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Institute Brief: Access for All Customers: Universal Strategies for One-Stop Career Centers

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ACCESS FOR ALL CUSTOMERS: UNIVERSAL STRATEGIES FOR ONE-STOP CAREER CENTERS

By David Hoff, Elena Varney, Lara Enein-Donovan, Cindy Thomas, and Sheila Fesko

INTRODUCTION

One-Stop Career Centers serve a diverse range of customers. These include individuals with a variety of educational and work backgrounds, people from diverse racial, linguistic and ethnic cultures, as well as individuals with a wide range of disabilities and support needs. One way of addressing the needs of this diverse customer base is to develop services and systems that respond to the needs of each of these groups. However, this can be expensive and labor-intensive. A more effective way to serve this broad customer pool is to provide One-Stop services according to the principles of what is known as “universal design,” using common strategies that benefit many groups – and that reinforce the concept of an inclusive setting that welcomes and celebrates diversity. To find a manageable approach to meet the needs of their many customers, One-Stop Career Centers can think universally about how they design their physical space, service delivery systems, and customer resources. For example, the barriers faced by people who cannot read are similar despite the cause (e.g. cognitive disability, illiteracy, or limited English proficiency). Therefore, the strategies to overcome this barrier and allow customers to benefit from One-Stop services will be similar.

This proactive approach lessens the extent of service specialization that may be required to meet the needs of some audiences. When services are designed universally, they are more likely to benefit job seekers with a wide range of learning styles, languages, educational levels, intelligences, and abilities, allowing the One-Stop to meet customer needs in a more efficient fashion.

BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING UNIVERSAL STRATEGIES

The One-Stop system is required to be “universally accessible” meaning that any member of the general public (including those with disabilities) can access the system and use the basic or “core” One-Stop services. As part of this requirement, One-Stops are required to make efforts to provide access to members of various racial and ethnic groups, individuals with disabilities, and individuals in different age groups. The use of universal design strategies can be a major component in such efforts. Beyond helping to meet these mandates however, the use of universal design can simply enable the One-Stop to provide easier access, a welcoming atmosphere and better customer service to all segments of the population, particularly those most in need of One-Stop services. For example, individuals with disabilities represent approximately 45 million Americans. Over 10% of the population of the United States is foreign-born, and in certain regions of the country this percentage is much higher, with a significant portion of the population having limited English language skills. In addition, the largest segment of the American population is over fifty, and many of these individuals will continue to work into their seventies. While many of these older workers may not have a disability, they could still benefit from a design that requires less physical exertion, and supports memory and organizational skills.

Developing services that are accessible to the largest number of people will reduce the need for specialized assistance, individualized accommodation requests and allow customers to use services immediately rather than waiting to have an accommodation in place. This approach will also reduce the demand on staff time for customer assistance, as customers will be able to work more independently. The end result is both more efficient use of staff resources, and higher customer satisfaction. While there will continue to be situations in which specific assistance and accommodations will need to be provided for some customers, since fewer such requests will be necessary, it will be easier to respond to those requests.

If universal design considerations are incorporated into the original design of a One-Stop, the cost is typically low and the result more aesthetically pleasing. Retrofitting space or services after the design is set can potentially interrupt the flow of services and have a negative impact as an add-on to existing facilities and procedures. While this post-hoc design can improve services, it generally does not completely meet the needs of either the individuals who require additional support or the general public.



PRINCIPLES OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN

The Principles and Guidelines for Universal Design were conceived and developed by The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University. The Examples for One-Stops are based on the Principles and developed by the Institute for Community Inclusion. These examples are separate and distinct from the Principles and Guidelines, and listing of the examples in no way constitutes or implies acceptance or endorsement by The Center for Universal Design of these examples.

1

PRINCIPLE ONE: EQUITABLE USE

The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

Guidelines:

- Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.
- Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users.
- Provisions for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all users.
- Make the design appealing to all users.

Examples for a One-Stop:

- During orientation, ask all customers if they need assistance completing registration rather than only individuals you think may have a disability.
- Make information on all services available to all customers, and avoid assuming that certain customer groups or customers may or may not be interested in certain services.

