**Emerging Practice**

**Title: Workforce Integration – Nebraska Model**

**Submitted by:** Lou Adams

989.329.0251

lou.adams@wintac.org

**Source:** (please bold choice and provide specific reference)

1. Research Project
2. Journal Article
3. Other Center
4. **Information Gathered from VR Programs**
5. Intensive TA Provision
6. Other

**Highlights:** (Key Points to appear on “Practice” page in tool kit)

* **Focus on planning to implement rather than planning to be compliant**
* **Shared and sustained planning**
* **Customer focused design**

**Description:** (full description that can be accessed by a link)

## Workforce Integration

*The vision of the WIOA includes a common service process for all customers provided in an integrated service system in order to assure equal access to services and job opportunities for all customers, as well as increased economy in service provision for the service partner agencies.*

The Training and Employment Guidance Letter -- WIOA *(Number: 4-15 Operating Guidance for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act)* provides a compelling vision for the One-Stop Delivery System.[[1]](#endnote-1) This vision of collaborating partners consists of aligning efforts to provide high-quality customer service to job seekers, workers and businesses. WIOA strengthens the accountability for States to align their investments in the core partners, including Adult Education and Family Literacy, Adult programs, Youth programs, Dislocated Workers, Wagner-Peyser and Vocational Rehabilitation. While it may have been the intent for collaboration to take place under the previous Workforce Investment Act (WIA), WIOA mandates a meaningful alignment. The DOL Guidance Letter referenced above provides a practical framework for alignment under these three functional areas for collaboration:

1. Excellent Customer Service
2. Innovation and Service Design
3. Systems Integration and High-Quality Staffing

*“What is a common sense approach that will work well for Nebraska?”*

The tri-part focus on customer service, innovation, and systems and staff integration puts the attention on solutions rather than obstacles to improving the outcomes addressed in the common measures. In any given year, there are 5,000 joint business ventures and countless more organizational alliances to address common issues and to improve services to customers. There are recognized and inherent challenges to the integration of services that play out with WIOA Core Partner Integration as well. The “Harvard Business Review” article *Launching a World-Class Joint Venture* identifies four common challenges facing successful integration.[[2]](#endnote-2)

1. Strategic Alignment
2. Creating of a governance system
3. Creating economic interdependencies
4. Organizing

## Nebraska Workforce Integration Model

## Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired - Image of hand reading Braille Nebraska VR - Where Future Begins

### **Strategic Alignment**

Nebraska created operational guidelines to help align their strategic planning. One thematic guideline was Common Sense Planning. The partners were aware that no federal regulations had been approved toward which to steer, so their driving force became “What is a common sense approach that will work well for Nebraska?”.

Another guideline for aligning their integrated planning was to look at the system from a participant perspective. This led them to planning toward a common intake to include triggers that would direct a referral to specific programs. The current plan is one in which any person could apply across the core partners’ system through the common intake process. A referral would then be made to each of the programs appropriate for that individual. Each core partner identified would make contact with the applicant and receive notice of which other core programs were involved with the participant. A discussion would take place with the participant to determine which core partner would be the principal provider. A sub-workgroup of core partners is working to determine what case management information should be shared and with which partner. One approach under consideration is to share benchmarked information connected to performance measures. This sub-workgroup is also working on confidentiality related issues and the sharing of data between core partners.

### **The Vision and Guiding Principles**

Nebraska’s Workforce System delivers statewide **coordinated, proactive, responsive and adaptable** services for jobseekers and employers to maximize opportunities for earning, learning and living.

**Guiding Principles**

**Coordinated:**

* The strategies are **coordinated**: Partners working collaboratively, sharing information and aligning policies across programs to ensure efficiency and enhanced access.
  + Common intake procedures
  + Aligning terminology
  + Integrating technology
  + Targeted outreach
  + Enhancing access to available services
  + Improving data sharing and analysis
  + Sharing knowledge to facilitate referrals

**Proactive:**

* The strategies are **proactive**: Anticipating future problems, needs and changes.
  + Coordinating policy development
  + Public sector partnerships
  + Developing and implementing sector strategies
  + Promoting and targeting high wage, high skill, and high demand jobs
  + Developing career pathways
  + Aligning education, credentialing and placement
  + Expanding work-based learning opportunities
  + Planning for the impacts of disruptive technology and innovation
  + Increasing school careers and workforce professionals’ knowledge and exposure to the job opportunities in Nebraska

**Responsive and Adaptable:**

* The strategies are **responsive and adaptable**: Continuously improving to meet the changing needs of jobseekers and employers.
  + Coordinating funding streams
  + Assessing systems collaboratively to ensure continuous improvement
  + Coordinating with local and regional areas
  + Targeted distribution of available funding streams
  + Targeted acquisition of new funding streams and other resources
  + Working closely with each WIOA-designated region
  + Promoting career readiness
  + Continuous improvement of workforce development strategies
  + Continued development and dissemination of online resources

