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Case Studies on the Implementation of the Workforce Investment Act: Spotlight on Maine

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Case Studies

Spotlight on Maine

on the implementation of the Workforce Investment Act

by Jaimie Ciulla Timmons, Sheila Fesko & Allison Cohen

Introduction

The implementation of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) requires major organizational change for employment and training agencies. The initiative emphasizes coordination, collaboration and communication among organizations for better service delivery. At this time, states are developing systems that will enable them to address the needs of all customers seeking employment. The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) has conducted state case studies for two purposes: (1) to identify how states have begun the process of collaboration under the new mandates of WIA; and (2) to understand the impact on customers with disabilities.

This is the third in a series of publications highlighting the findings from case studies in three states. Other studies describe the challenges and successes of WIA implementation in Kentucky and in Minnesota. Following these reports, a series of cross state analyses will focus on themes that were common among all states. These products are intended for use as a practical resource for other states as they work to create more collaborative systems for all job-seekers.

Collaboration and partnership are the cornerstones of the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

Requiring a major re-organization of state systems, the law mandates the creation of comprehensive linkages between training and employment agencies. States are now implementing these changes and are working hard to best respond to the diverse needs of their customers. The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) conducted state case studies to consider how state systems work together to realize more seamless service delivery, and specifically how customers with disabilities are affected by the workforce system changes. ICI researchers visited Maine in January of 2001, and interviewed local and state officials who were integral to the change process in the state. Much of the local data presented is derived from our interviews with staff at the Portland Career Center. All interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and analyzed. Written materials from Maine's state plan as well as the state website also contributed to this summary. Represented throughout the text in their own voices, participants from Maine shared their experiences, wisdom, and struggles in an effort to be a resource for others who are working to foster greater collaboration in their workforce systems.

Maine's Demographic Profile

Population and Income

- Population (2000): 1,274,923
- Per capita income (1999): \$23,529
- Median household income: \$38,932
- Personal income is increasing. Between 1993 and 1997, the average earnings for many Maine occupations outpaced inflation.

(Source: Maine Department of Labor, Division of Labor Market Information Services, in cooperation with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)

Geography

- 30,865 square miles
- 40.6 persons per square mile in 1999 (National average: 77.1)

Labor Market

- Unemployment rate: 3.6% (January, 2001) (National average: 4.2%)
- 2000 unemployment rates hit an "unprecedented low statewide." Lowest rates were in southern and coastal regions.
- 2000: Net gain of 17,800 jobs (Largest one-year increase since 1988)
- Continual job growth is surpassing the state's supply of labor.

(Sources: Gaining Good Jobs—Trends and Prospects in Maine, June, 1999; Labor Market Digest, March 2001)

History and Current Structure of the Maine Workforce System

The linkage between the workforce and the disability systems essentially began in 1997 when the Bureau of Rehabilitation (BRS) moved into the Department of Labor (DOL). Therefore, collaborative efforts preceded the implementation of WIA. BRS's position within the Department of Labor proved to be a boon for the agency because relationships and objectives were already shared between the two entities. Given this infrastructure, Maine was an ideal state for the early implementation One-Stop CareerCenter grant funds from the U.S. Department of Labor.



In Maine, there is one state agency that provides vocational services to individuals with disabilities, the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and it has two divisions, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). There have been three administrative moves for these agencies within their state government structure. From the 1970s until the mid- 1990s, BRS was housed within the Department of Human Services (DHS). In 1996, it briefly moved to the Department of Education (DOE), and then found a permanent place in DOL. Some believed that a catalyst to this event was that the Maine Commissioner of DOL had previously worked in the rehabilitation field and felt that the mission and goals of DOL were aligned with those of BRS.

Current infrastructure

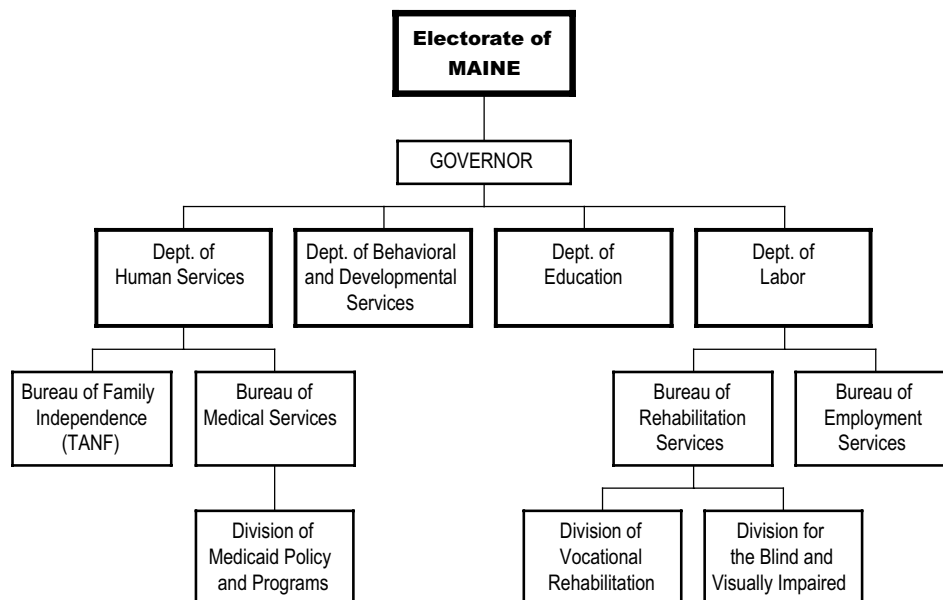
There are four Departments that focus on workforce development and disability issues under Maine’s Governor. These are the Department of Human Services, the Department of Labor, the Department of Education, and the Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services. Within DOL is the Bureau of Employment Services and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

Maine has 23 CareerCenters, with many concentrated in the more densely populated south. During the development of the Maine CareerCenter system, a statewide “Core Group” handled center policy and implementation issues. The group included leaders from:

- ◆ WIA partner agencies
- ◆ Division of Labor Market Information Services
- ◆ Unemployment Insurance
- ◆ Veterans’ Employment and Training Services

The Maine Jobs Council (MJC) integrated nine councils into one employment policy board (the State Workforce Investment Board). Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs) in Maine set policy, negotiated performance measures with the Maine Jobs Council, certified training providers and programs, selected One-Stop operators, and chartered CareerCenter sites. The local boards were also responsible for vision and leadership, technical assistance, oversight, community relations, and the leveraging of resources.

