

## **RIAL WORKSHOP ON PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL)

### **United States Response to Guiding Questions**

#### **PANEL 1 – Public Employment Services (PES) and local development: linkages with productive environment to ensure access to quality and productive employment**

- **Is there a process of decentralization of the PES in your country? If yes, how is this process taking place and how far has it progressed?**

The workforce system in the United States (U.S.) is decentralized by design, based on the premise that local labor markets vary significantly in the nature of their economies and the resources available to support workforce development and other support services. These variances require flexibility to customize and tailor workforce development strategies to meet the needs of the different labor markets.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) established this decentralized structure. While there are roles retained by states, much of the workforce system is driven locally and overseen by business lead local workforce investment boards. These local boards are required to design and implement a One-Stop delivery system that includes at least one comprehensive site where 17 different Federal programs are integrated, with services being delivered seamlessly to employers and jobseeker. One of these programs is the program formerly known as the U.S. Employment Service.

Employment service funding continues to flow to states as authorized by the Wagner-Peyser Act, as passed by the United States Congress in 1933. It remains a state controlled program with a requirement that services must be delivered by state staff. Under the auspices of WIA, state staff are deployed in the locally designed One-Stop Career Centers (also known as a “One-Stop”) and are functionally supervised by local One-Stop managers. There are challenges with integrating a state run program and state staff into a locally operated service delivery system.

- **What efforts are being made by the PES to address the needs of the productive environment and contribute to local economic development?**

In the last 3 – 4 years, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has placed strong emphasis on aligning all workforce investment system resources, including public employment services, with economic development strategies in regional economies.

A key component of fostering regional innovation in the global marketplace is transforming the way we have traditionally approached workforce preparation. The 21<sup>st</sup> century economy demands a workforce with postsecondary education credentials; comfort in rapidly-evolving high-technology environments; and the adaptability to respond immediately to changing economic and business needs. The public workforce system must play a leadership role in meeting these demands – catalyzing the implementation of innovative talent development

and lifelong learning strategies that will enable American workers to advance their skills and remain competitive in the global economy.

In 2005, DOL launched the Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development or WIRED initiative to demonstrate this premise. DOL funded 39 strategic partnerships (that included the workforce system) in regional economies around the country to develop a shared regional economic vision supported by talent development strategies that ultimately promote job creation. The framework these regions are demonstrating is described below.

Three critical “pillars” that must be in place and linked in order for regional economies to successfully innovate and create an environment for job creation:

- An environment that supports and nurtures capital investment and entrepreneurship;
- A world-class infrastructure, which includes both physical and technological/virtual assets; and, most importantly
- Talent development systems and strategies that give workers the skills needed to succeed in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy and continuously provide a lifetime of learning and education opportunities.

To link these three pillars, the WIRED framework calls for the strategic partnership of multiple regional stakeholders, many of them relatively nontraditional allies for the workforce system – philanthropists and foundations, capital investors and angel networks, research and development institutions – along with the entire continuum of education partners, economic development entities, business and industry association representatives, regional infrastructure stakeholders, community leaders, and others.

Under the WIRED model, the workforce investment system at all levels is the catalyst for promoting and sustaining the role of talent development as a driver of economic competitiveness, increasing job growth and creating new opportunities for American workers. Talent development is the core business of the workforce system, and innovative workforce education strategies inspire and support the implementation of complementary investment, entrepreneurship, and economic development innovations.

More information on DOL’s WIRED initiative is available at <http://www.doleta.gov/wired/>.

In order to bolster the capacity of the workforce investment system to carry out this new role, DOL developed a number of technical assistance strategies, including hosting “transformational forums” for state and regional teams of workforce system partners at all levels, including at the One-Stop service delivery level, to examine new roles and new competencies that must be in place. In addition, DOL is currently reframing a model for One-Stop service delivery, including traditional employment services, based on this framework.

