

John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development

evaluation report

Evaluation of the Union County One-Stop Career Centers, 2015

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Introduction

In late 2014, the Union County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) contracted with the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey to conduct a qualitative process evaluation of the One-Stop Career Centers in Union County, New Jersey.

This evaluation is particularly well timed, as the recently enacted federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which replaces the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), is now being implemented in New Jersey and across the nation. WIOA offers opportunities for a fresh strategic direction, a new type of partnership between Union County and the state, and a different role for the One-Stop Career Center system in the community. The new law offers a chance to ensure that the One-Stop system is flexible and responsive to changes in the economy, the labor market, and the community.

The One-Stop Career Centers in Union County, like One-Stop Career Centers throughout New Jersey and the nation, are comprised of collaborations of different agencies that provide services to people seeking jobs, career advice, and support for education and training. These agencies also provide services to employers. There are different funding streams for the various agencies and programs, each with its own rules, regulations, and performance expectations and measures.

There are two One-Stop Career Centers in Union County — one in Elizabeth and the other in Plainfield. There is also a satellite center at The Mills at Jersey Gardens in Elizabeth; however, the satellite center was not part of this evaluation.

This report contains the Heldrich Center's final evaluation of the Union County One-Stop Career Centers. The primary goals of this evaluation were to:

- > Document the key services being provided at the One-Stop Career Centers in Elizabeth and Plainfield,
- > Provide feedback to the county/WIB on the effectiveness of these services, and
- > Highlight promising practices from one or both One-Stop Career Centers in terms of serving job seeker and employer customers.

Research Questions

The Heldrich Center customized a number of key questions for each party that would be interviewed in order to define answers to the following broader research questions:

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1. How integrated are the services and staff at both of the One-Stop Career Centers? How integrated is the One-Stop with the rest of the community?
 - > **Interviews** with the WIB director, county One-Stop operator management staff, and the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD) Employment Services managers at each location. The purpose of these interviews was to understand their roles and invite their opinions on the services provided to job seekers and employers.
2. What are the primary reasons that job seekers visit the One-Stop Centers?
3. How are the facilities themselves, and how easy are they to access?
 - > **Focus groups with frontline staff members.** Nine staff members participated in each staff focus group, one held in Plainfield and the other in Elizabeth. The purpose of these focus groups was to understand the responsibilities of the staff and the services they provide.
4. How do the customers feel about the services that are provided and about how they are treated by staff?
5. What is the division of labor between state and county staff, and how does that division of labor influence their activities?
 - > **Focus groups with job seekers.** The research team also conducted in-person focus groups with job seekers. A total of six job seekers in Plainfield and nine job seekers in Elizabeth participated in these focus groups voluntarily, and each was paid \$20 for his/her participation. The job seekers in the focus groups were invited to participate by staff, who were asked to find people who had utilized a variety of different services. It should be noted that a few of the job seekers were Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) participants who were carrying out their work assignments at the One-Stops. The purpose of these focus groups was to understand how job seekers learned about the One-Stop Centers, the services they used, and their opinions about the services and staff.
6. How are the different statewide initiatives (e.g., Jobs4Jersey, Jersey Job Clubs, Talent Networks) being implemented and received at the One-Stops?
7. How does the One-Stop system in Union County tailor its services to meet the specific needs of job seekers in Union County?
8. Do the staff at the One-Stops have the resources needed to do their jobs effectively and efficiently?
9. How do the One-Stops determine whether their services are effective?
 - > **Employer survey.** In order to obtain employer feedback on services received, a brief employer survey was sent via email to nine employers with whom the One-Stop Career Centers currently work. The employers were asked questions relating to their opinions on the services provided, how well the centers met their expectations, and whether they would use the services again to recruit new employees.

Data Collection Methodologies

The Heldrich Center used a number of qualitative research methods to carry out this evaluation.