Maine Employment and Disability-related Agencies



Portland

Much of the local perspective in this report is derived from our site visits and interviews with staff at the Portland CareerCenter. While we realize that this center is not representative of all centers throughout Maine, it exemplifies “what’s working” in the state and its practices embody flexibility, leadership, and innovation.

In Portland, the collaboration was unique. It consisted of four agencies: the Division for the Blind, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Training Resource Center (TRC) which is a private non-profit agency, and Bureau of Employment Services (formerly known as Job Services). Representatives from these agencies formed a core management team for leadership, direction, and goal-setting. Individually, BRS, TRC, and Employment Services still managed their own staff. The management team set a shared tone and culture, which facilitated true partnership among the individual agencies.

When the agencies first decided to co-locate and integrate their services, several factors worked in their favor. TRC’s board of directors was comprised of very knowledgeable and resourceful individuals who facilitated the leasing process for the shared space. Because TRC was not a state entity and could negotiate with greater ease and flexibility, it was decided that TRC would be the primary leaseholder. The lead negotiator was a TRC board member experienced in real estate. This expertise put TRC in a very good position during negotiations with the landlord. In addition, the other partners were easily able to extract themselves from their present leases.

During this process and within a year of the actual move, agency representatives began to meet. Sub-committees to address the logistics of the move and shared management were formed to allow staff to meet across a common cause. Agency staff got acquainted personally and professionally. This resulted in a smoother transition and decision-making once the process got underway. After the move, some unsettling situations arose but did not affect the viability of the center. For example, the building underwent substantial renovations while the partners were present, but this only contributed to a “we’re all in this together” kind of spirit. Also, the building was sold and a new landlord came in but ultimately this was of little consequence to the tenants and did not disrupt the plans of the partners.

Case Study Findings

The following themes emerged from the interviews with key informants in Maine as important to the state’s implementation of the Workforce Investment Act:

1. Flexible standards for co-location
2. Local level implementation
3. Cost allocation
4. A new relationship with federal stakeholders
5. The creation of a specific set of strategies to facilitate integration
6. Innovative ways of dealing with disability issues
7. Placement of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services within the state organizational structure
8. Sharing data while using two systems

1. Flexible Standards for Co-location

I think it’s important to be under the same roof. Getting to know one another one on one. ‘She’s a good person after all, she’s not so bad.’ I think the fact that we sat down and had many meetings, hashed out our fears, opened up our fears rather than just harbor them and then a certain amount of trust came into play. I think once there was trust, the territorial issues became less and less.
—Local manager

Coordinated service delivery is one of the fundamental tenets of WIA and agencies have used the concept of co-location (essentially “moving in together”) to achieve this goal. Local variation among workforce areas resulted in different levels of collaboration. For instance in the more sparsely populated area of Northern Maine, some CareerCenters did not have all the partners present. Maine did not “force” co-location for its own sake when it did not meet the needs of the community. Because there were often geographic and other boundaries that prevented partners from co-locating, CareerCenters were connected through a central network fully accessible at all times. Electronic connectivity ensured better communication when partnering agencies could not physically share space. The Portland CareerCenter had most of the partner agencies located within the CareerCenter. Three of the most important issues that surfaced during discussions about co-location were:

- Turf
- Shared office space
- State and local relationships

Turf

At first it was us against them and them against us...Everybody was very territorial and everybody was afraid. ‘We don’t want to do too much of this. They are going to learn our end of the business.’

—Local staff member

Co-location often brings with it the issues of turf and protectionism among partnering agencies. Specifically, BRS felt that their first priority was to serve their own customers with disabilities and uphold the mandates of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. At times, not only did staff not want other agencies to infringe on their customers, services, and funding streams, but

there was also a reluctance to take on responsibilities that “belonged to someone else.” Even seemingly insignificant tasks could have an impact on the overall level of collaboration among co-locating agencies.

We almost came apart answering the TTY. There is a wonderful guide of what to do when that deaf phone rings because it's very intimidating if you have never been around it. So people were trained in how to do it, repeated the trainings, we did mock phone calls and... (yet there was still) 'It's not mine, it's not my program, why do I have to answer that deaf phone?'
—Local staff member

Also in Portland, turf was an issue because when the agencies first began to co-locate, all the programs were in different locations in the building. As staff began to move into more integrated space, they were able to do more joint planning and turf issues began to dissipate. Rather than grouping by agency, staff were assigned office space based on their job functions, so job developers for TRC were sitting next to job developers for Employment Services. This physical proximity allowed for greater levels of collaboration.

Shared office space

One of the biggest issues for agencies that are co-locating is how to negotiate shared office space. For the most part, this issue centered around customer confidentiality issues. BRS was adamant that their staff and customers have privacy during meetings and phone conversations. However, space limitations rendered this requirement impossible in some centers. Portland addressed this issue by allowing staff that use cubicles to have access to interview rooms for private meetings.

The culture and traditional working style of the agencies determined the type of space they needed for their staff. For instance, the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired emphasized that because their staff spend so much time in the field with customers, usage should be considered in allocation of space. Others perceived that they needed only cubicle space, and not private offices.

