

## Boot Camp Project Narrative: Team Rome, Georgia

The 2020-2021 Disability & Employment Boot Camp supported teams in their efforts to design and test innovative ideas in their evolving workforce landscapes; ideas that will strengthen system capacity to increase employment of Americans with disabilities.

### Experience Stages



### Team Rome, Georgia Participants

- **Terri Morgan** (Lead), NWGRC
- **Kiersten Millican**, AMP Rome
- **Christina Holtzclaw**, NWGA Center for Independent Living
- **Paul Workman**, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
- **Kelly Gribble**, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
- **Pam Dempsey**, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
- **Lindia Moore**, Georgia Department of Labor

### Defining the Challenge

#### Experience Highlights

The team completed a Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to help clarify the challenge with current business engagement. The team identified key stakeholders.

#### Results

##### Original Challenge Statement

“As a result of COVID, the disruption in schedules and closures of State agencies such as the Department of Labor (DOL) Career Centers and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) offices; Centers for Independent Living; day treatment centers; technical and community colleges; and many other local agencies/organizations has led to a significant gap in occupational skills

training, on-the-job training, job search, in-person financial management/independent living skills programs and collaborative meetings, and networking.”

### SWOT Analysis

The team increased their understanding of the challenge statement through identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The team identified their close ties to the community and existing available resources are strengths, while realizing that lack of transit, business and provider closures, and employer bias may be weaknesses. The team also identified virtual platforms and programs as opportunities, as well as the current labor market as a threat.

### Refined Challenge Statement

- 1) Outreach to the community to broaden the knowledge of citizens, stakeholders, and businesses regarding the job training services, educational services, and supportive services that are available to consumers and employers; and
- 2) Providing support to current agencies/organizations whose services have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 (loss of funding to meet/provide services in person) AND individuals who are disabled.

### Key Stakeholders

The Rome Comprehensive One-Stop Career Center; Department of Labor (DOL) Career Centers; Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) offices; Centers for Independent Living; day treatment centers; the university system; technical and community colleges; local and national employers; local elected officials; and local and state agencies/organizations whose missions are to assist individuals with developmental, physical, and intellectual disabilities.

## Building Empathy

### Experience Highlights

The team learned about the benefits and techniques for building empathy to get inspired by the employers they hope to serve. The interview technique enabled the team to listen to employers to get

new ideas about how to design for them. The team synthesized their learnings to identify patterns and surprising insights to inspire new opportunities for design.

The team recognized that employers are accustomed to being approached to make a hire rather than being approached by workforce to determine what they need. We interviewed 28 employers, organizations, and stakeholders in a two-part process. First, we asked questions of a broad selection of consumers, employers, and others to determine what the “pain points” were with organizations and others in their search for services or employees. Next, we created a Google Form and sent it out to employers in Rome and the surrounding areas to better determine the hiring needs and patterns of the employers, the interview guide is included in the appendix. We understand that there is great work being done across the workforce agencies, the maze of organizations and agencies with differing performance metrics and governance often leads to working in “silos,” thus making it difficult to provide that seamless, no wrong door approach system to both job seekers and employers. It is critical that we craft a reliable source to provide employers with timely, available resources for hiring, highlighting what is already available and building on that. Equally critical is the need to ensure that job seekers have access to employers, skills gaps training, and supportive services so that they can successfully obtain and retain meaningful, self-sustaining employment.

## Results

### Employer, Organizations, and Stakeholder Interviewed

Our team interviewed a number of small and large businesses, stakeholders, nonprofits, and community-based organizations including: Elevation House; Law Offices of David F. Guldenschuh; individuals who are consumers of various services in the region and their family members; individuals with disabilities who are employed or who are seeking employment; and staffing agencies.

### Key Insights

1. There is a huge lack of information and resources available to employers and organizations.
2. Vocational Rehab is doing a great job and have a great model for getting employers to hire IWDs.
3. One thing the team found is need for a “bridge,” such as a mentor or big brother/sister so that employers feel comfortable hiring IWDs and IWDs feel comfortable with transitions.
4. Job seekers and employers often are asked to navigate multiple systems to access the resources they need to achieve meaningful employment outcomes or to fill vacancies, respectively. In a complicated maze of agencies and organizations with differing

performance metrics and governing regulations, silos are created and, often, duplication or fragmentation of services may result.

### Final Challenge Statement

- 1) Outreach to the community to broaden the knowledge of citizens, stakeholders, and businesses regarding the job training services, educational services, and supportive services that are available to consumers and employers; and
- 2) Providing support to current agencies/organizations whose services have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 (loss of funding to meet/provide services in person) AND individuals who are disabled.

