

Engaging Older Workers in the Public Workforce System

Q&A

Q: What are the next steps following today's webinar?

A: ETA is in the process of updating the Protocol for Serving Older Workers in the Public Workforce System. We will hold conference calls and share concepts and outlines for feedback with stakeholders that wish to participate in the update process. If you would like to participate, contact Kim Vitelli at vitelli.kimberly@dol.gov. – ETA

Q: What types of training (seminars/texts) have you provided to your employees to train them to work with older workers?

A: Our hiring process is structured to select employees who have excellent empathy and communication skills to communicate across generations. Arapahoe/Douglas Works! also sends staff to national and local conferences to both present and attend workshops dealing with mature worker issues. Finally, Arapahoe/Douglas Works! brings in external organizations to train staff on intergenerational communication issues. – *Kelly Folks*

A: The “Set for Life” documentary about three Baby Boomers that lost their jobs during the Great Recession has been used by AJCs and SCSEP programs to help train staff. For more information, visit www.overfiftyandoutofwork.com. – *Lori Strauss*

Q: What does 'team case management' mean?

A: Team case management is derived from healthcare settings, where team members work collaboratively to serve a higher number of customers than they would be able to otherwise. In team case management, team members are not assigned individual caseloads. Instead, customers on a caseload can schedule appointments with any case manager. Weekly and/or monthly meetings allow team members to cross train and staff difficult cases. Benefits include more scheduling flexibility for customers and increased skills development and teamwork for case managers. – *Kelly Folks*

Q: Is it really a good idea to segregate older job seekers from the mainstream?

A: The Generations at Work resource center is primarily a specific resource available to mature workers. However, it is not set up to segregate any specific population. We are looking at ways to integrate youth and mature workers through this center to provide opportunities for both generations to learn appropriate workplace behaviors in a supportive environment. This way, we target specific needs of older workers to increase their job search success. – *Kelly Folks*

Q: Do you find that older workers go to AJCs on their own (i.e., they are aware of it and the resources are available), or do you have to go out to find them? If so, please share your outreach methods.

A: Mature workers do attend the workforce center on their own. Outreach efforts include but are not limited to: press releases, partnership with local news stations and newspapers, social media outlets, our website, and through our various partnerships with community organizations. In addition, through our partnership with the AARP Foundation and the “Back to Work 50+” program, we have seen a significant portion of those mature workers attending informational sessions have not utilized AJC services before the collaborated outreach with the AARP Foundation. – *Kelly Folks*

Q: Can you provide examples of universal design principles into AJCs that will apply to older workers?

A: “Universal design” is a strategy that makes programs and services accessible to a broad range of people, including older workers. To meet the needs of their many customers, AJCs can think broadly and inclusively about how they design their physical space, service delivery systems, and customer resources. Many older workers who access AJCs can achieve their goals without special assistance or programs, but others have employment barriers related to age or other personal characteristics and would benefit from targeted accommodations or supports.

The following are examples of policies for serving AJC customers, including older workers, using universal design principles that were identified in a recent survey of select AJCs. Note that policies that work for older workers also work for other AJC customers:

- The AJC adopts a process to consult with, elicit input from, and involve older workers and representatives of other diverse populations in establishing policy governing the operation of its programs and activities, including the development and implementation of strategic plans and efforts to improve outreach and service delivery to their groups.
- The AJC trains staff members to problem-solve and proactively offer assistance to clients who appear to be having difficulty accessing services (i.e., providing appropriate assistance to customers who need assistance to access core, self-directed services, including assistance using computers and other forms of technology).
- The AJC ensures that staff performance evaluations include requirements that staff have participated in older worker awareness training on effectively serving older customers.

For information about programs and initiatives designed by AJCs to respond to the unique employment needs of older workers, please see page 22 of

www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/NTAR_Public_Workforce_System_Report_Final.pdf. – *ETA*

Q: Are there any additional funds or grants that can assist us in building on this program?

A: Both WIA and Wagner-Peyser funds can be used to serve older workers. In addition, partner programs such as adult education, vocational rehabilitation, and other Older Americans Act programs may be appropriate to serve the interest of older workers. – *ETA*

Q: How do you handle the tremendous diversity of needs that older workers have?

A: We avoid using a cookie-cutter approach to our job search services, setting short and long term goals which are appropriate for the individual job seeker. We work with external community partner to provide additional resources to help build and stabilize a mature worker’s portfolio. We utilize a comprehensive assessment to determine any supportive or wraparound services needed and utilize community partnerships to provide services that are not available through the AJC or partnership with the AARP Foundation. – *Kelly Folks*

A: One resource you might find useful in understanding older workers’ needs is a report called [The “New Unemployables”: Older Workers Struggle to Find Work During the Great Recession](#). It highlights findings such as the fact that older workers search for work differently and access training less often than younger workers. – *Lori Strauss*

Q: What are the special topics of workshops for mature workers?

