Educational Services for the Blind (BESB)

***Roxann Robinson***, Vocational Rehab. Counselor, CT Dept. Of Aging and Disability Services/Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)

# Contact

---

**Dr. Robert Stensrud**

**(515) 724-2994**

[stensrud@mac.com](mailto:stensrud@mac.com)

**Doug Keast, WINTAC**

**(515) 707-8828**

[dkeast@ndi-inc.org](mailto:dkeast@ndi-inc.org)

# Resources

**Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC)** <http://www.wintac.org>

**South Central Connecticut – Workforce Alliance**  
[www.workforcealliance.biz](http://www.workforcealliance.biz)

**Connecticut Department on Aging and Disability Services** <https://portal.ct.gov/AgingandDisability>

**Equus Workforce Solutions** <https://equusworks.com/>