Department for the Blind consented and they said that since they are on the road so much (their clients don't come into the One Stops as often) they were willing to give up walled offices if they could have a quiet place for their cubicles.

—Local manager

State and local relationships

The relationship between state and local officials was both a benefit and a challenge. Because the state drove implementation down to the local level, management and staff at CareerCenters felt at times that they lacked guidance from a higher level. “Sometimes I thought ‘gee, I wish they could be out there telling us what to do’ and at other times I thought ‘gee, I’m glad they are not.’” Alternatively, local officials also appreciated the flexibility and latitude offered by their division directors in implementing the changes in ways that they felt best suited their needs, especially in some of the earliest CareerCenters. This flexibility was at the crux of Portland’s success. Locals kept a vested interest in implementation because they were responsible for both the process and the outcomes.

Because we were the first center to open in the state, we had the luxury of deciding on how something would be and then letting the people in Augusta (the state capitol) know what it was and getting their approval after the fact. We had a lot of things in place and said, ‘what do you guys think?’ They saw it was working and so we were allowed to keep going.

—Local manager

In Maine, physical co-location is a priority but not a true state mandate. For example, not every CareerCenter has a BRS staff person but every BRS office is attached to a CareerCenter. This flexibility in terms of physical co-location is somewhat different than in other states where co-location was of the utmost importance.

We are not going to subdivide our staff further in order to have a body in a CareerCenter when we only occupy eleven or twelve offices... We were not going to just for the sake of having somebody there.

—State Administrator

2. Local Level Implementation

Like other states, the approach to implementation of WIA in Maine was both top-down and bottom-up. The message from state administration was a mandate for greater collaboration, but the important decision-making was carried out among staff at the local level. Local staff in Maine had an important role not only in the “nuts and bolts” of implementation, but they were also instrumental in setting the tone and the agenda in the state for collaboration around workforce issues. Three themes emerged regarding local implementation:

- Local implementation was evolutionary and participatory
- Responsibility was shared with the state
- Local involvement was particularly important to BRS

Local implementation was evolutionary and participatory

The Portland center in particular benefited from a process that was both evolutionary and participatory because there were few “rules” to follow in creating CareerCenters. This was because implementation was in its infancy. The Portland CareerCenter used the approach that it was better to ask for forgiveness rather than permission from state officials, and this strategy was largely successful. With this flexibility, staff at all levels were able to sit at the table and participate in decision-making. A manager from Portland described this process:

We have done enough work with total quality management to know that in this day and age, authoritarianism doesn't get it done. People who do the real work around this organization are going to have to want to make it happen. They are going to have to see the value and they have to see the value for their customers. And then it's our job to listen to their suggestions and to really make sure that those suggestions get heard. Nobody has a lock on the truth here.

Responsibility was shared with the state

Exactly who drove the change process fluctuated, because ultimately it was a shared endeavor among state and local staff. The idea that at times local staff would problem-solve and then send this information

back up to the state is an example of the information flow that occurred. In the same vein, at some points the state sent down regulations to the local level. When this occurred, local staff were initially resistant, considering what had been for the most part a climate of local control. Because state administrators were not involved in direct implementation, it was difficult for them to know exactly what was and was not working in the CareerCenters. Occasionally local staff felt that they were “ahead in their concepts” and that state administrators needed to “catch up.” When state and local perspectives clashed, local staff dug in their heels and held steadfastly to what they believed would best serve the customer.

We won some and we lost some but we were going to negotiate and we were going to say this is how we think. You don't want to be stubborn and not negotiate but if we really felt that whatever we wanted had value we would stick to it as a local group.

—Local manager

Local involvement was particularly important to BRS

Local involvement was critical to BRS. Representatives from BRS chose to concentrate their efforts within the local boards and did not take a prominent role on the state board. BRS staff felt that because Maine's state board was pre-existing (formerly Maine Jobs Council), the agency could have more of an impact at the local level with newly established boards.

...as far as we were concerned there was this little addendum that said, 'Besides, nothing that they (state board members) say will have any impact on how we run the local CareerCenters. That's up to the local boards.' So the manager we have has to be invested in the local boards.

—State Administrator

3. Cost Allocation

The following factors had an impact on the allocation of costs:

- Early grant funding
- Changes in federal mandates
- The reduction in funding for core services at the Portland CareerCenter

Status of cost allocation

At the time that the site visits were conducted, state level officials calculated a 40/40/20 division that was the basis of their usage formula. This formula was based on the assumption that 40% of the resources were from the Bureau of Employment Services, 40% from the contracted Training Resource Center, and 20% from Bureau of Rehabilitation Services. This formula worked well for heavily populated areas such as Portland but was less relevant for more rural areas of the state where there was less walk-in traffic. Smaller CareerCenters were negotiating other financial arrangements that better suited their needs. Maine developed cost allocation guidelines to assist local boards in developing a plan that outlines the financial commitment to the CareerCenters for each partner. These guidelines acted as a somewhat neutral arbitrator during the negotiations between local officials who were struggling to build trust and partnerships among collaborating agencies.

Early grant funding

Early grant funding provided the seed money for many CareerCenters and temporarily created the illusion of ample resources. Early implementation afforded the opportunity to purchase amenities for the CareerCenters and create office decors that were welcoming and professional. However, there was concern about how to make the best use of the original funds. Money was committed to the physical structure of the CareerCenters but some believed that a better use of the resources would have been for staff, especially in light of the staffing cuts that eventually resulted once the funding source was depleted.

We would have rather gotten along with some of our old furniture and spent the money elsewhere... I would have to say when the three leather couches arrived here, as a lifelong bureaucrat, that blew my mind.

—Local staff member

One BRS Advisory Board also questioned the use of CareerCenter resources and would have preferred more money spent on client services. Higher costs for BRS combined with board members who were knowledgeable about such issues as direct and indirect costs resulted in a BRS Board taking on “watchdog” role during WIA implementation.

