

These Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title IV funds will be used to increase access, equity, and inclusion of people with disabilities in WIOA Title I and other workforce development programming, increase co-enrollment in WIOA Title IV/Vocational Rehabilitation, and improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Applicant: [Workforce Development Board of Solano County](#)

Instructions

The narrative must be organized by the headings indicated in bold and address the bulleted prompts that are provided as guidance to creating the narrative. The bulleted prompts in the boxes under each section may be deleted to make more space for the narrative.

The Project Narrative is limited to 5 pages, Calibri 12-pt font, and on 8.5 x 11-inch pages.

Section I: Needs Assessment

In Solano County, 13.4% (or 58,478 individuals) of the population has a disability. Of individuals between the ages of 18 and 65, 9.7% of Solano residents (26,638 individuals) have a disability; higher than the state average of 8.9%. Of those with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 65 in Solano, 42% have two or more disabilities, exacerbating the potential barriers to employment. Solano's population of people with disabilities (PWD) is diverse. Within the disability community, the two highest demographics are white (16%) and black (14.5%).

Of those registered in CalJOBS in 2024, 6.35% identified as having a disability, and 6.25% of the enrolled population identified as having a disability. The largest barrier to recruiting PWD is a lack of awareness about dedicated services for those with disabilities. Another challenge with recruitment in the AJCCs is that people often do not want to identify as a person with a disability. The local DOR in Fairfield states that there are no challenges in recruitment, but that they have an interest in better serving youth, individuals in foster care, individuals with intellectual disabilities, and individuals with hidden disabilities. As such, the Workforce Development Board (WDB) of Solano County will serve the full spectrum of PWD.

Both the WDB and DOR believe that the challenge in collaboration lies in the how the two agencies work together once a person with a disability is enrolled. Although the Fairfield WDB and DOR locations are within the same business park, there are minimal co-enrollments between the two organizations. Both organizations have heavy paperwork requirements for enrollment and assessments, and an individual may go through three enrollment and assessment processes to receive services – through the WDB, DOR, and a DOR contractor. This is an especially taxing process for an individual who may not be high functioning or has an intellectual disability. Once enrolled in both entities, there is little collaboration between case

managers at the two organizations – this provides a great opportunity to strengthen a collaborative case management service delivery model.

Challenges/Barriers Faced Securing Employment

PWD face a number of challenges and barriers to securing employment. Labor force participation of PWD in Solano is low at 49.7%, and PWD have a 13.8% unemployment rate, significantly higher than the general population. PWD in Solano County also tend to struggle more financially, with 15.1% of PWD falling below 100% of the poverty line, versus 9.2% of the general population. For those who are working, they tend to make \$12,000 less on average than those without a disability. This median earning is significantly below the living wage in Solano County. PWDs also tend to have a lower educational attainment. In Solano, 15.4% of people with a disability have less than a high school diploma, versus 9.8% of the general population. This data shows stronger employment and training resources for PWD are needed.

PWD in Solano County often lack basic employment/job search skills and may have little to no employment experience. In addition, many PWD need guidance on how to effectively advocate for their accommodation needs and other self-advocacy skills. Once connected to work, additional lack of awareness of asset and benefit resources, such as Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits counseling and work incentives, can further impede PWD. As such, resource awareness building and connection will be a key element of this project, as well as customized supports on work sites to combat workplace barriers.

In addition, support services for PWD are often provided in silos, which can make it difficult for PWD to receive support in gaining and retaining employment. Many disability partners are contractors with the North Bay Regional Center, with the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), or with Solano County Department of Behavioral Health. Many PWD must enter one of these three entities in order to receive services from local community organizations serving PWDs. This project will focus on reducing the silos between the WDB and DOR systems.

Stereotypes of PWD' workplace capabilities and stigma against PWD, as well as unintended obstacles in the recruitment process can be additional barriers to employment. Many businesses simply lack the knowledge and experience working with PWD. In Solano's business community, anecdotal evidence shows businesses are struggling to find and retain talent and are open to hiring PWD, but are often unsure how to hire and support PWD in the workplace. With a stronger workforce system in place for PWD, businesses and PWD would be able to better connect. As such, this project will also focus efforts on business education of PWDs.

