# Universal Design for the Workforce Development System

As public and private workforce development systems strive to meet the diverse needs of their business and career seeking customers, including individuals experiencing barriers to employment, personnel working within these systems need a clear understanding of how to design programs, services, and activities that provide genuine, effective, and meaningful opportunities for all. Universal design is a proactive approach to establishing simple, flexible, and efficient programs and services. With universal design, providers can anticipate diverse career seeker and business needs from the outset of planning, rather than later incurring retrofitting costs.

**Universal design for the workforce development system** is defined as the design of environments, products, and communication practices as well as the delivery of programs, services, and activities to meet the needs of all customers of the workforce development system.

Originally developed in response to the needs of an increasing aging population and people with disabilities, the concept of universal design benefits all people. Closed captioning, for instance, was designed for individuals with hearing impairments. Now people in gyms and at sports bars rely on it. The universal design concept has since expanded far beyond physical and technological features to include design of local policies, administrative practices, and service programming, resulting in exemplary systems that meet the needs of the widest possible range of customers. When public and private workforce development systems adopt this approach, they structure policies, operational practices, services, and physical environments that result in improved outcomes for both business and career seeker customers.

As the following matrix demonstrates, universal design strategies should be reflected throughout the multiple functions performed by public and private workforce development systems: marketing and outreach; orientation; assessment; service coordination; service delivery; and business services. Further, it provides workforce professionals with concrete strategies to guide their Workforce Investment Board and/or strategic planning efforts, while serving as a valuable reference tool to assist in formal state and local planning efforts. Adopting a universal design approach within the workforce development system enhances the cost-effectiveness of the system while improving the quality of services and performance outcomes.

