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Job Seekers with Disabilities at One-Stop Career Centers: An Examination of Registration for Wagner-Peyser Funded Employment Services, 2002 to 2009

By David Hoff and Frank A. Smith

The Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933 established a nationwide system of public employment services, known as the Employment Service. Via the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, the Employment Service was made part of the One-Stop Career Center service-delivery system. Wagner-Peyser is a primary source of funding for these centers, which make employment services available to all people, including those with disabilities. There are currently 1,800+ comprehensive One-Stop Career Centers throughout the United States, as well as satellite and affiliate centers.

Wagner-Peyser provides a significant source of data regarding the performance of the One-Stop Career Center system. One-Stop partners are encouraged to register everyone they serve (including people with disabilities) in the Labor Exchange Services funded by Wagner-Peyser. However, these data should be interpreted as a reflection, but not an absolute measure, of One-Stop performance, due to the following: a) variations from state to state in registration procedures and requirements (e.g., in some states, individuals can use some core One-Stop services without registering); and b) variations in the level of integration of Wagner-Peyser services within the One-Stop system. While the Workforce Investment Act does not officially permit delivery of Wagner-Peyser employment services outside the One-Stop delivery system (20 CFR 652.202), lack of integration of Wagner-Peyser has been an issue (see “Workforce Investment Act: One-Stop System Infrastructure Continues to Evolve, but Labor Should Take Action To Require that All Employment Service Offices Are Part of the System,” GAO report, September 2007, www.gao.gov/new.items/d071096.pdf).

The data summary in Tables 1 and 2 examines trends over time on a national and state-by-state basis in the percentage of job seekers with disabilities who register for the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service and identify as having a disability. In examining and interpreting this data, it is important to note this data may not fully reflect the use of these services by people with disabilities, as it does not include individuals with non-apparent disabilities who have declined to identify that they have a disability, or customers with disabilities not identified for other reasons.

Summary of Data Trends

As detailed in Table 1, the percentage of Wagner-Peyser Employment Service participants identifying as having a disability showed a steady increase from 2002, when it stood at 2.3%, to a high of 3.1% in 2005, and in 2009

Table 1. National Summary of Wagner-Peyser Employment Services Participants

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total # of Participants	14,948,985	15,154,824	14,149,380	13,308,625	14,674,883	17,791,960	19,550,756	22,447,124
# of People with Disabilities	340,090	358,055	373,157	416,188	418,583	499,147	509,118	614,393
% of People with Disabilities	2.3%	2.4%	2.6%	3.1%	2.9%	2.8%	2.6%	2.7%

was slightly below this at 2.7%. The overall demand for Wagner-Peyser services has grown significantly over this time period, due primarily to the increasingly high unemployment rate. However, the volume of customers with disabilities has increased at a much higher rate than the overall increase in customer volume. Overall customer volume grew by 50% from 2002 to 2009, while the volume of customers with disabilities over the same time period grew by 80%, from approximately 340,000 to 614,000. On a state-to-state basis, detailed in Table 2, there is extensive variability in terms of the percentage of individuals identifying as having a disability. For example, in 2009, North Carolina had the highest percentage at 15.0%, followed by Wisconsin at 7.3%. On the other end, Mississippi, Montana, and Ohio were each at less than 1%.

Looking at trends over time, most states have maintained a fairly consistent percentage of individuals identifying as having a disability, whether that percentage is above or below the national average. Among the consistent high performers have been Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin, and in more recent years Idaho, all generally consistently above 5%. A few states have shown increases in the percentage of individuals with disabilities served over time. The most noteworthy is North Carolina, which increased from 3.5% in 2002 to 15.0% in 2009 (the top percentage in the country). Other states showing significant and steady increases over the same period include Colorado and Michigan. On the other side, Kansas had been showing steady increases, but dropped from 5.4% in 2008 to 1.5% in 2009. Maine also used to be a strong performer, consistently over 6%, but has shown a real drop-off over the last two years, at 3.8% in 2008 and 3.7% in 2009 (still above the national average). Montana is of particular concern, having dropped from a high of 4.7% in 2003 to 0.2% in 2009.