The pie remains the same size and if we are paying for rent rather than providing for more... services, that's

juxtaposed right there and so they are very sensitive to the fact that we have all these new great looking buildings and it doesn't have much to do with what we are doing

—State Administrator

Changes in federal mandates

Although at the time of the site visits partners were using the 40/40/20 formula, as of July 2001 the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) mandated that in Maine, BRS funding could not be used to pay for the Information Center because it was not specifically focused on serving their clients. When RSA clarified the mandate that rehabilitation funds could only be used for rehabilitation services, the partners worked together to creatively and collaboratively find a solution that did not violate the federal directives. BRS acquired a greater share of the Reception and Switchboard since data showed that BRS used a greater percentage of these services than the other partnering agencies. RSA was able to afford BRS greater latitude in the creation of their partnerships and assisted in tightening and clarifying BRS's participation and role throughout the process.

BRS has also made the distinction in cost sharing between people with disabilities and its own clients. “Someone with a disability who comes in to get some job listing has nothing to do with this cost allocation. When they come in and say, I've never worked, I am not sure what my abilities are, and they end up as a VR client, that's part of our cost allocation.” In another example, if the training partner needed a certain number of classrooms to conduct trainings, BRS would not share these costs because the space was predominantly used by Training's programs. These distinctions are important in light of the recent RSA decision to limit BRS funds to activities and resources that only directly affect BRS clients.

The reduction of funding for core services at the Portland CareerCenter

A primary issue that the Portland CareerCenter has faced during this transition is the reduction in funding of core services. This resulted in the laying off of staff from the Training Resource Center. At BES, vacant positions were not allowed to be filled. While these

agencies lost staff, BRS experienced a shift in cost responsibility. Staff reductions in BES and TRC created increases in the BRS portion of the overall costs.

These staffing constraints resulted in creative management at the Portland CareerCenter. The partners came together and reached a consensus that involved all four agencies (DVR, DBVI, TRC and BES) sharing responsibility for the Reception/Switchboard area while TRC and BES covered the Information Center. In addition, the switchboard was moved from a back room up to the reception area so that reception staff could also operate the switchboard without the presence of separate operator. Not only were partners sharing these responsibilities, but all staff at times worked directly with job seekers.

I work there two hours a week. My director of case management services works there four hours per week. It doesn't hurt any of us to get into the line and really work person-to-person with customers.

—Local manager

Creativity in management lead to creativity in cost allocation. Cost sharing was negotiated in a variety of ways, and there are now a number of cost allocation schedules. Some costs are shared in thirds; some are based on percent of staff; by areas of responsibility; and by consumer usage. Partners at the Portland Center shared a common mail/fax room and had an events room used by all departments. In terms of office space, all of the partners were intermingled. Like many centers, office and cubicle space was an issue because of confidentiality concerns. Partners established the percentage of office space each department occupied to determine how much each was to pay for common space. “If you have 31% of the office space then you pick up 31% of the hallway.” It was noted that a group meets annually to discuss the distribution of space and budgeting since personnel and office changes can alter the allocation determinations.

4. A New Relationship With Federal Stakeholders

Staff in Maine experienced both the advantages and the disadvantages of the new federal standards in the WIA legislation. On the one hand, it appeared that the

representatives from federal agencies experienced a paradigm shift and gave priority to partnering with the state. Staff at the Portland CareerCenter felt that their relationship to regional DOL staff became more reciprocal rather than just one-sided monitoring as the federal government redefined its role. They were able to look at issues jointly and considered how to flexibly respond.

So all this happened at a time when there was a great philosophical shift in the federal government and I think the feds began to re-evaluate their role and as far as I am concerned, the best thing the federal government has ever done is to act like a think tank and to bring players to the table to propose some of these ideas together and then to offer opportunity for us to grow.

—Local manager

On the other hand, when the federal government set these new priorities and partnerships, many challenges ensued. For example, the bureaucratic aspect of state and federal government makes the change process move very slowly. This became frustrating for partners who wanted to implement changes that they felt would benefit the customers they serve.

Working in a non-profit situation, we find the state system excruciatingly slow...But their hands are tied and it's a big huge bureaucracy. It comes from the feds to the state. And the feds have all these rules so it's just hard.

—Local staff person

Other challenges included:

- loss of funding earmarked for training and staffing
- meeting standards set by the federal government

Loss of funding earmarked for training and staffing

Staff in Maine felt that there was a loss of earmarked funding to support needed services. The TRC in Portland (like many other agencies) lost a third of its funding in 2001. Without discretionary grant funding, one staff member indicated that, “we would be out of business because the WIA funding is so little.” WIA funding was one of their least significant funding streams. There were now higher expectations and performance standards but limited tools or resources for state and local staff to accomplish their tasks. Staff in Maine talked about the impact of the changes in

training funds and ultimately how it affected the customers. The Portland CareerCenter lost considerable training personnel as a result of funding shifts and had limited resources to provide more intensive services to individuals who needed them.

So we are focusing on the positive side using the counseling services, career guidance, all that we know that is value added for customers. So I don't want to be too negative, I just mean that there is also the very unfortunate situation in which you now have inequities regarding customers you used to serve that used to come in and look to us for training.

—Local manager

Reductions in staffing made it difficult for the Center to rotate staff to cover different aspects of the Information Center and front desk, as well as reduced opportunities for staff to participate in professional development opportunities. As staff dealt with a broader array of customers, managers indicated that diversity training was important. Because it is difficult to free staff from their responsibilities in order for them to attend a training, the Center management strived to offer the same training in more than one time slot.