Site Visits. The Heldrich Center team visited the Plainfield One-Stop on February 10, 2015 and the Elizabeth One-Stop on March 27, 2015. During the course of these visits, the research team conducted the following activities:

Program Description

One-Stop Career Centers provide a variety of employment and training-related services to people seeking employment, training, unemployment benefits, and public assistance. They also provide services to area businesses. The services offered at the One-Stop Career Centers in Elizabeth and Plainfield are generally the same as the services offered in One-Stops throughout the state. These include:

- > Job search assistance, primarily provided by LWD. The services include the Jobs4Jersey website and job matching tool, Jersey Job Club activities, workshops for unemployment benefits recipients required to attend as a condition of continued receipt of benefits, job fairs and “positive recruitments,” and one-on-one job search assistance for job seekers.
- > Training assistance for job seekers interested in training or further education, primarily provided by Union County One-Stop operations staff funded through WIA Title I (soon to be WIOA).
- > Assistance to customers applying for unemployment benefits or needing help troubleshooting problems with unemployment claims, provided by the LWD Division of Unemployment Insurance (UI).
- > Job search, compliance, and case management activities related to General Assistance (GA) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps), provided by LWD staff.
- > Computer-assisted training in the on-site Learning Link, which offers instruction in English-as-a-Second Language (ESL), computer literacy, and basic math and reading literacy. This is a joint effort of the county and LWD.
- > Public access resource area with computers, telephones, printers, and other resources to help job seekers with their job and training searches, and with applying for unemployment benefits.

- > Staff fully dedicated to serving high-need veterans. Job seekers are screened for veteran status and referred to these staff members.
- > Business services to help employers with their recruitment and training needs. This appears to be carried out by LWD staff.

The overall goal for One-Stop Career Centers is to meld a unified, customer-friendly, high-performing system from the various programs and funding sources that support the One-Stop system, with as much cooperation among partner agencies as possible. This is always a challenge, given different program and performance requirements, and overall resource limitations relative to customer needs.

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Heldrich Center’s review of the two full-service One-Stops in Union County.

Findings

Customer Flow

Finding #1. The majority of job seekers who visit the One-Stop Career Centers go there for the first time because they are required to do so.

The initial visit for most of the Union County One-Stop customers is the result of a requirement to show up. Some are unemployment benefits recipients who must attend Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) or Project Reemployment Opportunities Systems (PROS) programs as a condition of continued eligibility for benefits. Others are applying for or complying with work requirements under GA, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or SNAP. Staff in Plainfield did not say what proportion of those who visit their One-Stop Center are mandated to come in, but staff in Elizabeth estimated that about 60% to 70% of job seekers who visit do so because it is mandated. This proportion is consistent with other One-Stop Centers across the state.

Finding #2. Of those customers who come in voluntarily, most appear to do so because they want to file for unemployment benefits or have other UI-related issues.

According to staff, the majority of the individuals voluntarily visiting the Union County One-Stops are going there in search of assistance with UI benefits. However, others visit because they are interested in training, want to use the public access resource area, have heard about the One-Stop Centers through the Union County College (UCC) Job Connection newsletter, or are attending job fairs or “positive recruitments” with employers that are recruiting new employees. In addition, some people visit the One-Stops to see agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation or other on-site partners.

Finding #3. There is limited outreach to non-mandatory customers about services.

By all accounts, many job seekers in Union County are not required to visit a One-Stop Center but could benefit from its services. As was heard in both job seeker focus groups, job seekers who find their way to a One-Stop Center consistently said that they greatly appreciated the resources that were available to them, but they would have liked to have found out about the services earlier and gained access to them faster. This was especially true for the unemployment benefits recipients who were not called in mandatorily.

Even though the information is available online, job seekers reported that it was difficult to find out what services were available to them, as well as determine what they had to do to see a counselor. A number of job seekers said that this was due to a lack of communication between partner agencies within the One-Stop system. They stated that UI staff did not inform them of the services that were offered by the One-Stop when they first applied for unemployment benefits, and once they did learn of the services, they were not told how to utilize them. One job seeker in particular said that she was initially told by staff at one center that she was not eligible for any services but was later told by staff at the other One-Stop Center that she was eligible. Another job seeker said that it took her a month to finally speak to a counselor. A number of job seekers said that they were not informed about

how to register for a training orientation, or how to schedule an appointment with a counselor.

Finding #4. The reception area at both centers is highly structured and not integrated among the partners, meaning each agency has its own receptionist.

