

Issue BRIEF

“The success of the reformed workforce investment system is dependent on the development of true partnerships and honest collaboration at all levels and among all stakeholders.”

—Workforce Investment Act Final Rule
<http://www.doleta.gov/regs/statutes/finalrule.htm>



Moving Toward Integrated Job Seeker Services: Collaboration Among American Job Center Programs

Vinz Koller and Anne Paprocki, Social Policy Research Associates

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS BRIEF

Collaboration among multiple partners is a focus of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and reinforced under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. These partners—most prominently, the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker and Wagner-Peyser Employment Service (ES) programs—provide employment-related services to their customers through American Job Centers (AJCs). Across the 28 Local Workforce Investment Areas participating in the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation, ES and WIA employed three staffing models for the delivery of core services:

- A functionally aligned model in which staff from both programs worked interchangeably, providing job search assistance and other core services to AJC customers.
- A specialized staffing model in which WIA and ES staff provided distinct services.
- A hybrid model in which both functionally aligned and specialized staffing models were used.

Two other common aspects of collaboration emerged: collocation of multiple partners at AJCs, and partners' data entry into a common management information system.

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A key tenet of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) was to promote collaboration among workforce development programs to create a comprehensive and integrated system, accessed through American Job Centers (AJCs, formerly known as One-Stop Career Centers). The Act identified programs and agencies that were required to partner to operate the AJCs (see text box on the next page). The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which superseded WIA, continues the focus on partnerships and adds Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) as an additional mandatory partner. This system of mandatory partners was intended to make workforce investment services more “customer-focused,” by requiring programs to “co-locate, coordinate, and integrate activities and information” at AJCs.¹

This brief discusses the collaboration between the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and other AJC partners in 28 Local Workforce Investment Areas (local areas) randomly selected to participate in the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation (WIA Gold Standard Evaluation).² It begins by describing how WIA and Wagner-Peyser Employment Service (ES) program staff in the study's local areas collaborated to provide job seekers with core services, including greeting customers upon arrival at the center, providing new customers with a general orientation to AJC services, assisting customers with using information and online tools in a resource room available to all job seekers, and conducting workshops that are generally open to anyone. It then discusses two other aspects of partnering: (1) collocation of partner staff at AJCs, and (2) use of a common management information system (MIS) by AJC partners to record and share information.

MANDATORY AJC PARTNERS



- Programs authorized under Title I of WIA (programs for adults, dislocated workers, youth [including Job Corps], Native Americans, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, veterans)
- Wagner-Peyser Employment Service programs
- Trade Adjustment Assistance programs
- Veterans' Employment and Training Services
- Unemployment Insurance programs
- Senior Community Service Employment Program
- Adult education and literacy activities (authorized under Title II of WIA)
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Postsecondary vocational education
- Employment and training activities carried out under Community Services Block Grants
- Employment and training programs administered by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Welfare-to-work programs under the Social Security Act 403(a)(5) (no longer in existence at the time of the study)

Source: Workforce Investment Act, Section 6220.200.

STAFFING CORE JOB SEEKER SERVICES

Typically, AJC partners in the study's local areas had specialized staff members who worked on determining eligibility and providing services only for their specific program. However, as needed, these specialized staff referred customers to other programs. For example, vocational rehabilitation program staff typically provided services only to their program participants but might refer them to other partners in the center; staff at other AJC partner programs might refer customers to the vocational rehabilitation staff.

The WIA and the ES programs differed from most other mandatory AJC partners in that they served similar populations and provided some similar services. For example, both the WIA Adult and ES programs can provide core services to AJC customers. Hence, the opportunities for sharing the responsibility of providing services were greater for the WIA and ES programs than other AJC partners. Among the local areas in the study, we identified three broad staffing models to provide core services: (1) functionally aligned staffing, (2) specialized staffing, and (3) hybrid staffing, which included both functionally aligned and specialized staffing. Each model was adopted by roughly one-third of the study's local areas (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. WIA and ES staffing models adopted by the study's local areas



Source: WIA Gold Standard Evaluation qualitative data collection, 2012-2013.