Areas for Further Research and Study

This data raises a number of questions that bear further investigation:

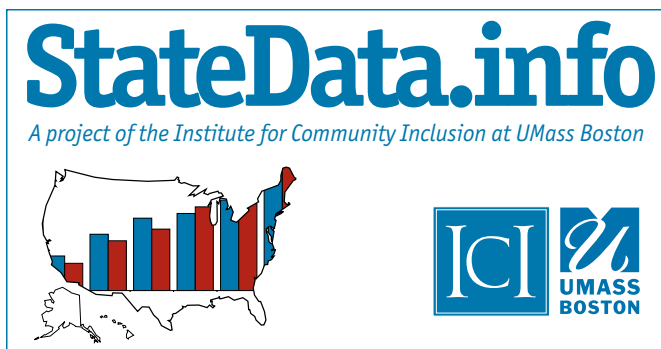
- **State-to-state variability:** The variability in terms of the percentage of people with disabilities from state to state is significant, and indicates an issue that bears further investigation by policymakers and researchers. Key to such an investigation is whether this variability is due to variations in state data-collection methods, or is a true indicator of major differences among states in terms of the percentage of people with disabilities being served.
- **Strong state performance:** The states that have consistently shown a high percentage of individuals identifying as having a disability are also worth examining further, to determine what specific factors are causing these results. It is currently unclear whether this data is a true indicator of greater responsiveness to the needs of job seekers with disabilities, or is instead a result of variations in methods for recording and reporting of data from state to state (i.e., states with high percentages could simply have methods for more consistent identification of customers with disabilities). Similarly, an examination of states that have shown steady increases over time are also worthy of examination to determine the underlying factors in this increased performance. If states are truly high performers in terms of meeting the needs of people with disabilities, then the strategies being used should be documented for replication.
- **Decrease in state performance:** As with those states that have shown increases in percentage of customers with disabilities over time, those states that have shown decreases are worthy of examination. Researchers and policy-makers need to determine what the underlying issue is, including whether these

