# ***1) How can State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies enhance outcomes through their coordination with Employment Networks (ENs) operating under the Ticket to Work Program with the Social Security Administration?***

Coordination with Local ENs can provide an opportunity for wraparound services that complement the services provided by the DSU. Well established agreements with the ENs can be the basis for strengthening ongoing service impact (enhancing performance outcomes) as well as being a mechanism for re-engaging former participants in the VR services, should the situation require. In addition, the structure of the AJC presents an opportunity for the VR agency, in a core partner role, to work with other AJC partners to support the AJC operation as an EN. This can result in additional resources coming to the AJC to be strategically reinvestment to enhance stronger employment outcomes for all job seekers with disabilities.

# ***2) What are Partnership Plus Agreements?***

“Partnership Plus” is the name for a type of agreement that outlines how the DSU will coordinate services with SSA approved employment networks. While not required under WIOA, coordination with Employment Networks (ENs) with regard to shared customers is a requirement. The benefit of articulating how the agencies work together in an agreement such as this in advance of providing service has the impact of making the service flow for the customer and the agency staff more effective and efficient. In lieu of a Partnership Plus agreement, the coordination could be articulated in a Local MOU with the Workforce Development Board, if the EN is a part of that agreement.

# ***Policy***

**WIOA:** There was no guidance in WIA for agreements with Employment Networks, or in the Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prior to WIOA. With WIOA, there is the following related guidance:

* Coordinate their activities with any other state agency functioning as an Employment Network (EN);

Section 412 State Plans (J) Coordination with ticket to work and self-sufficiency program. The State plan shall include an assurance that the designated State unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program established under section 1148 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1320b-19).

* Provide the Social Security disability beneficiaries they serve with "general information on additional supports and assistance for individuals with disabilities desiring to enter the workforce, including assistance with benefits planning;" *(Some ENs offer benefits advisement/planning as a service.)*

**Section 413:** Eligibility and Individualized Plan for Employment

(b) Development of an Individualized Plan for Employment, and Related Information.

“(2) Individuals Desiring to Enter the Workforce -- For an individual entitled to benefits under title II or XVI of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C 401 et seq., 1381 et seq.) on the basis of a disability or blindness, the designated State unit shall provide to the individual general information on additional supports and assistance for individuals with disabilities desiring to enter the workforce, including assistance with benefits planning.”

* Provide VR consumers with information on post-employment services and service providers that are necessary for the individual to maintain or regain employment; and

“(4) (iii) amended, as, necessary, to include the postemployment services and service providers that are necessary for the individual to maintain or regain employment, consistent with the individual’s strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, and informed choice.”

* Coordinate VR services with EN services for common customers.

Section 413: Eligibility and Individualized Plan for Employment

(5) “(H) for an individual who also is receiving assistance from an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program established under section 1148 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1320b-19), a description of how responsibility for service delivery will be divided between the employment network and the designated State Unit.”

# ***Resources***

<https://www.congress.gov/113/bills/hr803/BILLS-113hr803enr.pdf>

<https://yourtickettowork.com/web/ttw/public-vr-program>

***Benefits to SVRA’s as a result of good working relationships with Employment Networks (ENs) (from a draft resource developed by NENA****)*

1. The client is more likely, with support, to achieve nine months of earnings over SGA, which results in cost reimbursement.
2. EN support may result in better outcomes reported to WIOA.
3. Help in obtaining average quarterly hourly earnings Second and Fourth quarters after exit from VR services (WIOA).
4. Increased job retention/decreased recidivism.
5. Promotes self-sufficiency and decreases dependency on VR.
6. Hourly earnings (better outcomes for VR clients on benefits).
7. Higher wages at exit from VR.
8. Create a stronger working relationship with the EN.
9. Encourages a collaborative working environment.
10. ENs become an additional referral source for VR clients.
11. Smoother transition when leaving VR.
12. Better long-term supports.

# ***Discussion***

The State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (SVRA) operates in agreement with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to support individuals who are disability beneficiaries in becoming self-supporting through employment. As individuals achieve employment outcomes at a Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) level, SSA will provide payments or service reimbursements to the agency, depending on the nature of the SVRA’s agreement with SSA.