2

PRINCIPLE TWO: FLEXIBILITY IN USE

The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

Guidelines:

- Provide choice in methods of use.
- Accommodate right- or left-handed access and use.
- Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision.
- Provide adaptability to the user's pace.

Examples for a One-Stop:

- Provide options for a career interest inventory that can be completed on-line, on paper, or through answering questions through an interview.
- Provide a range of options for inputting information in a computer including a keyboard, trackball or a mouse.
- Provide information through both on-line self-directed methods, as well as in group workshop settings.

3

PRINCIPLE THREE: SIMPLE AND INTUITIVE

Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level. Eliminate unnecessary complexity.

Guidelines:

- Eliminate unnecessary complexity.
- Be consistent with user expectations and intuition.
- Accommodate a range of literacy and language skills.
- Arrange information consistent with its importance.
- Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.

Examples for a One-Stop:

- In an interviewing workshop, when talking about potential interview questions, role-play answers to questions, then promptly give suggestions about how interviewees might improve their answers.
- Provide information in multiple languages.
- Use touch screens with graphics for inputting information in a kiosk or computer.

4

PRINCIPLE FOUR: PERCEPTIBLE INFORMATION

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

Guidelines:

- Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information.
- Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings.
- Maximize "legibility" of essential information.
- Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions).
- Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.

Examples for a One-Stop:

- During trainings and workshops, present information verbally and in writing, and incorporate graphics to illustrate information, so individuals can receive information in the manner that best suits them.
- In the resource room, for all signage, use graphics and pictures combined with text. Use color to correspond to different types of information (e.g., job listings printed on different color paper from workshop notices; job listings for different job categories contained in different color binders).

5

PRINCIPLE FIVE: TOLERANCE FOR ERROR

The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

Guidelines:

- Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors: the most used elements are most accessible; hazardous elements are eliminated, isolated, or shielded.
- Provide warnings of hazards and errors.
- Provide fail-safe features.
- Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.

Examples for a One-Stop:

- In the resource room or library, configure most computers so that customers cannot inadvertently change settings, while having a couple of computers with a more flexible configuration so that users can more easily access the built-in accommodation features, and change these as necessary for their specific needs.
- Have computer procedures set up that ensure automatic back-up of job seeker resume, cover letters, job listing research, etc., avoiding accidental deletion.

6

PRINCIPLE SIX: LOW PHYSICAL EFFORT

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably, and with a minimum of fatigue.

Guidelines:

- Allow user to maintain a neutral body position.
- Use reasonable operating forces.
- Minimize repetitive actions.
- Minimize sustained physical effort.

Examples for a One-Stop:

- Provide adjustable chairs, desks, and tables for workstations and classrooms.
- Avoid storing paper resource materials in file drawers that can be heavy and difficult to open. Use notebooks or other alternatives instead which are more accessible.
- Set up Macros on computer keyboards for standard cover letter and resume text.

7

PRINCIPLE SEVEN: SIZE AND SPACE FOR APPROACH AND USE

Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

Guidelines:

- Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user.
- Make the reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user.
- Accommodate variations in hand and grip size.
- Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.

Examples for a One-Stop:

- Plan group meetings and workshops in a room large enough for a sign language interpreter and so that individuals who use wheelchairs have ample space to turn around.
- Design the front desk area so there are sections where the counter height is appropriate for customers who are standing, as well as a section that is lower so individuals in wheelchairs can interact with staff on a face-to-face level, and easily reach documents and materials.
- Have resource materials available in places and at heights that are highly accessible.

IMPLEMENTING UNIVERSAL STRATEGIES IN ONE-STOPS: A CHECKLIST

The checklist below is intended as a tool to help One-Stop staff implement a universal design approach to their own services. At first glance, some of these ideas may seem simple or obvious. However, like in any organization, it is easy for One-Stops and their staff to become comfortable doing things a certain way based on their own perspectives and experiences, and to assume that such processes work well for everyone. Implementing these strategies will enhance the service delivery to all customers within the One-Stop system. These ideas are intended as a starting point, to prompt consideration and development of the wide range of possibilities for maximizing the universal access of a One-Stop.