Table 2. Wagner-Peyser Employment Service Percentage of People with Disabilities (PWD)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
National	2.3%	2.4%	2.6%	3.1%	2.9%	2.8%	2.6%	2.7%
Alabama	1.4%	1.2%	1.1%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.6%	1.5%
Alaska	3.1%	3.0%	2.8%	4.1%	4.7%	4.1%	3.9%	3.5%
Arizona	1.9%	1.9%	2.1%	3.0%	2.6%	3.4%	2.4%	2.3%
Arkansas	1.3%	1.4%	1.5%	2.0%	2.1%	2.0%	2.1%	1.9%
California	3.4%	3.2%	3.3%	3.2%	3.1%	2.8%	2.2%	2.2%
Colorado	3.2%	3.8%	4.4%	4.8%	5.1%	5.6%	5.0%	4.9%
Connecticut	2.1%	2.2%	1.9%	1.1%	1.2%	1.4%	1.3%	1.2%
Delaware	3.9%	7.9%	8.3%	8.3%	8.2%	6.5%	5.8%	5.6%
DC	1.3%	2.5%	2.6%	1.8%	4.7%	3.7%	4.1%	3.2%
Florida	2.2%	2.5%	2.6%	2.7%	2.8%	2.8%	2.7%	2.4%
Georgia	0.5%	0.7%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%	1.1%	1.5%
Hawaii	1.2%	1.3%	1.3%	1.7%	2.3%	2.7%	2.6%	1.8%
Idaho	3.3%	3.8%	4.0%	7.0%	5.7%	5.3%	4.8%	5.0%
Illinois	2.5%	2.6%	2.8%	3.1%	3.0%	3.0%	2.6%	2.7%
Indiana	3.7%	3.7%	3.8%	3.9%	3.9%	3.6%	2.9%	2.7%
Iowa	1.6%	1.4%	1.4%	1.5%	1.8%	1.7%	1.9%	2.0%
Kansas	1.4%	2.7%	3.0%	4.0%	4.0%	4.8%	5.4%	1.5%
Kentucky	2.2%	2.1%	3.0%	2.4%	1.6%	1.7%	2.7%	3.4%
Louisiana	2.2%	2.3%	3.0%	2.9%	2.5%	2.5%	2.3%	1.5%
Maine	6.2%	6.4%	6.6%	7.3%	6.1%	7.5%	3.4%	3.3%
Maryland	5.9%	6.4%	7.3%	7.0%	6.1%	6.5%	5.7%	5.9%
Massachusetts	5.1%	5.4%	5.2%	5.7%	5.8%	5.4%	5.5%	6.0%
Michigan	0.5%	1.9%	2.9%	3.4%	3.4%	3.8%	3.3%	3.2%
Minnesota	4.5%	3.0%	3.4%	3.9%	3.5%	2.8%	3.7%	3.6%
Mississippi	1.0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.6%	0.6%	0.4%	.3%	0.8%
Missouri	1.1%	1.1%	1.4%	1.8%	2.0%	2.1%	1.9%	1.7%
Montana	4.5%	4.7%	2.6%	1.4%	1.3%	1.0%	0.8%	0.2%
Nebraska	4.0%	3.9%	3.6%	3.0%	3.2%	3.1%	3.0%	2.7%
Nevada	2.7%	2.7%	2.6%	3.0%	3.2%	2.9%	2.3%	2.5%
New Hampshire	3.5%	3.8%	3.9%	3.9%	4.1%	4.2%	3.8%	3.0%
New Jersey	2.0%	1.9%	1.8%	2.1%	2.0%	2.0%	1.4%	1.3%
New Mexico	1.3%	1.9%	2.2%	2.4%	2.3%	2.4%	2.4%	2.1%
New York	2.9%	3.1%	3.6%	4.6%	4.7%	4.4%	4.4%	4.4%
North Carolina	3.5%	4.2%	5.3%	7.6%	9.0%	11.0%	15.0%	15.0%
North Dakota	4.4%	3.4%	3.6%	4.4%	4.9%	3.9%	3.6%	3.2%
Ohio	1.5%	1.9%	2.5%	1.8%	1.3%	1.1%	0.7%	0.5%
Oklahoma	0.1%	2.5%	3.1%	4.0%	3.9%	4.2%	3.8%	3.8%
Oregon	2.3%	2.5%	3.2%	3.6%	3.5%	3.4%	3.4%	3.3%
Pennsylvania	1.0%	1.0%	0.7%	0.7%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Puerto Rico	2.4%	2.4%	2.6%	2.9%	3.1%	2.9%	3.0%	3.0%
Rhode Island	4.0%	4.3%	3.5%	3.1%	3.0%	3.5%	3.4%	3.0%
South Carolina	3.2%	3.7%	4.1%	4.2%	4.6%	4.1%	2.7%	1.7%
South Dakota	3.0%	3.0%	3.1%	3.2%	3.1%	2.7%	2.5%	2.5%
Tennessee	1.1%	1.4%	1.9%	2.0%	2.1%	1.9%	1.4%	1.4%
Texas	0.7%	0.7%	1.1%	1.4%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Utah	3.6%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%	3.4%	3.7%	5.4%	4.9%
Vermont	3.7%	3.4%	4.3%	4.8%	4.7%	4.8%	4.7%	5.1%
Virginia	3.0%	3.4%	3.4%	3.7%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	2.2%
Washington	0.6%	3.1%	3.3%	3.4%	2.8%	2.5%	2.2%	2.8%
West Virginia	3.5%	3.9%	3.4%	3.1%	3.2%	3.3%	3.2%	3.2%
Wisconsin	5.4%	5.9%	6.3%	7.0%	7.1%	7.7%	7.3%	5.4%
Wyoming	3.6%	4.4%	4.5%	4.5%	4.1%	3.7%	3.6%	3.2%

variations are a result of changes in data collection, or a true reflection of performance. One factor appears to be that a state may continue to serve a consistent number of individuals with disabilities each year, but with the overall number of individuals served via Wagner-Peyser Employment Services increasing, customers with disabilities as a percentage of customers has decreased. If so, it is unclear why the number of customers with disabilities hasn't increased at concurrent levels with the overall increase in number of customers.

- **Definition of disability:** A question raised by this data, given the variation from state to state, is whether a consistent definition of disability is being used in each state, and whether similar data-collection methods are being used in all states. Anecdotal evidence indicates there is significant variation among states in terms of definitions and requirements for collection of customer disability data. Policymakers may wish to consider examining this issue, to ensure this data is as accurate and consistent as possible in reflecting the use of the One-Stop Career Center system by people with disabilities, and whether policy directives regarding this issue should be developed.
- **Lack of placement data:** One significant limitation of this data is that it only looks at the percentage of individuals with disabilities accessing Wagner-Peyser Employment Services, and does not look at placement outcomes (placement data is available for the general customer base using Wagner-Peyser services). The availability of placement-outcome data for people with disabilities would strengthen the ability to examine the performance of the generic workforce system in meeting the needs of people with disabilities.
- **Information on type of disability:** Finally, this data provides no information regarding the types of disabilities of individuals accessing Wagner-Peyser Employment Services. It would be useful to conduct further research to get more specific information regarding the types of disabilities of these individuals, to determine which groups find the workforce development system an effective option, and to determine which groups are being underserved and why.



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