At the same time, SSA is establishing agreements with other agencies, including Job Centers. SSA provides guidance to these other agencies (Employment Networks) to establish agreements with the VR agency in order to improve the coordination of services in a manner that will benefit the agencies and improve their outcomes with beneficiaries. With regard to those situations in which the Local Workforce Development Board or Job Center operates as an Employment Network (EN), this strengthens the SVRA in its role as a core system partner to improve how the traditional labor exchange system includes people with disabilities while improving the agency’s own long-term outcomes with people in this population. In the WIOA vision, a job center is a lifelong resource to businesses, workers, and job seekers. When a job center operates as an employment network, it is to its benefit to utilize the resources generated from EN operation to assure that it is able to support individuals in sustaining a satisfying standard of living above SGA, long after VR closure and long after an individual leaves the SSA disability support.

The VR system is unique in its operation under its own agreement with SSA, in addition to being a core partner of the job center system that operates as an Employment Network. Along with payments that the SVRA receives from SSA for outcomes achieved by beneficiaries, the SVRA is also a part of the job center EN operation that brings new resources into the system. This places the VR agency in a position to advise the operation of the Job Center in a way that enhances its success in including people with disabilities in services, and in the investment of resources generated by the operation to increase the future success of their shared operation. SVRAs in several states are currently operating in this manner and benefitting as an agency in this process.

Agreements between SVRAs and other ENs are known as **Partnership Plus** Agreements. Agreements of this type have shown to establish greater comfort for staff in working together in serving SSA disability beneficiaries. A great benefit for the VR agency in particular is the promise of ongoing support to the individual that has “exited” from VR services, while continuing to pursue a career. Employment Networks, including the Workforce Employment Networks, are in a position to follow these beneficiaries far beyond the 12 months that would assist VR in collecting cost reimbursement, and promote long-term stability for the beneficiary.

The recommendations in this FAQ are focus on enhancing the operational relationships the state agency has with all Employment Networks, in order to assure the ongoing support for individuals with disabilities that make their own decisions to pursue career objectives. This includes private agencies and American Job Centers. Job Centers that have become successful in their EN operation have been able to add new resources and tools to their job center services as a result of Ticket to Work income that comes into the center. Disability Resource Coordinators, job center professionals with disability expertise, have been added to the job center service operation. Flexible funding has become available to fill in service gap needs not able to be addressed by available “program” funds. Services such as SSA work incentive advisement and benefits planning for SSA disability beneficiaries have been added in centers and freely available upon request by beneficiaries. These resources have also been valuable in support to the use of strategies such as Integrated Resource Teams and other efforts to braid and leverage resources.

For information about Job Center EN application and operation in an integrated setting or examples of State Partnership Plus Agreements, contact the WINTAC representative below.

# ***Recommendations***

1. Establish agreements with all ENs, including workforce ENs, in a manner that establishes cooperation and understanding between agencies and removes a competitive spirit that might exist in some areas.
2. Coordinate with all ENs to establish collaborative outreach to the disability community. Misinformation about SSA disability benefits is often an insurmountable barrier for many beneficiaries.
3. Work together with other ENs with regard to the investment of new resources in ways that will enhance their ability to connect individuals with disabilities into the career pathways of the community. This can include the enhancement of tools in the job center such as customized employment and SSA disability work incentives advisement and benefits planning.
4. Work with AJC partner agencies in the development of guidance to Workforce Development Boards in their development of the MOU’s with their Job Center partner agencies. If the Job Center is operating as an Employment Network, it is a suggested practice for successful workforce Employment Networks that the EN oversite be collaborative in integrating the operation into the overall customer service operation. It is also suggested that decisions on the investment of the Ticket to Work payments be made collaboratively as well, so that the diversity of expertise in the full Job Center partnership be allowed to contribute to the success of the operation. The success of the Job Center EN will boost outcomes for all job center partners (and other community partners) if done collaboratively. This could be outlined in the MOU with the Local Workforce Development Board.

# ***For More information and Technical Assistance***

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