USING THE CHECKLIST

This checklist was developed as a result of work conducted by the Metro North Regional Employment Board in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which evaluated its One-Stop services for accessibility, as part of Metro North's Customized Employment Project, funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor. While Workforce Investment Board and One-Stop staff can complete the checklist, it can also be useful to have an outside entity to use the checklist to evaluate services, which can potentially result in more candid and useful feedback from a customer perspective. In the case of Metro North, a local disability organization was used to assist with the evaluation process.

Another such method that can be used is a "mystery shopper". "Mystery shoppers" are individuals who are not known to staff providing the service. The shoppers use One-Stop services like any other customer, evaluate the user-friendliness of the services and how their needs were met, and later report their experiences. Finding mystery shoppers that represent individuals who have barriers to employment can help get a true picture of how services meet the needs of specific populations. Examining services in this manner is not intended to be a compliance review or to catch staff doing something wrong, but instead is part of efforts towards continually monitoring and improving services to better meet customers' needs.

By following these guidelines, One-Stops foster self-service while making their services more accessible to all customers.

Welcoming Environment

- Welcome all visitors as they enter the One-Stop, and request that first-time customers complete a registration form.
- Inform every customer that assistance with completing the registration form is available. Staff should make this offer to everyone, not just people they feel may need help. Customers may have a variety of reasons that they need or want help in reading the form or providing the necessary information.
- Provide all information both verbally and in writing as a general practice in every aspect of One-Stop service delivery.
- Display clear, visible signs that direct customers to the location of resources, including staff who can answer questions; books, computer programs, telephones, and the like. Signs should use a combination of symbols and text whenever possible.
- Display signs that clearly indicate the availability of assistive technology and accommodations.
- Have information available on how to access the One-Stop by public transportation, both on the web site and at the front desk.
- Maintain electronic files of standard orientation and intake materials, as well as materials provided in various workshops. Provide them to customers ahead of time on disk or via e-mail as requested.
- Provide the option of registering and/or signing up for orientation, workshops, and classes online or by telephone ahead of time so that orientation can be accomplished upon the first visit. Completing activities through the phone or web reduces unnecessary trips for customers who use specialized transportation services, and is also just good customer service for all.
- Post a staff listing that includes photographs of staff members. Individuals may forget the names of staff they worked with, and this visual reminder will allow them to connect with the person they have worked with before.
- Provide a pad of paper and pen at the front desk along with a sign indicating that customers who are deaf or hard of hearing can write down instructions for the receptionist.

Intake

- ❑ Use private space when helping a person fill out forms, so other customers and staff cannot overhear the customer's responses.
- ❑ Offer several options for completing intake forms, and inform customers that they can use the method they are most comfortable with: filling out a paper form on their own; having a staff member assist them with the paper form; completing the form electronically at a workstation; or taking the paper form home to complete.

Orientation

Group orientations are held in many One-Stops and allow new customers to learn about the range of services available and how to access them. Orientation components may include a review of the One-Stop services, calendar of workshops and tour of the center.

- ❑ Host orientations in a room with ample seating, allowing space for wheelchair mobility.
- ❑ Have the speaker sit or stand in an area visible to all participants. The speaker should speak loudly and clearly to aid people who supplement hearing with lip-reading.
- ❑ Give an overview of the facility at the start of orientation, including the location of restrooms, water, and emergency exits.
- ❑ Provide a written and oral overview of the orientation. Include the time frame, what topics will be covered, and when questions should be asked.
- ❑ Provide a comprehensive overview of all services available (core, intensive, and training), with clear and specific information on how to access these services, and eligibility criteria. Provide a written summary of this information. A menu and/or chart of services with information in a standard format, can be useful in helping customers understand the services available.
- ❑ Specify what steps customers must take in order to access the services discussed. Examples: when customers must “register for classes early,” how, where, and when do they register? How do people determine if they are eligible for additional services beyond the core services available to all customers?
- ❑ If disability-specific services are available, consistently provide this information verbally and in writing to all customers. Let people know how to access these

resources. While discussing these services, indicate that while people with disabilities may find them helpful, there is no requirement that they use any services specifically for people with disabilities (including public Vocational Rehabilitation). Clarify that they can still use any other One-Stop services for which they are eligible, whether or not they use services targeted to people with disabilities.