Meeting standards set by the federal government

Participants in Portland reported concern about their ability to adequately meet the standards set by the federal government. For example, staff were worried that CareerCenters would not “meet their numbers” if they registered individuals who may be harder to employ. Agencies that had previously been funded for job training did not believe they were equipped to provide intensive, long-term funding for people with greater difficulties securing employment. “For us to enroll somebody whose (goal) is eight hours (of work) a week wouldn't work because of the standards that have been imposed on us.” Respondents also expressed frustration with their accountability to seemingly contradictory federal mandates.

It's a little tough if you are responsive to a federal agency that is different than another federal law. You are kind of responding to multiple federal agencies and then if you've got local authority involved it's even more difficult.

—Local manager

5. The Creation Of A Specific Set Of Strategies To Facilitate Integration

There were several strategies that staff in Maine cited as being instrumental in facilitating the integration of Career Centers. These were:

- Creating an effective administrative structure
- Creating a shared vision
- Acknowledging that collaboration is hard and lending support
- Working to empower front line staff
- Providing support to guide staff through the change process
- Keeping the focus on the customer

Creating an effective administrative structure

The establishment of an effective local administrative structure was imperative. During the original planning for One-Stop implementation, state administrators wanted a single leader at each center to act as a point person and be responsible for the center's management. The DOL commissioner pulled together 40 stakeholders that represented state employees from all the departments and private non-profit agencies to begin planning, and brought in a neutral facilitator. This group, also known as the “gang of forty,” had to put aside their fears about retaining identity and make decisions about the administrative structure.

... there was...suspicion, anxiety, fear of job loss, fear of take over, paranoia, every possible negative emotion that you could imagine was there. At the end of two months we were nowhere so we petitioned the commissioner to extend the time. And we actually went for over four months. The consensus, much to the chagrin of my governing authorities, was team management because nobody could get beyond team management. And even though I was advocating a single manager position it would not have worked and I can look back now and be absolutely sure. Because you can't take people and take away their autonomy, their identity, their security and expect them to be fully contributing, enthusiastic partners in the process. Everybody has brought something very important to the table.

—Local manager

Largely because of RSA mandates, partners decided that a shared management structure would be beneficial.

We will do shared management of the one stops because there's no other way to do it. And we were the principle sticking point because we said our RSA is not going to tolerate a breach in the line of authority on the Rehab Act programs. And of course that is construed as you are protecting your turf and you won't be a partner... We cannot share authority for rehab act programs with anybody. We had to balance it by being as enthusiastic as possible in everything we could do... And that group after all of that work went back to the Commissioner and said the answer is this kind of shared management and that's what we need to do.

—State administrator

Within this team management approach, partners focused on making all the systems within the centers effective. “We made sure that the shared management in each of the CareerCenters was real, that all of the managers who were attempting to cooperate really understood how critical that was.”

Creating a shared vision

In Maine, barriers such as agency cultural differences and turf protection were addressed by focusing on a shared goal and vision for the collaboration.

Interviewees commented on the importance of alignment between key partners and a strong vision from leadership. In order to create a shared vision, open communication and tolerance of risk were cited as crucial. In addition, collaborators had to truly believe that the collaboration itself is better for customers.

I don't think we have had a lot of lumps. They really are growing pains. Personality clashes, turf issues, they are there but they are not insurmountable... To have a common goal is pretty key.

—Local staff member

An example of the creation of a shared vision can be seen in the following quote. Partners agreed that in order to reflect the new culture of collaboration, it was important to no longer differentiate between parties by using agency names but rather to describe the supports each provides.

One thing we agreed on was that we will not use agency names. We would use functions. So we said welcome to your One Stop CareerCenter connecting you to services for vision impairment, rehabilitation...

—Local manager

Another local example can be found in Portland. Portland began the process of creating shared goals by encouraging staff from partnering agencies to first, simply get to know each other and second, create “wish lists” of how they would envision the Center. While developing goals and visions collaboratively, staff remained flexible about the rules of the game and were urged to think creatively, and even hypothetically, about the limits of their responsibilities. The focus of the wish list exercise was to remain fun and fully participatory. This creative process allowed them to define success and push the system to the type of Center they envisioned.

I think that's probably a good message for this group because we don't like the rules anyway. We just think sometimes the rules are not in the best interest of customers. I have always told my staff, if you take the money you have to follow the rules but it doesn't mean you can't be creative. So at some point the rules are there for everybody so you can't break them, but you can go right to the edge of the envelope and it's up to you. I think of it in terms of putting another notch in your belt. You stay within the rules but you did it in a way it worked.

—Local manager

Acknowledging that collaboration is hard and lending support

As the non-profit vendor of workforce training services, TRC's mandate was not as directly affected by WIA as those of the partnering agencies.

Nothing was changing for us. The re-authorizations did change. But to a large extent our jobs, we didn't have to come in every morning and say gee am I going to have a job tomorrow. And most of the people in the building with us did. And so what we tried to reinforce with our staff is that be cool, participate, do as much as you possibly can. They have a hell of a lot more difficult circumstance than we do in trying to figure this out. Stay easy. When people come at you waving their arms in the air don't get excited. They have a reason. Understand it and then help them.

—Local manager

They acknowledged the different position of other collaborators. Their focus on lending support to other partners ultimately led the establishment of relationships. This enabled them to become key players in the collaborative process.

We did a lot of cross training additionally, some on a state wide level, some on local levels to help people understand what our capabilities were and what our motives were. We made sure that the shared management in each of the CareerCenters was real, that all of the managers who were attempting to cooperate really understood how critical that was. And were committed to actually cooperating. And we try to avoid being provocative, presenting or creating any problem that we can possibly avoid.

—Local manager

Subsequently, TRC did endure severe staffing cuts as a result of funding issues, but this did not seem to deter its determination to effectively partner with the other agencies.