Functionally aligned staffing

When functionally aligned to provide core services, WIA and ES staff members were trained to function interchangeably in providing services. Of the 28 local areas, 9 used a functionally aligned staffing approach to provide three or more core services, including greeting customers, providing AJC orientations, staffing resource rooms, and conducting the same workshops.

Local areas varied in how they functionally aligned their staff. One local area established “welcome teams,” which carried out the greeter role and conducted center orientations, and “job-getting teams,” which focused on conducting workshops and helping customers in resource rooms; both of these teams included both WIA and ES staff members. In other areas, WIA and ES staff members took turns providing certain functions, such as greeting customers, on a rotating basis. Similarly, in some areas, WIA and ES staff took turns conducting the same workshops; in other areas, each program facilitated specific types of workshops. To promote the smoother coordination of staff, in five of the nine functionally aligned local areas, WIA and ES staff who provided core services reported to one supervisor, rather than each reporting to a program-specific supervisor.

Staff in the local areas with functionally aligned staffing argued that this approach was more effective; it allowed job seekers to access services more quickly, because any WIA or ES staff person—regardless of program affiliation—could assist them. However, local area staff reported one challenge to implementing this staffing model: small AJCs did not always have sufficient staff for both a WIA and an ES staff member to be available to interchangeably provide core services. For example, one local area could not use the functional alignment model in some centers, because due to funding cutbacks, those AJCs no longer had ES staff. In another local area, staff reported that functional alignment may have eliminated some of the benefits that come with staff specializing in particular programs.

Specialized staffing

Unlike the functionally aligned staffing model, under the specialized staffing model, WIA and ES staff had specific responsibilities that did not overlap. Of the 28 local areas that participated in the study, 11 used this specialized model. The staff specialized in one of three ways:

- 1. By service.** In five local areas, ES staff members were responsible for nearly all core services, and WIA focused on providing intensive and training services. In some of these local areas, WIA staff may have occasionally led a workshop or helped in resource rooms, but ES staff took primary responsibility for all core services.
- 2. By customer type.** In another four local areas, WIA and ES staff members both provided core services but specialized in serving distinct customer groups. Often, ES staff focused on providing services to customers receiving unemployment insurance, and WIA staff focused on other customers.
- 3. By location.** In the remaining two local areas, WIA and ES both provided core services but in different locations. In one of these local areas, ES operated AJCs that provided core services primarily to customers who did not need training, and WIA operated AJCs that provided core services, such as job placement assistance, mostly to customers who received training.

Staff in the local areas that used a specialized staffing model noted that, for the most part, the model led to a well-integrated and coordinated system of responsibilities that took advantage of the ability of one set of staff to become experts in specific functions. For example, the ES staff that focused on assisting unemployment insurance recipients could become experts on the unemployment insurance work search requirements.

In some local areas, however, the specialized staffing model involved duplication of services. This issue was especially prevalent in the four local areas that established separate resource rooms for ES and WIA customers. In one of these local areas, at least three AJCs each housed two separate resource rooms. The resource room near the center’s reception desk was typically referred to as the “ES resource room,” as it included mostly materials provided by the ES program. Another resource room at the rear of the center was commonly referred to as the “WIA resource room,” and primarily contained materials provided by WIA. Customers participating in either WIA or ES could use either resource room. In another local area, the ES and WIA resource rooms were in different but adjacent buildings and, in the other two local areas that established separate resource rooms, the WIA and ES resource rooms were in different AJCs.

Hybrid staffing model

Eight local areas combined elements of the functionally aligned and specialized staffing models and, hence, are categorized as using the hybrid model. These areas functionally aligned ES and WIA staff to provide one or two core services but also specialized staff for other core services. In these hybrid local areas, greeting customers entering an AJC was the core service most likely to have functionally aligned WIA and ES staff. Fewer of these local areas had functionally aligned staffing for the center orientation, the resource room, and workshops.