Needed Investments in Improving Services

In initial project conversations between the WDB and DOR, there is a desire to create a systematic approach to co-enrollment and staff collaboration. This project will enable a new level of collaboration between the WDB and DOR to meet the employment needs of PWD. As part of the early grant activities, partners will focus on clarifying roles and building service team connections to guide service delivery. Partners will work to design better approaches for co-enrollment, collaborative case management, business engagement, and data sharing.

The local DOR office in Fairfield has experienced staffing gaps, leading to an average caseload of 120 individuals and 200 for youth. This caseload size is much larger than that of the WDB team, with the WDB's Disability Resource Specialist having an average caseload of 45 individuals. As such, DOR has expressed interest in the in-depth support and coaching for

individuals that the WDB can provide in order to keep clients motivated throughout their job search journey. The WDB will use evidence-based approaches such as the discovery process and person-centered planning (PCP) to customize workforce services for PWD.

Another area of need for this investment is being able to provide in-person, facilitated peer support for PWD. Development of a Disability Resource Group for PWD is needed to better address the whole person and provide PWD a safe space to talk through issues and feel that they are not alone. This project will launch a Disability Resource Group (based on the LEAD Center job club model) with the intention of WDB and DOR staff co-hosting the group. The Disability Resource Group can address topics such as disclosing disability status to an employer, sharing challenges and successes in the job search process, and building knowledge and awareness of the rights of PWD in the workplace.

To prepare individuals for work-based learning, there is a significant gap identified in providing Situational Assessments. These assessments can help identify where individuals' strengths are and what capabilities they have in a workplace environment. DOR currently provides this on a case-by-case basis, but has lost the capacity and vendors to do this at their pre-COVID levels. They expressed a particular challenge in developing sites to host Situational Assessments. This investment would build both the WDB's and DOR's capabilities to provide situational assessments, as well as seek to expand work sites that can host Situational Assessments through the engagement of the WDB's Business Services Team.

Another gap in services is targeted job development services. One way to enhance job development efforts is to create more opportunities for hands-on experience in the workplace. Employers often look for experience and essential skills, and rely heavily on the interview process to select employees. PWD that only have training can be at a disadvantage; work and learn strategies can help candidates build that experience. Work and learn opportunities also help PWD connect directly to employers, often bypassing the interview process than can stigmatize PWD and downplay the skills PWD bring to the workplace. The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition identifies that PWD participating in paid work experience are more likely to be engaged in employment. An investment in this area would greatly improve services for PWDs. The WDB Business Services Team would lead this effort.

Another area of improvement in job development is business education and advocacy. The WDB could do a better job of defining essential functions of a vacant position and what accommodations would be needed for PWD to accomplish the essential functions. This should be a collaborative effort between the case manager, business services consultant, and employer. We know that despite common misconceptions, employees with disabilities tend to be loyal, have better attendance and punctuality, and stronger retention rates. These positive attributes need to be highlighted for businesses more. Investment in developing marketing materials for businesses would support this need. These materials can also address the myth of what a disability is and the vast spectrum of abilities.

Having the education and understanding, resources, and access to support can not only empower both the WDB and DOR service workers, but also empower the individual seeking service. This investment would support the WDB and DOR in better providing these services collaboratively from co-enrollment to employment. It is estimated that 70 individuals will be served through this project and receive the benefit of the project's collaboration.

Section II: Staff Roles and Locations

The project will serve participants at both the Fairfield and Vallejo AJCCs in Solano; however, the project team will be based out of the Fairfield AJCC.

The project team will include the following individuals and roles from the WDB:

- Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC) – Matthew Moon-Bailey, Director of Job Seeker Services, will serve as the DRC for this project. The DRC will support the system-wide coordination between the WDB, DOR, and local disability providers. He will also ensure effective implementation of the project goals and objectives both for direct participant services, as well as system-change and sustainability goals. The DRC will also take the lead on engagement in state-level activities and workgroups.
- Disability Services Navigator (DSN) – Rachelle Franko, Disability Resource Specialist, will provide and improve direct service delivery, as well as support the DRC in implementing system enhancements to address challenges PWD face in receiving services. She will work with local DOR staff in implementing co-enrollment and collaborative case management, as well as lead the Disability Resource Groups.
- Disability Benefits Planner/Work Incentive Practitioner – Rachelle Franko, Disability Resource Specialist, is certified as a Work Incentives Practitioner through Cornell University, Institute on Employment and Disability. She will embed work incentive and disability benefits planning into her service delivery with participants.