A: All of our workshop offerings are applicable to mature workers. We do have specific workshops designed for challenges faced by mature workers, including Intergenerational Communication, Social Media, and motivational workshops. Hands-on computer assistance is also offered in the Generations at Work resource center to assist individuals with commonly used software, such as Microsoft Office. Job Clubs, networking events, and hiring events are offered specifically for mature workers on-site and off-site in partnership with external organizations. – *Kelly Folks*

Q: I'm not familiar with LinkedIn workshops – can you describe how you use them for older workers?

A: The basics of our LinkedIn workshops are utilized for all Wagner-Peyser customers. We show them the benefits of LinkedIn as a job search resource, and basic overview of the site, and review strong profiles compared to weak ones. We also set up LinkedIn workshops that work with customers in setting up a profile.
– Kelly Folks

Q: Does federal training money also include the usage of basic computers (mouse, keyboard, etc.) and increase as the users skillset improves?

A: Yes, federal funds (such as WIA funds) can be used to provide training in basic computer skills. – ETA

Q: How do I deal with the fact that WIA only funds short-term training?

A: The majority of the customers that we serve are not requesting long-term training; instead, they are looking for ways to improve their current computer literacy and build on existing skills from their previous work history. When someone is interested in long-term training, we will typically work with them to fund the last portion of their training while providing additional resources during the beginning of their training program. – Kelly Folks

Q: How do you handle the unrealistic salary expectations that older workers often have after leaving long-term, higher-paying positions?

A: Difficult conversations at the counselor level, utilizing labor market and wage information for specific occupations, have to occur in order to make sure job seekers have a realistic outlook on the current labor market. EMSI Career Coach is a resource offered on the Arapahoe/Douglas Works! website (www.adworks.org) to assist customers in this manner. In addition, the website offers links and resources to help job seekers obtain viable labor market information to guide their job search. – Kelly Folks

Q: What labor market information is most useful to your mature workers?

A: The [evaluation of the Aging Worker Initiative](#) found that labor market information and career exploration services were key in helping older workers (1) understand prevailing wages in the fields in which they are interested and (2) the types of training they might need to get certain jobs. The information at www.mynextmove.org is valuable for career exploration. Guides to state and local labor data can be found at the Labor Market Information Win-Win Community of Practice at winwin.workforce3one.org. – ETA

A: Wage data, occupational projections, and hiring patterns. EMSI Career Coach is a resource offered on the Arapahoe/Douglas Works! website (www.adworks.org) to assist customers in this manner. In addition, the website offers links and resources to help job seekers obtain viable labor market information to guide their job search. – Kelly Folks

Q: What are good educational programs to help older workers re-enter the workforce?

A: Short-term trainings dealing with computer proficiency are vital for the majority of older workers. Arapahoe/Douglas Works! also tries to share information on targeted, growing industries to help job seekers make wise choices regarding training programs. – Kelly Folks

Q: How would you characterize older workers' relationship and engagement with career pathways and career pathway programs?

A: Career pathways programs can be useful for all workers, but their emphasis on short-term training, “on-ramps” and “off-ramps,” and flexible training delivery can make them especially attractive to older workers. For more information, visit the Career Pathways Community of Practice at learnwork.workforce3one.org. – ETA

Q: Our older population is now 60-70 plus years old. I need ideas to assist with employment opportunities.

A: We suggest that you read the [evaluation of the Aging Worker Initiative](#) for concrete ideas and recommendations on serving an older worker population! – *ETA*

Q: I would like advice in helping older workers feel confident that they have skills instead of thinking they are too old.

A: The key that we have found in addressing customer's confidence level is building rapport through empathy, commitment, and follow-through. These are key elements for the customer to build up trust and rapport with their counselor. Once there is a rapport built that is at the customer's level of trust, they will begin to implement counselor advice and job search techniques at a greater level. It is important to track and share customer progress and successes with them as this builds their confidence and they see positive results. In addition, setting short-term goals that are attainable add additional value to their confidence as the relationship of trust is built between the job seeker and counselor. – *Kelly Folks*

Q: I worry that older workers are being put into low-paying soft skills jobs. Is there a way to ensure that an older worker who has been laid off from a professional position is given upgraded skills so that they could keep their jobs?

A: All AJC programs can provide training to keep someone competitive in their fields, or to transition dislocated workers into new fields. Rapid response programs, including incumbent worker training, can help with lay-off aversion; for more information, visit www.doleta.gov/layoff. Laid-off older workers can benefit from dislocated worker programs, as well as electronic tools (such as mySkills myFuture – www.myskillsmyfuture.org) and reemployment services (see reemployment.workforce3one.org). – *ETA*

Q: I feel that we need more tools to support the older job seeker on an emotional level. How can we go about this?

A: In this instance, partnerships with outside organizations can be very valuable. You can connect older workers to Older Americans Act programs and social support organizations. In addition, many older workers find demographic-specific job clubs to be useful for social support. (For more information on job clubs, visit the Partnerships Community of Practice at partnerships.workforce3one.org/page/job_clubs.) Good case management can also be very important. – *ETA*

Q: How do you incorporate the SCSEP into your agency?

A: Our initial step was to collaborate with the AARP Foundation to formulate a memorandum of understanding. Once this was in place, we utilized our Generations at Work resource center to conduct outreach efforts. We targeted frequent visitors to the resource center to refer them accordingly. We continue to evaluate how to improve upon this program by using additional outreach efforts, such as IVR calls and similar methods. – *Kelly Folks*

Q: A big issue with SCSEP with Resource Sharing Agreement. How was this handled?