Essentially, a visitor to one of the One-Stops must know what he/she is there for first, and then, depending on the purpose, the security guard tells him/her to go to Line 1, Line 2, or Line 3 or to take a number to be served by UI staff. Several job seeker focus group participants noted that if they did not know what type of assistance they needed, it was more difficult for them to get to those services because they didn’t know what to request. All three reception lines are staffed by participants on work assignments through CWEP (i.e., none are paid staff). Although these CWEP participants may do their best to help customers and many are bilingual, it appears that they do not understand all of the agencies and programs in the One-Stop Centers and are not trained to understand customer needs and direct customers to the most appropriate services.

The UI setup has an especially bureaucratic feel, with customers seated in chairs lined up in rows waiting for their number to be called. Although there were not many people present at the time of the research team’s visit, the area where claimants would normally wait was small and cramped.

Finding #5. Jersey Job Club workshops were highly regarded by job seekers participating in focus groups.

Many job seekers from both focus groups shared positive comments regarding the Jersey Job Clubs, noting that the classes and workshops were very useful. The Jersey Job Club in Elizabeth is particularly well developed, and includes an orientation to services at the One-Stop Center, résumé and advanced résumé workshops, an interviewing skills workshop and mock interviews that are recorded, a networking workshop, a workshop on how to use LinkedIn, and a monthly “chat session” that people can drop into. Job seekers mentioned that they especially liked the mock interview sessions and the informal support groups. In the mock inter-

view sessions, job seekers were able to sit down with the Jersey Job Club coordinator and practice their interviewing skills while being recorded, and then had the opportunity to review the video afterward to observe how they acted during the interview. Job seekers also greatly appreciated the support group (“chat”) sessions for helping them cope with being unemployed and showing them that they aren’t alone. Job seekers in the Elizabeth focus group were tremendously enthusiastic in their support for the Jersey Job Club coordinator, who provided moral support, empathy, and even homemade cookies during support group sessions. Heldrich Center researchers have visited One-Stop Centers throughout New Jersey and have not heard about such Jersey Job Club activities as recorded mock interviews and drop-in support group sessions in any other One-Stop Center. These activities are innovative and were praised by both job seekers and staff. The Heldrich Center considers them to be promising practices.

Finding #6. Support for occupational training was also highly valued by job seekers, but job seekers noted problems with the tuition waiver system, including frustration at having to wait until late registration to register for classes.

In both focus groups, a number of the job seekers were engaged in occupational training, and they expressed their appreciation for having access to training resources. Some job seekers were beginning new careers while others decided to pursue credentials based on previous experience, such as one individual who wanted to get an accounting degree since he took a number of college accounting classes in the past. This job seeker in particular was grateful for the opportunity to finish what he had started years prior.

Although job seekers were happy to be able to have tuition waived, they expressed frustration at being forced to wait until the late registration period to register for classes, at which point they are allowed to fill whatever seats remain. In many situations, the classes are already full by the time job seekers can register. This can be distressing for people who have mandatory classes in their programs of study and could potentially slow their progress toward earning their degree or credential.

Finding #7. Staff members utilize different forms of labor market information when helping job seekers choose a training program.

The primary use of labor market information within the One-Stop is the New Jersey LWD list of in-demand occupations. Job seekers meet with counselors and explore their interests, and then select an occupation that they would like to pursue. Staff then check the state list to determine if the occupation is in demand, and attempt to steer job seekers away from that occupation if it is not on the list. Heldrich Center researchers have visited a number of One-Stops in New Jersey where staff mentioned that the statewide in-demand occupations list is at least three years old and may not reflect the current job market. Union County management staff were aware that the state’s in-demand occupations list is only to be used as a starting point when approving training programs. Job seekers can still pursue an occupation that is not on the list if they or the staff they are working with can show that the occupation is in demand in the local area. Staff usually determine this by using information from the Talent Networks, job fairs, a “top 50 jobs” list from labor market analysts, and the New Jersey Career Assistance Navigator, an online resource that presents current national, New Jersey, and local labor market information.

Finding #8. Job seekers reported long waits for services, and some job seekers also complained about having to “jump through hoops for no apparent reason” to get funding for training.