PARTNER COLLOCATION AT AJCS

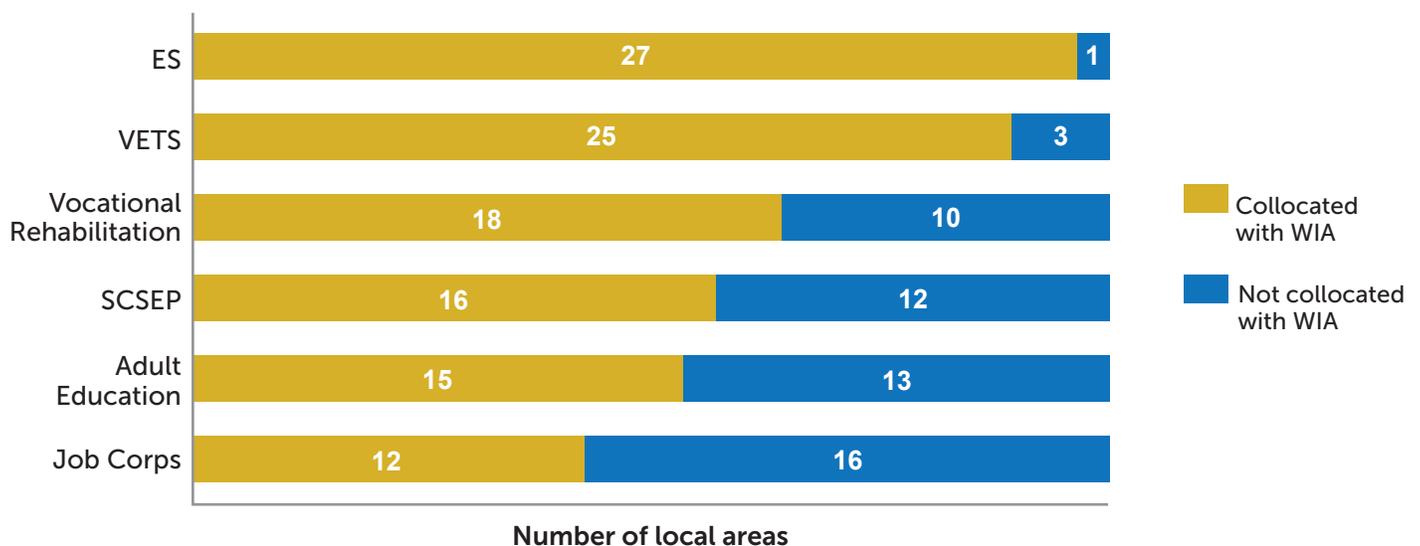
WIA required that at least one AJC, referred to as “comprehensive,” provide core services and linkages to all AJC partners’ services but did not require the collocation of partners. (WIOA now requires that WIA and ES collocate at AJCs.) However, at the time of the collection of the qualitative data for the study, ES staff members were collocated with WIA staff in at least one comprehensive AJC for at least one day per week in all but one of the study’s 28 local areas (see Figure 2). In 24 local areas, ES staff members were collocated full-time at *all* of the local

areas’ comprehensive centers (not shown). Staff from the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) were collocated with WIA staff in most local areas, and staff from the Vocational Rehabilitation, Senior Community Service Employment, adult education, and Job Corps programs were also frequently collocated (Figure 2).

Decisions to collocate programs at AJCs were often made at the local level, but four states that participated in the WIA Gold Standard Evaluation enacted policies that required collocation of at least some partners. One of these states required that a comprehensive AJC have *all* WIA-mandated partners physically collocated. Another of these states required that comprehensive centers include staff members from five mandatory partners: WIA, ES, VETS, Adult Education, and Vocational Rehabilitation. Two states required that the TANF and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) employment and training programs operate out of comprehensive AJCs.

Local area staff in the study cited three benefits from collocation. First, staff needed to be collocated to implement the functionally aligned or hybrid staffing models described above. Second, collocation facilitated regular meetings between program staff. These meetings promoted

Figure 2. Collocation of partner staff with WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs’ staff at local areas’ AJCs



Source: WIA Gold Standard Evaluation qualitative data collection, 2012–2013.

Note: A partner is counted as being collocated if the partner staff members were physically located at some or all of the area’s comprehensive AJCs for at least one day per week. We included data on these six partners as these were the partners most frequently collocated.