### Final How Might We Statement

How might we create a team approach to improving and retaining meaningful, self-sufficient employment for individuals with disabilities and provide seamless, no-wrong door service to employers and stakeholders?

## Identifying a Solution

### Experience Highlights

As we conducted empathy building and convened, potential solutions were identified. The team brainstormed around potential themes, solutions, and challenges. The team recognized that there are many potential solutions and that there is a great need to strategically advance key proposals through this Boot Camp. After participating in a Peer session, we gained valuable insights from other teams.

### Results

#### Potential Solutions Identified

1. Creating a holistic system of mutually reinforcing strategies to increase the impact of partner agencies while also reducing duplication of services.
2. Ensure that employers routinely advertise with and seek referrals from the One-Stop System.

3. Assist employers in creating and maintaining best practices, utilizing tool kit/desk guide resources developed by the PAID Council, to provide an inclusive culture where all are present, welcome, and needs are accommodated.
4. Create resources such as short videos, recorded webinars/panels, newsletters, flyers, news releases, listening sessions, etc. to disseminate consistent, timely, and correct information to employers and stakeholders.

## Prototyping Solution

### Experience Highlights

The Rome Team utilized the already existing Promoting Access for Individuals with Disabilities (PAID) Council to inform the Boot Camp activities. Through a combination of virtual meetings, email conversations, phone calls, and collaborating through Jamboard, we developed the questions for interviews; connected with the developers of a social networking app called “Yolbe,” and participated in an Employer Panel to gain further insight.

### Results

Our team developed an outline of a system whereby consumers, stakeholders, and employers could obtain information about services, including a Facebook page and website while also thinking ahead to utilizing a social networking platform (Yolbe) and a “211” phone information system.

## Testing and Refining the Prototype

### Experience Highlights:

The Rome Team met virtually via Zoom, collaborated using Jamboard, created a Slack channel, and spoke many times on a one-on-one basis with other team members and with stakeholders/community organizations to come to some conclusions about the “Prototype.” Realizing that one of the primary issues that negatively impacts the “flow” of information regarding services in the NWGA region is the confusion that stems from having several agencies and organizations providing those services and with the “alphabet soup” that comes with these entities, our team “went back to the drawing board” in an attempt to streamline the process while advantageously using the rich partnerships already in place. Significantly, our team needed to make the following distinctions: Is the Prototype a new social platform (like Yolbe or something else); is it an amalgamation of social media, a website, and/or a “211” system; or is it some permutation of the already-existing partnerships?

## Results:

The Rome Team concluded that taking advantage of the existing partnerships that have been developed through the PAID Council is the natural, logical “prototype.” Currently, Vocational Rehabilitation, the Center for Independent Living, WIOA, DOL, and Elevation House are members of PAID and will assist in this effort. Moving forward, PAID will be expanded to include job seekers, employers, elected officials, advocates, and other stakeholders. This model of providing services will allow us to quickly and efficiently address any questions from employers, job seekers, and the public, as well as to directly address problems as they arise. This “One-Stop” approach to service delivery is a hallmark of WIOA and is a natural fit for responding to the gaps in knowledge that currently exist.

## Outlining Next Steps

### Experience Highlights:

The PAID Council agreed that the “Prototype” for our area was certainly the utilization of the already-existing rich and functional partnerships that we have developed through PAID as well as other small groups and steering teams that many of us participate in regularly. In order to further streamline the process of easing the “pain” of the dilemma of too much information/too little information/too much conflicting information, we determined that a central contact is necessary. As the lead of the Rome team, as well as a member of the Board for the CIL and other partner organizations and agencies, Terri Morgan has agreed to be that central point of contact for individuals, employers, and the public. A website has been created along with a YouTube channel and Facebook page.

## Results

### Next steps:

1. Market the NWGA PAID Council as a one-stop resource for information about not only hiring and recruiting individuals with disabilities, but also a “no wrong door approach” for individuals looking for assistance from the plethora of agencies that provide services to individuals with disabilities, employers, stakeholders, and advocates.
2. Create a toolkit, best practices desk guide, and/or resource guide for the website to provide employers and job seekers with timely, available resources for hiring and current resources for training, employment, and supportive services.
3. Provide interactive in-person and virtual panels for employers, stakeholders, and job seekers and utilize YouTube and social media to disseminate recordings of the panels and other events.
4. Advance collaborative leadership within the PAID Council by continuing to partner with the Chambers of Commerce, the High Demand Career Initiative Advisory Council, the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Council, ARC of Georgia, and other local organizations and agencies.