Working to empowering front line staff

Portland worked very hard to develop a collaborative work environment that placed power in the hands of front-line staff. They developed strategies that facilitated empowerment, enhanced morale, and kept people invested in the change process. Staff felt a sense of contribution, accomplishment, power and control. Empowerment occurred because:

- ◆ Leadership relinquished power
- ◆ Staff were involved in committees and planning activities
- ◆ Front-line staff were included in the discussion and decision-making process

Leadership relinquished power. Sharing of power in this process was felt to not only be important, but ultimately to produce rewards. At the state level, administrators gave staff in the local CareerCenters autonomy to design their services while ensuring that they conformed to state and federal guidelines. This willingness to relinquish power occurred at various levels. For example, staff in Portland cited the Center management group for having turned over a great deal of power and control to a local working group. At meetings, management left their authority “at the door.” As a result, staff at the front line were able to contribute more. Their voices were heard and validated.

What I have found was that giving up power or giving responsibility to others to do these things, they usually experience...vested interest in it because they are responsible for what happens and they have decided how it was going to be done...If I tell you how to do

something as opposed to, ‘you are going to do it, it’s your responsibility and you are part of the decision-making process of how it’s going to be done.’

—Local manager

Staff were involved in committees and planning activities. Another way that staff in Maine tried to empower front-line staff was by encouraging involvement in committees and planning activities. Representatives from the local centers participated in the “Gang of 40” state level planning. Interviewees acknowledged that management should not always make policy and planning decisions, and that contributions were important from staff who directly deal with the customers. These front-line workers had innovative problem-solving strategies and were most in tune with the needs of the customer.

All levels were involved in activities around co-location, everyone was at the table. Being involved in the discussion was imperative. For some people who were resistant, they were empowered to make decisions and the decisions made at those levels were honored. So people who were more anxious about the change really felt like they contributed and were supported.

—Local manager

In Portland, working groups of staff at all levels were developed to address such issues as customer flow, reception, and phone systems. Overall, front-line staff seemed to have embraced these opportunities. For example, one interviewee discussed a staff person who assumed a leadership role on a “meeter/greeter” committee at the center. Although not in a management position, this individual was invested in the decision-making process. As a result, she has taken charge and adopted a leadership role. She called meetings, created an agenda, and identified potential problems and their solutions.

Front-line staff were included in the discussion and the decision-making process. Interviewees recommended that front-line staff be involved in the collaborative process from the start. Discussions around the process of decision-making were identified as critical. Through these discussions, front-line staff felt more control over, and validation within a bureaucratic system that could otherwise be perceived as insurmountable. One

specific opportunity for open discussion related to the development of a customer service policy. Internal discussions with staff were conducted in the form of half-day workshops. Goals were set, evaluative procedures were identified, and a customer service philosophy was agreed upon.

Line staff sending information up rather than administration sending it down, making people feel comfortable and inclusive... The very things that we say about the CareerCenter shouldn't only apply to external but also internal. I always felt if you make your employee happy, the people receiving services will be happier. If morale is low, it's not going to work. So I think that administrations have to believe and listen to the input because they are your front-line.

—Local staff person

Portland staff also took initiative and control when they were required to take part in state training on values associated with the Career Center system. The state program was called PRISM, and stood for Professionalism, Responsiveness, Inclusiveness, Simplicity and Measurable results. When Portland staff originally came across the training, they felt that it was somewhat dry and sought to develop a training that was more interesting. They pulled together a team of staff and managers and wrote songs and developed skits that taught all of the values of PRISM, but in a way that was more enjoyable for participants. The new approach was a big success and staff felt more of a commitment because it was something they developed together. The Portland CareerCenter has since won the Governor's Team Work Award two years in a row for ongoing creativity and excellence.

Providing support to guide staff through the change process

Partners consistently tried to think creatively about supporting their staff. Facilitators were used to help in the planning process at both the state and local levels. Staff at the Portland CareerCenter were better able to work as a partnership following this effort.

We began brainstorming... How were we going to do this? And at one point it got quite tense, is a polite word, for where we were. And we weren't getting anywhere, it was very difficult. And we brought in a professional

facilitator to move us along and help us see and hear each other better.

—Local staff member

Additional ways that support was provided included:

- ◆ Creating an information booklet to ease customer referral
- ◆ An officer of the day
- ◆ Using food to bring people together

Creating an information booklet to ease customer referral. In Portland, as the central reception began to respond to a wider variety of customers, it was a challenge for staff to understand the different programs. An information booklet was created so that front desk staff in the reception area were equipped to refer clients to each of the different areas. While originally intended for staff covering the front desk, it has become a resource for all staff as they begin to work more collaboratively with the partner agencies and their different programs.

...It naturally evolved, they developed a book for staff so that when you work at the front desk and somebody calls and wants information about employer services, then you can say OK, fee-based services, here's the page, here's what we do and here are the contact people... So everything is in here so you don't have to say 'I don't know.'

—Local staff member

An officer of the day. The nature of different partner agency staff routines was initially complicated for front desk personnel. Staff from DVR and DBVI were in and out of the office throughout the day while Employment Services staff were typically at their desks. Front desk staff were unsure how to respond to inquiries when staff from specific programs were not available. The solution was to develop an "officer for the day" who was responsible for the front desk at all times.

... each program has a person whose job it is to do paperwork or whatever they are going to do that day but to be available for those kinds of calls or the walk-ins. So that the front desk never has to say 'I'm sorry, there's no one here that can help you.'

—Local manager

Using food to bring people together. Prior to co-location, partners had already been meeting for a year. This enabled people to really get to know one another and allowed time for relationships to develop. Often, the focus of these relationship-building meetings was food. This created a casual and cordial atmosphere.

Whenever things got rough we did something with ice cream sundaes or apple pies or something to bring people together. Because if you know each other and like each other as people it's easier to work together as professionals.

—Local manager

Keeping the focus on the customer

The thing that was the glue that always held us together was that we really all did believe in customer service. We do believe in our customers. This is the most customer-focused business that I could possibly imagine... So ultimately, we honestly fully bought into the fact that this was a better way to serve our customers.