# Universal Design for the Workforce Development System Matrix

| | Marketing and Outreach | Orientation | Assessment | Service Coordination | Service Delivery | Business Services |
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| **State and Local Strategic Planning** | Economic development, business associations, and community leaders are actively recruited for state and local strategic planning meetings.<br><br>State and local strategic plans include proactive strategies for outreach and partnerships with entities that reflect the full diversity of the service area population, including special populations and individuals from diverse backgrounds. | The intake process for business is clearly identified and outlined as an element of the strategic plan.<br><br>Local strategic plans reflect the priority, as well as specific strategies, for public and private workforce systems to be consistently welcoming and accessible to the diversity within the service area.<br><br>Mechanisms are identified (e.g. statewide mystery shoppers, universal design teams) to ensure that all customers have access to the array of workforce development system services. | State and local strategic plans include a means of evaluating the community's prevailing needs, special populations and demographics (e.g., for large numbers of non-English speakers) to allow public and private workforce development providers to design their assessment processes accordingly.<br><br>State and local strategic plans indicate how assessments will be inclusive of all, including special populations and individuals from diverse backgrounds, and ensure that these processes enhance their employment prospects and ability to access services. | Strategic planning efforts include resource mapping to establish an inventory of the scope of services available within a community.<br><br>Various partners are recruited for participation in joint strategic planning and the development of common goals and outcomes.<br><br>Program outcomes for each partner have been identified.<br><br>Seamlessness between public and private systems is emphasized in state and local plans, including the development and use of common forms, processes, and case management. | Planning guidelines are established to support LWIBs in developing annual operational goals that include strategies for meeting the needs of individuals from diverse backgrounds, special populations and job seekers with barriers to employment.<br><br>Local challenges and needs are aligned and compared with regional, state, and national data, and reflected in service delivery options and programs. | Strategic plans indicate collaboration with economic development entities at the local level for effective use of labor market data/trends towards the development of targeted training that meets the needs of "hot" industries.<br><br>State and local plans indicate how businesses will be encouraged and supported in employing diverse career seekers who are fully reflective of the local service area, including those with barriers to employment. |
| **Partnerships** | Marketing plans are developed jointly between multiple workforce system partners, and strategies are pursued in a coordinated fashion, representing multiple partners as a single entity.<br><br>Businesses and career seeker advocacy groups assist in designing a marketing plan that reaches the widest range of customers.<br><br>Staff recruit qualified speakers from diverse groups to present workforce development services in the community. | Workforce development partners are involved in planning to streamline the intake process for career seekers and businesses (e.g., through the development of a common intake form for all new customers).<br><br>Business associations are oriented to the public and private workforce development systems' services available to their members.<br><br>Partners consist of a wide range of diverse entities (e.g. grassroots and minority organizations) that are representative of the service area. | Partners provide an array of assessment approaches to capture the skills and abilities of customers with barriers to employment, while businesses assist in determining the skills essential to the job market.<br><br>Mechanisms are in place to protect privacy regarding assessment results, and consent is obtained before sharing results among partners. | When appropriate, a range of partners work with an individual for the purpose of identifying potential funding options. These partners may include agencies for: Aging, Mental Health, Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities, justice systems, TANF, immigrants/refugees, Social Security, and/or Medicaid.<br><br>Partners collaborate to design and implement common processes, including intake, MIS, case management and resource allocation. | Payment mechanisms are developed that reward providers that serve persons with significant barriers to employment, and that indicate that services are provided to a demographic that is fully reflective of the service area.<br><br>Traditional case management services are supplemented with service delivery support teams, comprised of all who can assist the job attainment efforts of customers with barriers to employment. | Partners agree upon the specific services they provide to businesses, which is then presented as a unified business services package, rather than marketing to employers through individual partner efforts.<br><br>Business groups are involved in the design and implementation of business services to ensure that the key needs of businesses are being met while the broadest possible range of career seekers is being served. |
| **Capacity Building** | A marketing group is established to identify creative, non-traditional marketing strategies, such as advertising on public transportation, in public libraries, and presenting success stories via local television programming.<br><br>Staff are trained and supported to market the workforce development system to potential career seeker and business customers, as well as to potential partners. | Staff have adopted strategies and products for communicating with people with diverse cultural backgrounds, disabilities, or limited English proficiency, and are available to assist them throughout the registration and orientation process.<br><br>Systems are established to ensure that all staff are familiar with the array of partners and services within public and private systems, to accurately inform career seekers and businesses and assist them with accessing such services. | Staff are competent in the use of a variety of capacity-based assessment tools and strategies, including those for use with individuals from diverse backgrounds and special populations, to effectively capture individuals' strengths, interests, and skills.<br><br>Resource mapping is conducted to create a comprehensive picture of all system/community programs and resources that could contribute toward the effective assessment of career seekers. | The organization has a professional development plan in place for each staff member and for the organization as a whole.<br><br>Workforce staff members know and draw upon local resources to assist individuals with barriers to employment; information about these resources is available to staff and customers. Both youth and adults are involved in the process of mapping these resources. | The knowledge, skills, and abilities that service practitioners need to provide effective services play an important part in the hiring, training, and promotion of staff.<br><br>Staff members have been trained on the range of service delivery options available to individuals with multiple barriers to employment and how to assist individuals in determining their best employment options. | Partner staff assist employers in developing accessible and welcoming work environment and, when necessary to accommodate needs of their workers.<br><br>Employers receive coordinated support in response to their needs. For example, business service staff are assigned to specific industries so that they can be more responsive to employers and develop greater expertise in negotiating and networking in their sector. |
| **Administration/ Management/ Evaluation** | WIB and other public and private workforce leaders are active on other community boards and initiatives as representatives of the workforce development system<br><br>Marketing efforts are evaluated based in part on the diversity of career seeker and business customers.<br><br>Outreach is conducted to: businesses that are reflective of the diversity of the service area; associations representing diverse business owners; and businesses that do not participate in the more traditional business gatherings. | Internal mechanism(s) have been established for staff to identify and serve individuals who may be eligible for or need services beyond the core offerings.<br><br>MOU's, RFP's and contractual partner agreements call for active participation in the orientation process, to ensure that all appropriate and eligible customers are able to access the relevant services.<br><br>Orientation efforts are evaluated by degree to which a diverse range of customers remain active in the system, and take full advantage of a wide range of intensive services. | Mechanisms allow for responding to the employment needs of customers for whom traditional "work ready" and/or standardized assessment practices are not effective. Alternative solutions are explored for identifying contributions that would lead to a good employment fit.<br><br>Reasonable modifications and accommodations are made during the assessment process as needed.<br><br>Customers are surveyed for their satisfaction with the assessment process to determine if they felt it was an accurate discovery of their skills and abilities. This feedback information is used to develop and refine the assessment process. | Public and private workforce development system funds are used flexibly with other partner resources. For instance, a community provider conducts job development activities, while on-the-job support services are paid for through WIA training dollars.<br><br>MOUs and agreements with partners identify specific expectations, including how the needs of diverse customers will be met.<br><br>Service data is evaluated to ensure that a diverse range of customers accessed is from an equally diverse range of partner programs. Stereotypical routing (e.g., all customers with disabilities use VR for intensive services) is precluded. | Hiring, training, and evaluation practices are reflective of the requirement for staff to possess competencies in effectively responding to the needs of individuals from diverse backgrounds.<br><br>Customer satisfaction tools and feedback mechanisms are used in a variety of ways (e.g., verbal, written, electronic, via telephone) to allow all customers, including those of diverse backgrounds, the opportunity to provide input.<br><br>A comprehensive assessment of the facility and service delivery system is conducted to ensure maximum use of universal design and universal learning strategies. | Workforce development services are designed with ease of use for businesses in mind, and this is reinforced in RFP's, MOU's and other contractual partner agreements. For example, a comprehensive menu of services for businesses is developed and includes economic development, staffing, and training services, as well as HR services for small businesses.<br><br>The organization uses a variety of data sources for determining business service activities.<br><br>Business Service Units are evaluated to ensure equal rates of success for a diverse range of career seeker customers. |