Some job seekers mentioned long delays for training orientation sessions (four to six weeks), which is the first step in the training approval process. A number of staff members confirmed this by saying that the training orientations were booked for at least one month in advance. Aside from the long waiting time for orientations, job seekers also expressed frustration over having to “jump through hoops for no apparent reason,” such as being forced to take the Test of Adult Basic Education even if they had a Bachelor’s degree. Even when job seekers were able to get into an orientation, see a counselor, and finish the process of choosing a training provider, they stated that they still had to wait for funding to come through. One job seeker

stated that although the process from the orientation up through choosing a training provider only took about two weeks, he had to wait an additional two weeks for his funding to come in. It appears that the whole training approval process can be time-consuming and that training funds are not always available at the end, leading to disappointment or additional waiting.

Finding #9. There are many high-need job seekers going to the Union County One-Stops but limited services to address these needs.

Both staff and managers indicated that one of the major challenges in Union County is a large number of high-need job seekers. Many of those accessing services from the One-Stop system have a high school education or less, few job skills, limited English language skills, and inadequate computer literacy. The One-Stop Centers are only able to address these issues in a limited way. For example, there are very few bilingual Spanish-English staff and a very small ESL and computer literacy capacity. Both staff groups mentioned that the centers need to focus on computer literacy because many of the job search and training resources are online, but many job seekers do not know how to use a computer.

Finding #10. The programs at the One-Stop Centers appear to run parallel to each other and do not often intersect.

While many partner agencies are co-located in the same building, the advantages of co-location are not being fully realized in terms of coordination and integration of services. Job seekers who participated in one focus group expressed frustration that the staff of the different agencies do not communicate with each other. This lack of communication, especially between the UI staff and other One-Stop staff, is one reason that job seekers do not learn about the services of the One-Stop Centers early enough in their unemployment periods.

Facilities

Finding #11. Both One-Stop Centers are in convenient locations.

Both locations are easily accessible via public transportation and have parking nearby. Both facilities are pleasant and appear to be well maintained.

Finding #12. Services are co-located.

The One-Stop Career Center in Elizabeth houses Union County One-Stop operations; LWD's UI, Employment Services, and Vocational Rehabilitation divisions; Reconnections (a prisoner re-entry program); and Easter Seals (an employment program for adults 55+). The center in Plainfield houses all of the same organizations except Vocational Rehabilitation. Having all or most services available in a single location is more convenient for customers and makes it easier to coordinate and integrate services. Co-location is a necessary ingredient in a unified One-Stop system, but does not by itself bring about coordinated services to individuals.

Staffing

Finding #13. While staff understand their own responsibilities, knowledge of the responsibilities of partner staff appears incomplete.

Staff in one of the One-Stops appeared to have good informal communication and seemed to understand each other's roles and programs. In the other One-Stop, however, county staff could explain county tasks and LWD state staff could explain LWD tasks. However, only certain staff members understood both, adding to the impression of programs being siloed. It should also be noted that services did not seem to be less siloed at the One-Stop where there was good informal communication. Staff had a good understanding of what others within the system did, but they did not necessarily work together.

Finding #14. The UI presence in Elizabeth seemed to be both understaffed and lacking important language skills.

According to staff focus group participants at the Elizabeth One-Stop, UI was forced to close for a two-week period due to inadequate staffing. Also, staff reported that there are no bilingual UI staff, despite the fact that according to the Census Bureau's 2013 American Community Survey, Elizabeth has a population that is more than 50% Hispanic.

Finding #15. Job seekers who participated in one of the focus groups were positive about their experience with the One-Stop staff.

Job seekers from both Plainfield and Elizabeth characterized the One-Stop staff they dealt with as caring and responsive. In particular, job seekers at one center identified specific counselors by name with whom they said they had developed a good relationship. They said that although the counselors may push them, they are caring and are always there when job seekers need them. However, job seekers at the other One-Stop did express some frustrations with staff there. They said that they had to "shop around" until they found a counselor that they felt really cared about their situation. To further aggravate matters, these job seekers also said that since staff don't communicate with one another very well, they feel as though they have to start from the beginning every time they move to a new counselor.

As noted earlier, the Jersey Job Club leader in Elizabeth received special praise for not only being caring and respectful, but for also emailing job seekers regularly to tell them about different events that were coming up at the One-Stop.