—Local manager

Staff in Maine tried hard to keep the focus on consumers. Through the involvement of people with disabilities in many facets of the collaborative effort, staff were better able to support their clients with disabilities. People with disabilities were involved in the process in a few ways:

- ◆ As mystery shoppers
- ◆ Through board membership

Mystery Shoppers. For the most part, people with disabilities did not appear to come into Centers independently, but rather through referral to specific agency staff with whom they were already familiar. However, interviewees placed a large emphasis on what happens to job seekers with disabilities when they enter a One-Stop Center without referral or knowledge of the system. If their disabilities were visible, did they automatically get referred to disability services or were their needs assessed like all others? In order to “test” this, the Portland CareerCenter hired a mystery shopper (a man with a disability who posed as a job seeker). The mystery shopper was instructed to enter the center and request assistance and report back to Center staff about his experience.

One of my clients, a man who had never been connected here at all arrived and said he was new to the area and was looking for a job and could anybody help him. He stood there with his white cane in hand. People got him organized, over into the information center, no mention of services for the blind. Got him connected with one person in there who got him to the computer that had large print, got him organized.

—Local staff member

Board Membership. People with disabilities were instrumental in providing feedback to planners on such topics as providing referrals, focusing on outreach, and how to continually improve services for job seekers with disabilities.

(Council for the Blind board members) continue to be very much observers of how it's going and what does WIA mean. What do the career services mean for services for people who are blind. They have been very much auditors, making sure things worked okay and saying, 'this isn't going well, you need to work on this.'

—State administrator

Members of the DBVI advisory council were constantly asking questions, and challenging the planners to provide services to people with disabilities in the most effective way possible. They questioned the agency about specific outcomes, direct and indirect costs, and how the changes would affect them in particular.

6. Innovative Ways Of Dealing With Disability Issues

Disability concerns related to the One-Stop System were of high priority in Maine. In particular the following issues were highlighted during discussion with informants:

- Accessibility of the CareerCenters
- Emphasis on all partners serving all customers
- Innovative use of federal grant funds to serve people with disabilities

Accessibility of the CareerCenters

Like other states that received early grant funds, Maine had a “jump-start” on the accessibility of its Career Centers because it used much of its original funding to create the physical infrastructure of the One-Stops.

Still, accessibility concerns were ongoing issues. Some CareerCenters needed to move into existing structures, which created challenges for accessibility.

(Regarding an inaccessible building)...we said that we will put in an elevator. Well the landlord went crazy and said, 'I'm not going to that expense and there is an elevator at the other end of the building so people who need that can always use that elevator and get where they need to be.' And we said, 'that's not acceptable. People with disabilities come in the front door. The days of using the back door are gone.' And he did that.

—Local staff member

A good example of Maine's commitment to accessible buildings was an experience with an interior designer who worked on Portland's Career Center. Getting the designer to understand the importance of accessibility and safety was a challenge but through innovation, agency staff conveyed that people with disabilities needed complete access like any other job seeker. By using simulated goggles, staff demonstrated different levels of visual impairment for the designer to experience first-hand. "So we made this interior decorator come outside with the morning sun flooding in and put on some goggles and said, 'go to the reception desk.' Well he nearly fell down the stairs and said, 'wow.'" This perseverance resulted in a greater understanding of accessibility issues.

Emphasis on all partners serving all customers

The idea that all the partners shared responsibility for serving people with disabilities helped to solidify collaboration in the One-Stop Centers. In some centers in Maine, a willingness and commitment to serving all customers has been a slow evolution—a change in thinking brought on by both legal and ethical responsibilities.

We have had to say to them in fairly blatant language that we do not own people with disabilities. You have a major obligation to be accessible to people with disabilities and that has nothing to do with us. That's your obligation. We can help you accomplish that in a lot of ways with technical assistance and support and recommendations but if you think accessibility for a customer in the Career Center depends on the VR program you are wrong.

—State administrator

During the initial stages of WIA implementation, when a person with a disability entered a Career Center, they were sent directly to disability agency partners. While for the most part this was no longer the case at the time of the site visits, in some instances front desk staff were still encouraged to acknowledge the disability and suggest initial referral to BRS. The difference here was that it was not automatically assumed that the person meet with a disability professional, but the option was presented. This happened because BRS retained its "expert" status in dealing with people with disabilities and agencies were hesitant to assume total responsibility.

In CareerCenters such as Portland, staff no longer wholly relied on disability professional and considered the person's support needs instead of focusing on the apparent disability. This was accomplished through cross training of staff from all partnering agencies and an emphasis on the idea of seamless service delivery as achieved through universal access.

Previously if you were a person with a disability and you walked into any one of those labor offices they would say, 'you are in the wrong place. VR is on Forest Avenue.' We worked very hard in terms of cross training to first say, 'remember all of your Title 1 programs have to be open to people with disabilities.' A blind person walking in here doesn't have to be on a program until you establish their needs require the certain things we can do in vocational rehab. A blind person who moves here from Boston and comes in with a job history and travels safely and arrives here and communicates fine and needs a job listing to go on an interview doesn't mean vocational rehab.

—Local manager

Innovative use of federal grant funds for people with disabilities

The Ability First Initiative was a joint project between the Coastal County Workforce Investment Board and Alpha One, an independent living center in southern Maine. The lead agencies were TRC and Alpha One. Staff from Alpha One utilized CareerCenters to expand service delivery for people with disabilities. One of the greatest benefits of the project was the creation of two peer benefit specialist positions. These staff help customers with disabilities better understand their Social Security benefits and the financial ramifications of joining the workforce.

Alpha One committed to working with other Career Centers to explain the goals of the Ability First project and to become familiar with their resources and their support needs, specifically around assistive technology and accessibility in the centers. The project also funded the hiring of a deaf instructor to work with individuals on computer and technology instruction.