**Universal Design for the Workforce Development System** — *(vertical side title)*

## Universal design for the workforce development system is rooted in the following concepts:

- **The best practices invariably serve the most customers**; by providing the best possible services to career seekers and to businesses, organizations will naturally be inclusive of the broadest range of potential career seeker and business customers. A single set of high-quality services can be more effective, and far more efficient, than a boutique of specialized services designed for small sub-groups of job seekers and businesses.

- **Every agency and organization can benefit from collaboration**; local systems that engage in significant collaborations are invariably more effective than those that conduct their work alone, or with a limited range of partners. Further, the One-Stop Career Center is, in most cases, the natural hub for collaborative activities in any given community.

- **Businesses and career seekers are equal customers of the workforce development system**; better service for one means better outcomes for both.

- **Highly coordinated services are essential for all customers**; given the complexity of the workforce development system, and the wide range of services available to businesses and career seekers, systems, agencies and organizations should build a network of robustly coordinated services across the community that are accessible at multiple points and in a highly seamless fashion.

- **Greater alignment between workforce development and economic development will benefit both systems**; to provide a full array of effective and coordinated business development services, workforce development organizations should align themselves with economic development organizations.

## Resources

For additional information or assistance on *universal design for the workforce development system*, contact the following centers:

### Adult services
National Center on Workforce and Disability/Adult
Institute for Community Inclusion
UMass Boston
100 Morrissey Blvd.
Boston, MA 02125
888/886-9898 (toll-free voice/TTY)
contact@onestops.info
www.onestops.info

**National Center on Workforce and Disability/Adult NCWD**
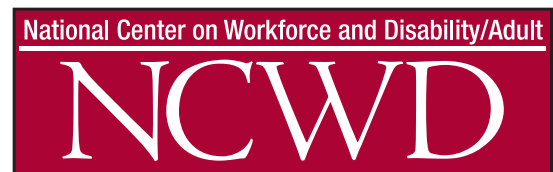
### Youth services
National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability/Youth
Institute for Educational Leadership
4455 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20008
877/871-0744 (toll-free voice)
877/871-0665 (toll-free TTY)
contact@ncwd-youth.info
www.ncwd-youth.info

**National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability NCWD For Youth — Navigating the Road to Work — Making the Connection between Youth with Disabilities & Employment**