- **Are there strategies or initiatives in place to achieve closer coordination with local productive actors, in particular, closer ties with employers? If yes, what are the successful components of these strategies?**

The U.S. workforce system is founded on the premise that workforce development is a collaborative activity that must engage business and industry, educators at all levels and other key partners such as community and faith-based based organizations. Sustained strategic partnerships among these players are critical to fully understand and analyze workforce challenges and to develop solutions that leverage public and private resources in their implementation. Employers are no longer just customers of the workforce system, but must be strategic partners. They are critical in articulating the skills and competencies needed for jobs in demand; they routinely invest resources to train and educate a skilled workforce; and they have other resources that can be leveraged, such as using skilled employees as instructors. Education and training providers must translate skill needs into relevant curriculum that result in industry driven credentials. The workforce system is the source of a pipeline of workers and can help make connections to employers following completion of education and training. Community organizations can provide other support services that enable individuals to successfully complete training.

Important success factors for sustained strategic partnerships include a shared ownership of developing workforce solutions and a willingness for all parties to utilize their resources to implement solutions collaboratively. Moreover, success depends upon an entity guiding the partnership. This is an important role is usually taken on by the public workforce investment system.

- **How can effective collaborative relations with employers be achieved? What services do the PES provide to employers?**

As discussed above, the workforce system in the U.S. has two kinds of relationships with employers – one as customer and one as strategic partner. Our experience is that employers are eager to work collaboratively if they can see a return on investment for their commitment of time and resources. Therefore, it is critical to keep engagements with business highly focused and results oriented. One of the initial challenges may be getting businesses to the table. The U.S. experience has been successful through using intermediaries, such as local Chambers of Commerce and industry trade associations as partners for that purpose.

With regard to service delivery to employers, the U.S. has actively promoted business services through One-Stops. Many centers have implemented business account representatives to encourage businesses to post jobs through the One-Stop Career Center. In some cases these business representatives may focus on specific high growth industry sectors. One-Stop Career Centers provide a wide array of services to employers that may include recruitment activities such as job fairs, use of One-Stop space for recruitment and interviewing, provision of labor market information, and screening and referral of job applicants. Some One-Stop Centers offer more customized and intensive services to employers on a fee-for-service basis, such as doing specialized assessment and testing of applicants, background checks, or job profiling.

## **PANEL 2 – Articulation of PES with workforce development (training) systems and information systems**

- **In your country, what is the role of the PES in vocational and job counseling? Is there any coordination with the workforce development (training) systems? If yes, how is this coordination taking place and what are its achievements and lessons learned?**

Employment and training systems in the U.S. are integrated in a single delivery system with resources from multiple funding streams. These include employment services resources, which are used to provide career guidance and counseling. At the Federal level, resources are utilized to create national self-service electronic tools that provide comprehensive career information. Two examples of these national tools can be found at the following Web addresses: [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org) and [www.careervoyages.gov](http://www.careervoyages.gov). Some states develop similar e-tools through their labor market information sites. For example, Florida's career information website can be found at <https://www.employflorida.com/careers.asp>. One-Stop Career Centers generally provide career guidance and job counseling in two ways: by providing self service tools and by offering more intensive staff assisted services for those who need them. Most comprehensive One-Stops have self-service resource rooms that have staff coaches to support customers using computers, tools, and information in the resource room. Some One-Stop Career Centers may also provide career guidance information as part of group workshops. For those who need additional assistance, staff counselors are available to provide more personalized guidance. Some One-Stop Career Centers may also provide career guidance information as part of group workshops.

One of the challenges that some One-Stop Career Centers face is transferring the information they have on in-demand industries and occupations learned from extensive business engagement at the local level to counselors who may be both providing career counseling, but also connecting customers to training opportunities. This transfer of information needs to become a formalized process within the One-Stop to enable better alignment of skill attainment with actual jobs in demand. **Another challenge the One-Stop Career System faces is its capacity to utilize assessment tools as part of the career guidance process. In these cases, the U.S. is taking steps to improve these processes.**

- **Are the PES in your country playing a more active role in job counseling and in follow-up after job placement?**

Job counseling is a critical component of service delivery as discussed above. Follow-up after job placement is a service available when an individual is placed following training, but resource constraints have been a factor in reaching its full potential. The follow-up service is most often made available to individuals with barriers to successful employment by community and faith-based organizations that partner with the One-Stop system.