Finding #16. Management staff reported few professional development opportunities for the staff.

In Union County and statewide, it appears that staff development has received relatively little attention in the past several years. Both management staff and the WIB director mentioned that there has been little staff development at the One-Stops in Union County, and have expressed that this is an issue.

Finding #17. The time demands associated with conducting required group activities and compliance functions leave staff little time for one-on-one activities with job seekers.

Almost all of the LWD Employment Services staff time appears to be occupied with required group activities, such as REA, PROS, and Jersey Job Club, and compliance activities related to public assistance recipients. This leaves little time for one-on-one activities with job seekers. It is not clear how staff allocations are made statewide by LWD to the local One-Stop Centers, but staff in both Elizabeth and Plainfield appear to struggle just to keep up with required activities. In Plainfield, there are no Employment Services counselors, only interviewers. Staff believe that customers greatly benefit from one-on-one counseling, but aside from helping with the training process, there is little time available for this to happen.

One-Stop Management and Partner Relationships

Finding #18. There is no unified management structure within the One-Stop system.

The current management structure within the two One-Stop Centers in Union County is comprised of two LWD Employment Services managers (one at each center) and two county One-Stop operations managers who go back and forth between the two One-Stops. However, both Employment Services managers are functioning in an acting capacity, and the One-Stop operations managers handle both centers instead of one manager per center. This has created a management structure where no one person or agency is in charge of each One-Stop. Consequently, there is no single person to contact who manages what happens in each facility. This management approach is consistent with the observations that programs appear to operate parallel to each other instead of a fully integrated system.

Finding #19. There appears to be little formal partner interaction at the One-Stops.

Based on comments from both focus groups, and all of the interviews, there appears to be limited formal interaction among the partners at the One-Stops. This includes a lack of staff sharing information about customers and limited knowledge of what other agencies are doing. It was not clear whether there was any interagency referral system. It appears that there are no regularly scheduled partner management meetings within the centers, which differs from other One-Stop Centers in the state. One staff member described his center as a “vertical maze” where people from different agencies do not talk to each other.

Finding #20. Though it is not an on-site partner, there appears to be a good working relationship with UCC.

Both staff and job seekers mentioned UCC’s Job Connection newsletter, published weekly by UCC’s Center of Economic and Workforce Development and supported by the county. This newsletter includes information about community events, including those at the One-Stops, as well as an extensive listing of job opportunities. It is distributed at the One-Stop Centers, among other locations. In addition to the widely praised newsletter, UCC appears to be a training institution of choice for many job seekers and accepts tuition waivers.

Technology

Finding #21. The antiquated unemployment benefits claims system has the effect of increasing traffic at the One-Stops.

Though this is a statewide issue, and not within the control of Union County, the outdated UI claims system results in frustrated customers visiting the centers to troubleshoot their problems with both the online and telephone systems. A number of staff and job seekers mentioned that this causes particular problems in Union County because UI is severely understaffed at the One-Stops.

Finding #22. Union County One-Stop staff reported several problems with the Jobs4Jersey system.

While Jobs4Jersey is a statewide system and not within the control of Union County, staff reported that it is difficult for non-computer literate and non-English-speaking job seekers to use, and many Union County job seekers are one or both. In addition to user limitations, the system also suffers from some technical problems. Both staff and job seekers mentioned that the search and matching algorithm is not accurate. This is especially true for less-skilled job seekers, who usually receive “matches” produced by the system that are too broad. Staff also said that they had received complaints from employers who said that the system is not user friendly on their end, and job seekers mentioned that the résumé builder can scramble their résumé once they upload it.

There was positive feedback on Jobs4Jersey from one of the people who handles business services. That individual said that the staff-assisted function facilitates ongoing relationships with employers.

Finding #23. There are different information systems, forms, and requirements for partner programs.

This creates additional work for staff and in some cases, “double data entry” issues. For example, America’s One-Stop Operating System (AOSOS) does not communicate with other systems within the One-Stop, such as the system for TANF, SNAP, and GA. This creates a situation where staff must input the same information twice. Also, there have been complaints about the interface between Jobs4Jersey and AOSOS, where anything that is written in Jobs4Jersey overwrites everything in AOSOS. This has created situations where job seekers will accidentally make changes on their profile on Jobs4Jersey that then changes their profile in AOSOS.