AJC = American Job Center; ES = Wagner-Peyser Employment Service; SCSEP = Senior Community Service Employment Program; VETS = Veterans’ Employment and Training Service; WIA = Workforce Investment Act.

shared policies and procedures and facilitated discussions about the needs of specific customers. Third, local area staff argued that collocation strengthened the referral process, because customers were more likely to follow through on a referral if the partner was located in the same AJC and even more likely to follow through if they had been introduced to a staff person at the referred program. In one study local area, a WIA staff person would accompany a customer to the desk of a staff member from the referred partner to introduce the customer and briefly summarize what assistance the customer hoped to receive from the partner. WIA staff members in the study also said that it was easier to follow up on whether a referral occurred and the outcome of the referral when the partner staff members were located in the same center.

One constraint on the ability of program staff to collocate was the number of partner staff relative to the number of AJCs. This problem was especially challenging for smaller partners, such as VETS. However, it was even difficult for larger partners, such as ES staff, when the local area had many AJCs relative to the number of ES staff assigned to the area. Staff in one local area with 11 comprehensive AJCs (the average across the local areas in the study was 5) noted that the number of AJCs was a major constraint to collocation.

Some local areas in the study had sufficient staff to collocate but chose not to. One Local Workforce Investment Board in the study opened AJCs specifically for the delivery of WIA services, because it believed that the centers—managed by ES—were neither well managed nor attractive to customers. In other local areas, some administrators of the WIA and other programs were reported to be resistant to becoming part of a “branded” AJC that would not emphasize their individual program identities. This position was summarized by one WIA program staff member in the study, who said that even when collocated, “ES staff provides ES services to ES customers, and WIA staff provides WIA services to WIA customers.”

SHARED MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

In most of the study’s local areas, some partners entered customers’ data into a shared MIS. In 25 of the 28 local areas in the study, WIA and ES entered data into the same MIS. In 23 local areas, at least one other partner—most frequently the Trade Adjusted Assistance or VETS programs—also entered data into an MIS that was used by the WIA and ES programs. In two of the three local areas in which WIA and ES did not enter data into the same MIS, a statewide MIS for WIA did not exist, and each Local Workforce Investment Board had its own customized WIA MIS; the ES program used its own statewide system. The other local area in which WIA and ES did not share an MIS employed a statewide MIS, but the local WIA administrative entity members elected to not use it because they perceived that it was difficult to use and did not include key case management features.

Respondents in the study reported two advantages of entering data into the same MIS as their partners. First, these systems typically lessened the burden of data entry, because information about the customer could be entered once and would thereafter be available to other shared MIS partner staff members without additional data entry. Second, these systems typically allowed partners to view data on each other’s customers. This ability made it easier for staff members to keep track of services customers received from other partners and helped minimize the duplication of services. However, when they entered data into the same MIS, some programs did not allow WIA staff members to view some or all of their customers’ data for confidentiality reasons, mitigating some of the benefits of a single MIS.

Through an integrated staffing model, collocating partner staff, and sharing an MIS with partners, the WIA programs in most local areas in the study had made significant efforts to collaborate with other AJC partners. How WIOA enhances or otherwise changes such collaborations will be worthy of further study.

ENDNOTES

¹ Workforce Investment Act; Final Rules. 20 CFR Part 652.

² Another brief in this series, “Enhanced Intake for All American Job Center Customers: A Functionally-Aligned Model,” discusses a model in which WIA and Wagner-Peyser Employment Service program staff collaborate to provide all new AJC customers an enhanced intake.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Through the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), Congress allocated about \$2 billion annually for employment and training services that states and their Local Workforce Investment Areas (local areas) provided through their Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. WIA mandated that job seekers and employers have access to employment and training resources provided by more than a dozen workforce system partners through American Job Centers. At these centers, job seekers could access core services, such as information on local labor markets and job openings. In addition, eligible adults and dislocated workers could receive intensive services, such as career counseling and skills assessments, and training services. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which superseded WIA, made important changes to the public workforce systems but largely maintained the services provided through the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs.

This issue brief is one in a series of briefs that presents findings from the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation, which is being conducted for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Employment and Training Administration (ETA). The study examines the implementation, effectiveness, and benefits and costs of the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs using an experimental design. The study occurred in 28 local areas that were randomly selected to participate. For more information about the evaluation, please visit the [project web page](#).

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