

and securing employment through the One-Stop delivery system.

WIA provides a system in which multiple programs and agencies (including state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies) to: (a) Form partnerships in this effort; (b) share expertise and coordinate resources; and (c) provide services to assist people in gaining and retaining employment. The One-Stop Career Centers that comprise this system are in a position to expand employment opportunities for people with disabilities, thus ensuring that the intent of the New Freedom Initiative is accomplished.

Under WIA, collaboration with multiple required partners¹ is intended to create a coordinated and streamlined system for the customer seeking employment. It is essential to involve additional state or local programs as partners with the One-Stop Center to enable people with disabilities to have increased employment opportunities and choice in employment. These additional programs include, but are not limited to, state programs for Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, Medicaid, Mental Health and Transportation; State Councils for Developmental Disabilities; state assistive technology programs, Small Business Development Centers and secondary education programs. While not required partners under WIA, these programs have expertise and/or resources that can contribute to expanding employment and business opportunities for people with disabilities.

In addition, community colleges, University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, business incubators, lending institutions, foundations, faith-based and community organizations, and other state or local programs may also be critical partners. These agencies and programs may not be informed about the potential for coordinating resources and expertise with Local Workforce Investment Boards and One-Stop Centers to increase employment, choice and wages for people with disabilities.

In addition, One-Stop Centers may elect to become employment networks

under the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Ticket-to-Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (42 U.S.C. 1320b-19 *et seq.*) (TTW), thus making it more likely that they will require expertise in customized employment strategies to successfully facilitate employment for people with disabilities who are recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). The TTW is providing increased employment opportunities for people with disabilities who receive SSI and/or SSDI benefits by addressing some of the major barriers encountered by these individuals as they attempt to gain or regain employment. Approximately eight million people with disabilities receive SSI and/or SSDI benefits. According to the U.S. General Accounting Office, less than one percent of these individuals leave the rolls each year as a result of paid employment. About one-third of those who do leave the SSI and/or SSDI roles typically return within three years.

The TTW program provides a variety of work incentives, including greater choices of needed employment services, the continuation of Medicare eligibility for SSDI recipients and, at the state's option, health coverage under the Medicaid program to certain workers with disabilities, either by permitting them to purchase Medicaid coverage or by extending Medicaid eligibility to them without charge. As a result, there is unprecedented opportunity for these individuals to enter, or return to the workforce.

Therefore, increasing numbers of individuals with disabilities will be approaching their local One-Stop Centers for assistance.

Many strategies exist for securing integrated, competitive employment for people with disabilities, including people who previously might have been considered "nonfeasible" for employment, and people who have been segregated in institutions, nursing homes, and day activity programs.

Many exemplary practices and promising strategies have emerged through decades of research and demonstration projects, and through other public and private activities promoting increased choice and self-determination for people with disabilities. These include a variety of approaches such as:

- Supported employment;
- Supported entrepreneurship;
- Individualized job development;
- Job carving and restructuring;

- Use of personal agents (including individuals with disabilities and family members);

- Development of micro-boards, micro-enterprises, cooperatives and small businesses; and

- Use of personal budgets and other forms of individualized funding that provide choice and control to the person and promote self-determination.

These and other innovations hold the promise of dramatically increasing both employment and wages for people with disabilities, in part by increasing their choices for integrated, competitive employment, business ownership, micro-enterprise development, entrepreneurship, and other employment options that were previously seldom available.

An important focus of these innovations has been on providing non-stereotypical jobs that provide increased earnings, benefits, and career advancement potential for people with significant disabilities. There is a substantial need for a sustained and coordinated initiative to build professional competency within One-Stop Centers and their partners, including service providers and employers, about the use of such customized employment strategies.

Additionally there is a need to:

(1) Effectively expand the availability of personal agents, job development expertise, and other strategies for achieving customized employment for people with disabilities;

(2) Increase the number of eligible training providers who register with the local One-Stop Career Center with expertise in providing customized employment assistance, including faith-based and community organizations that have expertise in supporting families and individuals;

(3) Provide information, technical assistance, training and strategic planning that focuses on integrating customized employment strategies into the workforce investment system;

(4) Develop ongoing linkages with employers, professional and business service organizations and trade associations and market to employers the abilities of people with disabilities to work in a variety of jobs;

(5) Coordinate all necessary employment and related supports from WIA partners and other essential programs that are not required partners under WIA; and,

(6) Research and demonstrate alternative methods of determining effective performance by the workforce investment system in terms of service to people with disabilities.

¹ Some of the required partners are adult education and literacy activities under Title II of WIA; post-secondary vocational education activities under the Carl Perkins Act (20 U.S.C. 2301 *et seq.*); vocational rehabilitation programs authorized under Title V of the Workforce Investment Act; welfare-to-work programs; veterans employment and training activities, community services block grant employment and training activities; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development employment and training activities; and activities authorized under Title V of the Older Americans Act (WIA sec. 121(b), 29 U.S.C.A. 2841(b), 20 CFR 662.200).