- ❑ Any forms or materials that contain personal information about individual customers should be kept concealed during orientation so that attendees cannot see them. This includes applications and forms that have been completed and collected during orientation.
- ❑ If the orientation facilitator observes any missing information on applications and forms, he/she should discuss the matter privately with the individual afterwards, not in front of the group. Explaining why specific questions are being asked may help customers to feel comfortable with revealing such information.
- ❑ Provide a list of assistive technology available at the One-Stop, both verbally and in writing.
- ❑ Present information about the policy and procedure for requesting help or reasonable accommodations, both verbally and in writing.
- ❑ Ask participants periodically if they have any questions or would like information clarified.
- ❑ Provide a tour at the end of the orientation that includes One-Stop facilities and available equipment (e.g., computers, fax machine, phones, copy machine, etc.). Point out any assistive technology available to all participants in the tour.
- ❑ Consider creating an audio- or videotaped version of the orientation and other workshops given at the One-Stop. This can be helpful for people who need to periodically review the material or go through it at their own pace.
- ❑ Develop a plan for addressing support personnel (e.g., family member or job coach) during orientation. This is necessary since support personnel will not be completing intake forms for themselves; to ensure confidentiality the orientation leader should not draw attention to that fact.
- ❑ Provide an extensive, private orientation to the One-Stop if a customer prefers one. Communicate to all customers that such an option is available.

Calendar

- ❑ Have a monthly calendar of events including orientation sessions, classes and workshops, with copies available at the front desk and throughout the public areas of the One-Stop.
- ❑ Post the monthly calendar on the One-Stop website, including dates, times, and a sign-up option for easy access by people with mobility or transportation issues.
- ❑ Use clear language on the calendar when describing events, services, hours of operation, and holidays. Avoid using jargon or abbreviations that customers may not understand. If abbreviations must be used due to space issues, include a guide to those abbreviations.
- ❑ Specify the target audience for each class and workshop offered.
- ❑ Indicate that people signing up for a workshop should request accommodations and/or information in alternative formats prior to attending. Staff may need to identify a specific time period by which requests must be received. This is particularly important if the accommodation will require advance scheduling, such as booking a sign language interpreter.

Workshops and Classes

- ❑ State early in the presentation that questions are welcome throughout the workshop. If the workshop generates new information (e.g., websites, phone numbers, and resources), provide it in various formats. For example, state new ideas in addition to writing them on the flip chart.
- ❑ Use concrete, basic language that is easy to understand.
- ❑ Verbal presentations should cover all of the information included in handouts to facilitate learning by people with vision impairments, people who do not read, and people who can get distracted due to learning issues.
- ❑ Similarly, all verbal presentations should be reinforced and summarized via written materials. Minimize the need to take extensive notes.
- ❑ Supplement abstract concepts with visual aids when possible (e.g., show a “text-heavy” resume next to one with good use of “white space”).
- ❑ Define terms and concepts that may not be familiar to everyone (e.g., networking, marketing, recruiter, affirming language, job fair, temp agencies).

- ❑ During the course of a presentation, periodically summarize what has been discussed, and ask if there are any questions.
- ❑ Maintain a supply of recording devices, and make them available to attendees to record workshops so they can review information later if they would like.
- ❑ Role-plays are an effective way for “hands on” learners to benefit from a workshop. Make role-plays voluntary, so as not to cause unnecessary stress for individuals who do not do well in group or impromptu situations. Breaking the workshop into smaller groups may make it more comfortable for people to role-play.
- ❑ Remind participants that assistance is available upon request.