A: We worked with our local AARP representatives to utilize the county MOU template to ensure that the verbiage that needed to be included was part of the document in order to handle these types of challenges. – *Kelly Folks*

A: Frequently, Resource Sharing Agreements are supported by memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between SCSEP grantees and the WIA system. For more information and effective practices, see the webinar [ABCs of an MOU: Basics of a Memorandum of Understanding](#). – *ETA*

Q: What is the success rate for placement of older workers in your program?

A: Placement rates vary depending on the nature of services they receive from the AJC. Intensive service recipients and individuals who participate in career coaching usually have a 70%-80% success rate in entering employment. – *Kelly Folks*

Q: Are you finding that more employers are now open to hiring older workers?

A: We have found that the biggest obstacle for mature workers is not employers' resistance to hire them; rather, many mature workers have very specific criteria for selecting a job, and sometimes pass up opportunities that do not meet their narrow job search scope. Most of the employers that we work with are most interested in finding the best-qualified applicant that will be able to hit the ground running at the posted wage for the position. We have received feedback from employers that some of our mature participants lack the ability to convey how their skill sets will meet the needs of the position. We do believe that there are age biases (both intentional and unintentional); however, we typically market our mature workers as "prime talent" to businesses and counsel our mature workers that these types of biases and/or discrimination are ultimately out of their control, therefore they should focus their energy towards positively impacting their job search marketing plan. – *Kelly Folks*

Q: Have other states had success in targeting employers that are experiencing skills shortages?

A: In the webinar, I mentioned a project from Lane Workforce Partners in Oregon that works with employers who needed talent in call centers. This approach is referred to as a sector-based strategy, and it is gaining steam across the country. The Insight Center's National Network of Sector Partners has done very good work in this area; for more information, see www.insightcced.org/communities/nnspp.html. – *Lori Strauss*

Q: What are some industries/types of organizations that are more open to older workers?

A: We notice that industries that place a premium on customer service skills find value in the 50+ segment of the workforce. This can include retail, call centers, and home/health care. Also consider companies whose main customer base are people over age 50. – *Lori Strauss*

Q: What studies can I use to refute older worker myths?

A: Some studies that you might find useful are:

- The Business Case for Hiring Workers 50+: Towers-Perrin (2005)
- [Engaging the 21st Century Multigenerational Workforce](#) from the Sloan Center for Aging: This brief explains how engagement at work increases productivity, and engagement correlates positively with age.
- [The Employer Resource Center](#): This site has research and articles on employers that value older workers. With many Boomers nearing retirement age, employers must explore a variety of options to meet their staffing needs. See information about and strategies from employers that value older workers. Learn about recruiting and retaining experienced workers, trends and best practices, and more. – *Lori Strauss*

Q: What can I tell employers who are concerned about their insurance rates increasing for medical and workers' compensation?

A: Health care costs are driven by a wide range of factors including individual health, age, dependent coverage, and health care utilization. For information to help combat employer myths about costs associated with older workers, see the The Business Case for Hiring Workers 50+: Towers-Perrin. This research report is being updated this year. Arapahoe/Douglas Works! also produced the [Myths and Facts](#) document for employers that addresses this question. – *Lori Strauss*

Q: Is there a way to share innovative ideas for serving older workers? If anyone online has resources (training modules, fact sheets, program outlines, etc.) to share with others, is there a central collection point for them?

A: This webinar was a good start to a conversation about serving older workers! For more ideas, please visit www.workforce3one.org, specifically the Workforce Systems Strategies Community of Practice (strategies.workforce3one.org). – *ETA*

Q: What is the current thinking from DOL and others regarding ensuring that the WIA performance measures do not continue to serve as a disincentive for WIA providers in serving older workers (as cited in the 2008 GAO report)?

A: The workforce system, particularly WIA core services and Wagner-Peyser employment services, are universal access programs and are intended to serve all populations. WIA and Wagner-Peyser performance goals reflect the employment outcome expectations for that wide population. States can negotiate their goals with ETA – and subsequently negotiate with local areas – based on the characteristics of the population they serve. – *ETA*

Q: Does DOL have any plans to restart/reconvene another interagency task force? If yes, could national SCSEP grantees and employers be involved?

A: Currently, there are no plans to reconvene the Interagency Taskforce on Aging. The taskforce made several recommendations, some of which were implemented by the Department of Labor in the Aging Worker Initiative. – *ETA*

Q: What has been the impact of Congressional inaction on extension of UI benefits to long-term unemployed for the older worker? Are they differentially impacted? Do we have national and regional figures?

A: As Lori Strauss pointed out, older workers make up a disproportionate share of the long-term unemployed (for the data Ms. Strauss used in the webinar, see the December Employment Report from the AARP Public Policy Institute). Recently, Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez hosted a listening session with long-term unemployed Americans, many of whom were older workers; for information from that listening session, see social.dol.gov/blog/dispelling-the-myths-of-the-long-term-unemployed. – *ETA*