Finding #24. None of the technology systems facilitate tracking outcomes in real time.

One frustration felt by staff and management is that there is no easy way to find out what happened to job seekers in real time. The Jersey Job Club staff member in Elizabeth keeps a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that allows her to keep in touch with

Jersey Job Club participants, but the existing information systems do not facilitate follow-up with participants. The required information systems are a statewide issue.

Also, one person interviewed remarked on the unrealistic nature of the official performance targets set by the U.S. Department of Labor (expecting local areas to achieve employment rates of 80% to 90% for low- and moderately skilled populations). This individual stated that this leads to some manipulation of the reporting system, which in turn leads to the official reporting system being of limited use in understanding what does and doesn't work in terms of serving job seekers. This issue is not limited to Union County and may be a statewide and even a nationwide issue.

Business Services

Finding #25. Services to businesses are conducted primarily by the acting LWD Employment Services manager in Elizabeth and the LWD business services representative (BSR) in Plainfield.

Both the BSR and the acting Employment Services manager have made it their focus to reach out to businesses in the area to partner with the One-Stops. They organize positive recruitment sessions and bring businesses into the centers to help make the connection between job seekers and local businesses in need of employees. Their goal is to satisfy employers by referring qualified candidates. The BSR has countywide responsibility, while the acting manager, who was previously a BSR in a neighboring county, has experience in business services and has made this area a priority for his work in Elizabeth.

Finding #26. The Union County One-Stop Centers seem to have a closer relationship with the Talent Networks than One-Stops in other parts of the state.

According to the staff focus groups, and interviews with both acting Employment Services managers, the One-Stops in Union County utilize the Talent Networks in a number of ways. Around the state, each Talent Network comes into each One-Stop Career Center once a year to host an information session on what skills employers are seeking in that

sector in local markets. These arrangements are made through the Jersey Job Club coordinators in each One-Stop Center. However, according to staff, the Union County One-Stop Centers engage with the Talent Networks in other ways. They use information from the Talent Networks for labor market information when trying to find training opportunities for job seekers. If a job seeker has a college degree or past experience in a Talent Network industry, then the One-Stop will work with the Talent Network to help the job seeker network and find more job leads. It appears that the One-Stop Centers work with the Transportation, Logistics, and Distribution and Health Care Talent Networks more than others, as those Talent Networks were mentioned by job seekers in particular, and a number of businesses that work with the One-Stops are in those fields.

Finding #27. Though few employers responded to an online customer satisfaction survey, those that did were positive about their experiences with the One-Stop Career Centers.

As was expected, few employers responded to the survey. (It is traditionally difficult to get employers to participate in focus groups or surveys about the public workforce system.) Those employers that responded indicated strong support for the Union County One-Stop Career Center services they received. They appear to value most the referral of qualified candidates for job openings. They were somewhat more mixed though still positive about other services (general customer assistance with navigating the workforce system, Jobs4Jersey.com/OnRamp information and assistance, and information about programs, services, and incentives). They each indicated they would use the services of the One-Stop Career Center again.

Recommendations

The implementation of WIOA offers opportunities for Union County to rethink the services of the One-Stop system and the place of the One-Stop Centers in the community. The Heldrich Center understands that many of the findings in this report are not within the sole control of Union County and require action by the state. LWD has taken an unusually collaborative approach to WIOA imple-

mentation, presenting a chance for Union County to work with LWD to develop a more integrated approach to providing services in the One-Stop Centers. At the same time, some issues, especially those relating to technology systems, are the state's responsibility to resolve.

The Heldrich Center recommends that the Union County WIB, in concert with the Union County One-Stop operator and other One-Stop partners, especially LWD, consider the following recommendations:

Recommendation #1. The county, state, and other partner agencies should better coordinate services offered within each One-Stop Center.

This will require more formal communication mechanisms, at least among on-site partner agencies. There should be regular management team meetings at each location and between the two centers, and team building and cross training for the staff.

Recommendation #2. The county and other partners should establish a unified management structure.