In addition, the WDB business services team will build work sites for Situational Assessments, work experience opportunities, and engage the business community. The Workforce Navigator will work with partners to build a local resource guide for PWDs.

Section III: Partnerships

The WDB will partner with the DOR office in Fairfield, which is in the same business park as the WDB. The regional DOR office has provided a partnership commitment letter that is attached with the application. The project partners will focus on both direct service and system-enhancing strategies in order to increase the long-term employment for PWD, as well as improving collaboration between the two agencies.

One collaboration need is to reduce the silos between staff at each entity that provide similar services. For example, DOR has a new Community Resource Navigator, but that individual has not yet met WDB staff. The Navigator serves the entire East Bay and Solano County, which presents challenges for depth of services, and the resources in Solano County are often very different than in the East Bay. As part of this project, the WDB intends to make meaningful connections between the community navigation and resource staff. DOR also has a Regional Business Specialist, who not only works with businesses, but leads the LPA meetings. There is an opportunity to better connect these DOR staff with the WDB's community Navigator and Business Services Team. As part of this project, each partner will connect the staff with similar roles and have them meet and collaborate on activities.

The WDB project team and the DOR identified staff members will set up regularly scheduled meetings to review processes, collaboration, and co-enrollment strategies. The DSN and front-line DOR staff will work together to coordinate the Resource Disability Groups and to collaborate on co-enrolled cases. Each entity staff will conduct enrollment and assessment

activities and the DSN will provide in-depth coaching for participants. Where available, each entity will leverage funding for participant training and supportive services.

Section IV: Budget Summary and Plan

The WDB requests a total award of \$501,850 for this project. This request includes:

- **Personnel - \$312,664.63** – This includes \$256,478.96 in programmatic salaries and \$56,185.68 in benefits. Programmatic staffing includes \$145,147 for the Disability Resource Specialist at 80%, who will fill the role of the DSN and the Disability Benefits Planner/Work Incentive Practitioner. It also includes 15% of the Director of Job Seeker Services time to serve as the DRC. The Workforce Navigator will coordinate community resources with DOR and is included at \$33,444. In addition, the Business Services Team will coordinate with the business staff at DOR and launch employer resources regarding hiring and retaining employees with disabilities at \$107,553.
- **Staff Travel - \$9,000.46** – This line item includes \$3,000.46 for local mileage to conduct project activities, as well as \$6,000 for statewide project meetings.
- **Participant Services - \$60,000** – The majority of costs for participant services, including training, work experience placements, and supportive services, will be covered through leveraged WIOA Title I funding. However, additional funding needs are anticipated to allow participants to engage in these services beyond the leveraged funding.
- **Contractual Services - \$60,000** – The WDB requests funding to procure a contractor to produce a publication highlighting the strengths and benefits of individuals with disabilities, as well as the services available locally. This publication will be used to build local awareness of PWD, and be targeted to both job seekers and businesses.
- **Other - \$10,000** – The WDB requests funding for outreach and awareness building efforts. These efforts include developing a resource guide and printing fact sheets for job seekers (on resources and rights), as well as for businesses (on the benefits of hiring people with disabilities).
- **Indirect Costs - \$50,184.91** – Indirect costs are based on the de minimis rate and include administrative staffing and cost allocation plan expenditures, such as facilities, communications, and business expenses.

To support the project, both the WDB and DOR will leverage their WIOA funds as feasible and appropriate. Ancillary supports of interest to DOR are the WDB's Career Coach and NorthStar platform. These two tools (totaling \$7,000 annually) will be leveraged by the WDB for this project. Career Coach is an online career interest assessment tied to local labor market data and training options to support an individual's career exploration. NorthStar is a digital literacy assessment that the WDB can use as part of this project.

In addition, participant costs, such as training, supportive services, and work experience will be leverage for WIOA Title I eligible individuals. It is anticipated that the WDB could leverage up to \$225,000 of WIOA Title I funds for participants. The WDB will also leverage staff, such as the AJCC staff in the Job Centers, WIOA intake staff, and upper management. It is anticipated that for DOR eligible participants, DOR will be able to leverage funds to support situational assessments, training, and supportive services for participants. These leveraged funds will support sustainability of the project and additional supports for participants.