5. Utilize the WorkSource Northwest Georgia Mobile Career Center to provide mobile training, recruiting events, networking, and other opportunities for job seekers and employers to take advantage of the resources available through our strategic partnerships within the PAID Council and the One-Stop Comprehensive Center.
6. Partner with the NWGA Center for Independent Living on a newly received grant to assist youth with disabilities.
7. Partner with the Northwest Georgia Housing Authority as they build a new facility designed to provide housing and services for individuals with disabilities.
8. Continue to work with Yolbe as they build a social media platform in Georgia.

## Appendix

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### SWOT

#### Strengths

- Terri: Our group has familiarity with each other and available services.
- Tamika: Active high school participation.
- Christina: Many resources available. The bus system. Paratransit.
- Tamika: Centralized to multiple providers.
- Paul: Large number of jobs on DOL and other resource sites.
- Melissa: We already have a strong collaboration and communication between resources and agencies in our community.
- Terri: WIOA has funding for training.

#### Weaknesses

- Christina: No transit in the county.
- Tamika: Closed rehab centers (for in person services).
- Melissa: Some of the events and opportunities that we have worked hard to provide the last several years have not been possible this year such as transition fairs, a planned event for employers, job fairs, etc.
- Terri: Need business input. Many employers are unaware of what services our agencies can offer to help.
- Paul: Educating employers as to the potential of hiring individuals with disabilities.
- Christina: Attitudinal challenges of what people with disabilities can do.
- Tamika: Tight job market for individuals with no/little training.
- Paul: Helping Individuals understand their potential with regard to employment.
- Tamika: Statewide budget cuts for programs that serve individuals with disabilities.
- Melissa: In person technology training to new technology as an accommodation has not been possible so access to technology is not as helpful if they do not know how to use it.
- Tamika: Limited ability for job coaching for those that require it to learn job duties.
- Paul: Matching individuals with jobs that would benefit both the individual and employer.

#### Opportunities

- Terri: Virtual models allows us to re-examine and re-vamp the methodologies to be more inclusive and sustainability.
- Tamika: With virtual capabilities, we are no longer limited to providers in our local area.
- Terri: Broaden remote work opportunities since we have seen it can be possible.
- Paul: Large number of current jobs available through various online resources.
- Christina: Local transit is seeking expansion. Using Zoom or similar to collaborate.
- Tamika: Expanded market for telework, which benefits some of our customers.
- Paul: Several areas have Project Search Sites.
- Melissa: Utilizing and maximizing use of YouTube and other platforms for training.
- Terri: Because of COVID, grants are becoming available to assist in training, etc.
- Paul: There are several opportunities for post-secondary training.

## Threats

- Terri: Businesses and individuals are suffering from overwhelm.
- Christina: Funding.
- Terri: Transportation in the county and non-traditional business hours is severely lacking.
- Paul: Effective and appropriate marketing of programs that assist people with disabilities.
- Tamika: Individuals are fearful to go out to look for work.
- Terri: Employers need to hire immediately.
- Paul: Past experiences people have had in seeking and accepting employment.
- Tamika: Job market is saturated with skilled workers.

## Interview Guide

### First questions to a select group of respondents:

1. Tell me about the last time you had a great/not-so-great experience with an agency/organization?
2. What did you love about that OR what was your frustration with it?
3. Why do you think that experience was so great or not great? Was it a person, place, or thing that made it that way?
4. How did it make you feel? How could it have been better?

### Questions from the Google Form:

1. Are you responsible for hiring decisions at your company/organization?
2. Is your business/organization currently recruiting for open positions?
3. How have you advertised these openings? (Check all that apply.)
  - Company/Organization Website
  - Paid Online Job Portal (Indeed or other)
  - Georgia Department of Labor
  - Chamber of Commerce
  - Print Media (including the online portals for newspapers)
  - Employment/Staffing Agencies
  - Professional Associations
  - Other (please describe below in "Other")
4. Did you consider these sources for advertising to be successful, generally speaking?
5. Have you used Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to employ people with disabilities (PwD)? If yes, please describe your experience(s) in "Other."
6. For PwDs you have hired who needed accommodations, how did you implement a successful accommodation for them?
7. What are some ways VR can assist you in meeting hiring and retention needs for PwD? (e.g. Assistive Work Technology, Disability Awareness Training, Talent Pipeline, etc.).
8. Would you be interested in learning more about how VR can assist you with hiring individuals to fill your vacancies?
9. Additional questions or information?



## Current Resources

[Career Depot](#)  
[PAID Resource Guide](#)  
[NWGA Center for Independent Living](#)  
[United Way Community Resource Guide](#)  
[GVRA](#)  
[Java Joy](#)  
[Elevation House](#)  
[Goodwill Career Centers](#)  
[ODEP](#)  
[CareerOneStop](#)  
[The ARC of Georgia](#)  
[DBHDD](#)  
[Northwest Georgia Housing Authority](#)  
[HOPE Alliance](#)