### **Governance System**

The people who worked on the Combined State Plan were an active core partner group who met weekly for several months and are currently meeting every other week. Because of the internal State Departmental structure, the Department of Education needed to review and approve the plan before it proceeded. This required an early start on the process in order to meet the federal deadlines. Early deadlines helped them focus and work closely. They also hired a grant writer to pull together all of the elements. Having a grant writer allowed the core partner group to focus on the vison and the goals rather than the wordsmithing of the document. Each planning group member reviewed the drafts individually and then as a group. This process had the added benefit of connecting core partners on unified tasks and to build positive working relationships. For example, the Nebraska Commission for the Blind had very little previous contact with Adult Education and Literacy and Wagner-Peyser but developed a strong connection through the planning process.

Each of the following Workforce System Partners have been responsible for specific coordinating activities as part of the Combined State Plan Goals and Strategies implementation. In nearly every case, they shared responsibility with one of the other Workforce System Partners:

* Nebraska Workforce Development Board and Local Area Workforce Development Boards
* Nebraska Department of Labor
* Nebraska Department of Education
* Nebraska Department of Education, Career Education
* Nebraska Department of Labor, Office of Employment and Training
* Nebraska Department of Labor, Office of Labor Market Information
* Nebraska Partner Council

### **Organizing for Implementation**

The Core Partners Group continues in an implementation governance role with an expanded membership. The group is being facilitated by the Nebraska Business Development Center. This group, comprised of central office and field staff, consists of around 15 people who are creating the action plan for implementing the goals of the Combined and Unified State Plan.

**Approach**

* Both Nebraska VR Directors highlighted the *Common Sense Approach to Planning,* focused the partners on what is **needed** in Nebraska. This helped them move forward in the absence of certainty regarding the final regulations.
* Nebraska Core Partners created a process focused on *planning to implement* rather than *planning to be compliant.*
* All of the partners were on the same page with protecting the confidentiality of the clients **and** ensuring a participant’s full access to services.
* The group was able to sustain their effort and their relationships beyond the planning process and into the implementation process.

Nebraska is aligning goals and strategies with their three guiding principles: 1. Coordinated; 2. Proactive; and 3. Responsive and Adaptable; and with Coordination lead, activities and timelines. Subgroups are being formed under goal and strategic activities to create and oversee the final implementation activities.

The is draft snapshot of the Nebraska Workforce Planning Matrix. The table headers include Combined State Plan Goals and Strategies, Guiding Concept: Coordination, Guiding Concept: Proactive, Guiding Concept: Responsive and Adaptable, Workforce System Partner Coordinating Activities, Activites, Timeline.

Figure 1: Snapshot of Nebraska Workforce Planning Matrix (draft).

These are designed to provide a system of excellent service and support to three major groups:

* + Consumers
  + Business
  + Service Providers
  + Groups (participants, business and providers)

Specific examples of coordinated activities currently underway or planned include joint training on Motivational Interviewing for Core Partners arranged by Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation and exploration of a single point of contact for Businesses between VR Business Account Managers, Work in Nebraska, DOL staff and other Combined Plan Partners.

### **Evaluation and Potential Impact**

The steps taken in this practice can be considered a work in process; however, the consistency and sustainability of the collaborative approach the Nebraska Core Partners Group has developed is one that is likely to have a positive impact through planning and implementation to practice. With the changes that come from the WIOA implementation, Nebraska residents will be well served by the strategic alignment around guiding principles, a governance structure that places an emphasis on collaboration, and the strong relationships and effectiveness of the core group team. Nebraska’s Combined Goals and Strategies have measurable goals. The focus on the tri-partnership of business, participants and providers as a driving force in their system design and the emphasis on a practical common sense approach is a promising beginning for Nebraska, as is the fact that the VR Directors have been active participants in the integration of services.

**For More Information:** (a specific link or person to contact)

**Mark Shultz**, Director, Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation

877-637-3422

[Mark.Schultz@nebraska.gov](mailto:Mark.Schultz@nebraska.gov)

**Pearl Van Zandt**, Director, Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

877.809.2419

[pearl.vanzandt@nebraska.gov](mailto:pearl.vanzandt@nebraska.gov)

1. Wu, P. Assistant Director. *The Training and Employment Guidance Letter - WIOA Number: 4-15 Operating Guidance for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.* Employment and Training Administration, US Department of Labor, Aug. 13, 2015, Washington, DC [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Bamford, J., Ernst, D., and Fubini, D. *Launching a World-Class Joint Venture*, Harvard Business Review, February 2004, Boston, MA [↑](#endnote-ref-2)