In order to better coordinate services, a different management structure is needed. The current structure reflects the parallel operations of the different programs. No one person is responsible for what happens in each building and no one person is responsible for organizing partner meetings or bringing people together. Some One-Stop Centers in other parts of the state and nation have figured out ways to organize the management structure so that it is more unified, while at the same time respecting the roles and responsibilities of the different agency managers. These structures vary from county to county, and at times even from One-Stop to One-Stop within certain counties. At times, the One-Stop operator(s) is clearly in charge of the center, while in some cases the Employment Services manager is in charge. Sometimes the WIB director is the convener. Regardless of which structure is used, there must be a management structure where someone is the point person for the entire operation at each center.

Recommendation #3. County and state partners should market and streamline services.

There must be better marketing of the services available as early in the unemployment period as possible. All of the agencies at the One-Stop Centers, including UI staff, need to improve their upfront communication with job seekers to tell them exactly what services are available to them. It may also be necessary to increase the frequency of training orientations so that job seekers can move through the process more quickly.

Recommendation #4. All of the partners in the One-Stop system should better address the needs of job seekers, particularly high-need job seekers.

While the county has already begun to move in this direction, more needs to be done. Addressing these needs could involve both changes at the One-Stops and additional relationships with other organizations in the larger community. Recommended strategies include:

- > ***All partners should have more bilingual staff.*** The Census Bureau's 2013 American Community Survey reported that 74% of Elizabeth residents and 47% of Plainfield residents speak a language other than English at home. Serving this population necessitates staff at every agency that can communicate with these residents.
- > ***The county should establish closer relationships with community organizations.*** Although the One-Stop Centers already have a good relationship with UCC, it would be beneficial to establish additional relationships with other community organizations (faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, libraries, etc.) in order to improve the One-Stop system's image and reach. Currently, the feeling among some staff and job seekers is that the One-Stops are disconnected from the rest of the community, and that the One-Stops have a "don't call us, we'll call you" reputation. By forging closer relationships with community organizations, the One-Stop Centers will be able to change their image to that of a community partner, and thus take advantage of other services in the community that support employment outcomes.

- > ***The county should arrange for more ESL and computer literacy instruction.*** Given the extent of need, the One-Stop system should develop or connect with additional services specifically for the high-need population served by the One-Stop Centers. At a minimum, there should be additional classes offered directly or by partner and community organizations in ESL and computer literacy so that customers can function better in the job market. In light of LWD's emphasis on the Jobs4Jersey portal, customers with limited computer skills will need additional training so as not to be left behind in the job search process. There are a variety of modalities for offering such courses, such as in-person, teacher-led, online learning, and mixed-method. Different approaches may work for different people, and some of these approaches may be relatively inexpensive.
- > ***The agencies in the One-Stop Centers should streamline and professionalize the reception/triage function.*** Currently, the reception desks are not integrated (each agency has its own receptionist) and they are all staffed with CWEP participants. It would be best if there were fewer people at the reception desk and that they be paid professional staff that understand all of the agencies and programs in the One-Stop Centers and are able to triage based on customer needs. One person interviewed stated that the county is already looking to move in this direction.

Recommendation #5. The state and county should further develop the staff.

In consultation with the state, the county should develop and implement a staff development plan for all One-Stop Career Center staff. Staff would benefit from team building and cross training, as well as efforts that bring staff up-to-date with labor market trends and current job search modes. This should involve general information sharing about the various partner programs and activities, information on labor market trends and changing demands for workers, and specific training to enhance the skills of staff in each discipline.

Recommendation #6. The WIB should analyze staffing and resource issues and set strategic priorities.

Clearly, the One-Stop Career Center system has resource limitations and cannot be all things to all people. It is important to identify what the One-Stops can do by utilizing all of the resources available and setting priorities. The delays that job seekers complained about can discourage and alienate customers, but this may not be the best way to reduce the workload.

Recommendation #7. The WIB should establish formal customer feedback mechanisms.

This could involve periodic surveys — on paper or online — to check in with both job seeker and employer customers. It might also include mechanisms to follow up with both types of customers individually after a period of time to gauge outcomes. This type of customer feedback would help the One-Stop system evaluate the value of its services, periodically redirect resources, and keep its strategic direction attuned to the needs of and input from customers.