- **Is there any relationship between the labor market information system or the observatory (if one exists) and the PES?**

The labor market information system is an integral component of the U.S. workforce investment system. It is foundational to the electronic career information systems available to both job seekers and workforce professionals, which inform their understanding of the industries and occupations in demand and assist in career guidance. States have labor market information offices that collect data to feed national systems for occupational projections and other information related to the workforce. These offices receive funding from the Federal level to support use of data at the state and local levels to translate it into workforce intelligence for use in strategic planning by the workforce system as the foundation for career guidance information. In some states, regional labor market analysts are also available to support these functions.

- **Is the work of the PES receiving feedback in the form of information from the observatories or information systems? If yes, how is this feedback taking place and what have its effects been?**

In the U.S. there are two types of information systems: those that provide labor market information and those that capture and report data on service delivery and performance outcomes such as entered employment, retention, and wages. At all levels (Federal, state, and local), the workforce system has the opportunity to utilize these data sources to inform service delivery strategies and to measure results. The extent to which both types of information are utilized for these purposes in tandem is not uniform across the country.

### **PANEL 3 - Public Employment Services' approach to addressing vulnerable groups or persons with greater barriers to employment**

- **Do the PES in your country work in some way with the social protection system to address the needs of vulnerable groups or groups facing serious difficulties entering the labor market? If yes, what are the lessons learned, difficulties, and results of this relationship?**

In the U.S. there are different models for how vulnerable groups are served through the workforce system, which integrates public employment services with a wide array of other employment and training services. First, several programs targeted at vulnerable groups are mandatory partners in One-Stop Career Centers including programs for individuals with disabilities, veterans, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, Indians and Native Americans, and disadvantaged or at-risk youth. In many states and local areas, employment and training services to individuals receiving federal assistance (formerly known as “welfare”) are also served through the One-Stop system.

There are two approaches that have been successful in serving more vulnerable or disconnected populations. The first model is focused on developing the capacity and the service delivery processes in One-Stop Career Centers to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to the full array of services available through the One-Stop and not limited to those targeted specifically to that population. The Employment and Training Administration and the Social Security Administration (SSA) are jointly funding the Disability Program Navigator Initiative in 45 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto

Rico where SSA has implemented employment support initiatives. The Initiative promotes comprehensive services and work incentive information for SSA beneficiaries and people with disabilities, through the One-Stop system. The Initiative focuses on developing new and ongoing partnerships to achieve seamless, comprehensive, and integrated access to services, creating systemic change, and expanding the workforce development system's capacity to serve customers with disabilities and employers.

A second model connects networks of community and faith-based organizations to the One-Stop Career Center. This networking is formalized and enables the customers of community and faith-based organizations to access One-Stop services more effectively, while continuing to have personalized support of the community-based organization. The network effectively expands the accessibility and reach of the One-Stop Career Center, and has shown to be effective in both urban and rural areas.

- **Are there any successful experiences or good practices in your country for overcoming the discrimination faced by persons in accessing employment, based on their gender, race, ethnicity, migration status etc?**

The U.S. has strong anti-discrimination laws and government infrastructure to manage, investigate, and resolve complaints of discrimination. These laws apply to the administration of federally funded workforce programs. Similarly, states also have infrastructure and processes in place to manage, investigate, and resolve complaints. DOL routinely provides guidance to states and hosts annual conferences to provide technical assistance and promote effective anti-discrimination practices.

An example of a pro-active model to support the employment of legal immigrants in the U.S. was Federal funding provided to Arkansas and Iowa to demonstrate New American Centers (NAC), which customized One-Stops for new legal immigrants. The goals of the NACs is to (1) speed the transition of new Americans into communities; (2) promote their stability and rapid employment with good wages; and (3) enhance the economic development of the communities where new Americans reside. In addition to providing services such as job placement and English language and citizenship classes, the New Americans Centers offer a variety of support and social services to newcomers including various forms of immigration assistance and referral services to employers and workers.

- **Which measures, programs, or strategies are being implemented by the PES to support groups facing serious difficulties entering the labor market?**

As stated previously, the public employment service function is integrated into a broader comprehensive workforce investment system in the U.S. Formal programs exist and are integrated within the system for several populations as discussed above. In addition, States are given broad flexibility to tailor workforce strategies for these populations using discretionary resources. National discretionary resources are also focused from time to time to demonstrate new and innovative strategies to enable individuals with significant barriers to employment achieve effective entry into the labor market.