7. Placement Of The Bureau Of Rehabilitation Services Within The State's Organizational Structure

As noted earlier in the report, BRS moved several times within state administrative structure. BRS's position was critical to consider because it has important implications for how workforce agencies work collaboratively with disability agencies. The current administrative structure which has DVR and DBVI within the Department of Labor has had both its advantages and disadvantages. It is important to note that people with disabilities also had the opportunity to weigh in on this decision.

Advantages

BRS's position within DOL prior to the implementation of WIA had a positive impact on forward thinking by the partners about disability issues. For example, accessibility concerns were already on the table. A BRS 504 Coordinator reviewed the plans from a physical standpoint to make sure they were accessible.

At the state level, administrators were able to match the priorities of WIA with the collaborations that were already happening between the agencies in Maine's DOL. "Being inside, we were there, we had relationships already, we had to have them because it was our department and we were prepared to really join the vocational objectives which made a lot of sense."

Disadvantages

Unfortunately, interviewees never reached consensus on the alignment of priorities between DOL and the rehabilitation agencies. Because BRS moved so frequently, some in the agencies felt that they really did not belong anywhere. Specifically within the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, some believed that the type of customers they served and the idea of a "successful outcome" for their clients differed

significantly from other DOL customers. One representative from the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired noted that the majority of their clientele is over 75 years of age and therefore not primarily focused on finding employment. This clear distinction between Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the other agencies made some skeptical that DBVI shared common goals with other partners.

The problem is that we're not ideal in Labor, we are not ideal in DHS, we are not ideal in education. In each place we try do something that's not directly related to the primary function of those departments...

—State administrator

Another reason the rehabilitation agencies may have felt separated from the other agencies was because of their fundamental mandate from RSA. BRS staff were required to adhere to RSA requirements and to make sure they were not violating the Rehabilitation Act. RSA's services had previously been centered at the state level but because of WIA, local implementation became critical. State WIBs and local governance created a challenge for the state level DVR and DBVI agency administration. They had to monitor local decision-making to ensure consistency with the mandates of the Rehabilitation Act. This became another assumed responsibility in addition to current administrative duties.

8. Sharing Data While Using Two Systems

Just prior to the enactment of the WIA, the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services invested considerable money and time on their operating system (ORSIS). Although users of the ORSIS system described its challenges, they were reluctant to spend additional money and energy changing to the newer system.

Just before we moved we had spent zillions developing our own case management system that was developed by the same group that developed OSOS. Ours is called ORSIS. And it has more bugs than you can imagine. So our feeling was we just invested several million dollars in developing this thing, why would we turn around, dump that and start all over again, we don't have that kind of money. So we have chosen to stay separate from that. Also knowing that the bugs are pretty big and we don't have the energy to go through the process a second time.

—Local manager

Status of data systems

At the time of the site visit, there were two data systems operating in Maine. The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services used a system called ORSIS (Office of Rehabilitation Services Information System) and the other partnering agencies used OSOS (One-Stop Operating System). OSOS was created after the WIA legislation was passed and as implementation occurred.

Because there were two separate data systems, staff in Maine experienced a set of circumstances that were somewhat unique. Agencies faced challenges in completing daily, core administrative

functions. A Portland manager described the practical implications of two systems. “We don’t have the same operating system...so there’s some real communication problems that happen as well as the shared case management that we would all like to go to.”

Additionally, they experienced:

- Limitations in data sharing
- Inability to capture use of multiple services

Limitations in data sharing

While data between Employment Services and TRC was all common and shared, it was not shared with BRS because the two systems were completely separate. This posed problems with respect to accessing information. If an individual was a customer of both systems information about their services was not available to both staff people.

Although through OSOP Employment Services and TRC could share data with BRS, BRS could share data back with OSOP only after a customer signed a release form. This was because of confidentiality concerns. Customers who entered the OSOP system automatically signed a release so that their information could be shared with the BRS system, but this was not reciprocal. BRS was adamant about protecting the confidentiality of their customers.

(VR) will not even give us verbal information. If we had somebody we worked with in the past, and unless they have given us a release they won’t even talk to us about it. It’s kind of interesting and they are very stringent about it. So I understand it’s confidentiality so we have to make sure we have release forms. That has to do with the law more than anything else and breaching confidentiality, we are all very sensitive to that.

—Local staff member

BRS staff noted that they have since implemented procedures to begin to address these problems.

Inability to capture use of multiple services

Because the two data systems did not come together, it was impossible to accurately capture the instances where people may have used two or three different services. The only way to have obtained this information was through hand counting. Staff in Maine proposed better tracking of individuals by asking which services they had used. In addition, it appeared difficult to electronically capture where people entered the system.

Future goals in Maine related to data systems included the establishment of a shared employer database whereby employers will have increased connection to potential employees. For example, an employer could enter specific web sites and access the resumes of potential applicants. Employers could also ask for lists of potential employees with appropriate skills or qualifications. It would also document activity between employers and workforce center staff.

In addition, Maine workforce staff expressed interest in a collaborative project with the state’s technological sector. This project would link potential employees with available jobs electronically. A Portland manager considered this as a strategy to leverage money so the CareerCenter could take advantages of resources in their community that serve their customers’ needs. With such a system, potential employers can also view resumes and share them with others who are hiring.

Conclusion

Maine’s re-organization was met with some challenges. However, the state’s focus on flexibility, local level implementation, relationship building, and the creation of innovative strategies to facilitate integration has proved beneficial. Maine has been working hard to best respond to the diverse needs of their customers while working through such obstacles as sharing data while using two systems and coping with reductions in funding. As other states create comprehensive linkages between training and employment agencies, Maine’s experience can become a resource as collaborative systems are created in order to provide more integrated employment supports.

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