Print Material

- ❑ In printed materials, use concrete, basic language that is easy to understand.
- ❑ Reword current handouts and other printed materials that are abstract or require a higher educational level to comprehend.
- ❑ Supplement text with illustrative graphics (e.g., a labeled diagram of a cover letter and its various components).
- ❑ Print page numbers on all documents. This allows instructors to refer to specific sections of the handout, which can help people who have trouble following all the information.
- ❑ Use at least 12-point size font on all calendars and handouts, with 16-point font preferred.
- ❑ If there is a significant segment of the local population for whom English is not their first language, have as many of the basic materials as possible (such as orientation materials, basic job seeking guides, etc.) translated into languages spoken in the local service area. Purchase commercial job seeking materials that are available in a variety of languages.
- ❑ Have as many print materials as possible available on disk, as this makes them more accessible and easier to translate into various formats. (Note that PowerPoint materials should be saved in text format, to make them accessible.)

Resource Room

- ❑ Provide clear, color-coded signs for each area and piece of equipment or assistive technology.

- ❑ In the Resource Room, clearly post signage regarding the availability of assistive technology (e.g., alternative keyboards and mice, specialized software) and how to access/obtain them.
- ❑ Ensure that Resource Room staff are aware of the various assistive technology devices available, and how to use them.
- ❑ Ensure that the Resource Room staff are aware of the various pre-installed accessibility features on all computers (e.g., sticky keys, filter keys, toggle keys, mouse keys, screen enlargement, pointer enlarger, etc.), and how these can be used to meet individual customer needs. Both Windows and Mac operating systems now have a wide variety of pre-installed accessibility features.
- ❑ Install speech output software in as many workstations as possible, and include headphones with each workstation. (Voice output software is now standard in newer computer operating systems.)
- ❑ Provide clearly posted instructions regarding how each workstation can be customized to individual user needs and preferences, including the details of any assistive technology installed on the machine. In addition to written instructions, offer demonstrations of how to use the equipment.
- ❑ Include images of computer graphics and picture icons in the written instructions for computer programs and functions. This will help individuals match the text with what they are seeing on the screen.
- ❑ Ensure that videos have closed captioning. Closed captioning benefits people who cannot hear as well as those who have limited English proficiency. Some people benefit from the combination of spoken and written words.
- ❑ Use a color-coding system to make it easier for customers to find resource materials. For example, the One-Stop could locate all resume development materials in red binders and interview guidelines in green binders.
- ❑ Compile a “low-tech” toolkit for the resource room that customers can use to help them organize their materials. Include rulers, color dots, post-it notes of various colors, and pen grips.

BACKGROUND ON UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND DISABILITY

Universal design was originally developed as an architectural concept that emphasized creating and designing environments and services to meet as wide a range of preferences and needs as possible. Rather than thinking about a design solely from the perspective of the average user or a particular population such as people with disabilities, the design considers approaches that have the broadest application that benefit customers from various backgrounds, learning styles, abilities, and disabilities.

When the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990, there was concern expressed about the expense of making adaptation to meet the needs of a small percentage of the population. As the ADA began to be implemented, it became clear that changes originally intended to benefit individuals with disabilities would benefit many members of the general public. The following are examples of changes that were previously considered special accommodations for individuals with disabilities but now have broader usage:

- ▶ **CURB CUTS:** While originally designed for ease of travel for individuals using wheelchairs, it is now estimated that only one out of a hundred people using curb cuts does so because of a disability. Individuals pushing strollers, riding bicycles, rolling luggage, or rollerblading all take advantage of this now standard way to access the sidewalk.
- ▶ **CLOSED CAPTIONED TELEVISION:** Studies of the use of closed captioning for television and video indicate that individuals who are deaf or have a hearing impairment are not in the top five groups that use this technology. More frequently cited examples are people at gyms and sports bars who “hear” the television by reading text, and those at home when one partner wants to watch television and the other wants to sleep.
- ▶ **ELECTRONIC DOOR OPENERS:** Delivery people, individuals with strollers, and those whose hands are full carrying multiple bags all benefit from being able to push a button to open a door, rather than having to do it by hand.

REFERENCE

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www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about_ud/udprinciples

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