What is a Workforce Innovation Cohort?

A cohort is an interactive peer-learning technical assistance forum where cross-agency participants representing a combination of States and/or regions participate. The goal is to collectively brainstorm and develop solutions that will ensure individuals with disabilities are able to enter, stay in, or return to the labor force.

The cohort will work towards the following outcomes:

- Serve as an overall “Innovation Lab” for ideas that drive integration, promote improved efficiencies, and provide insight to Federal agencies on how the workforce system can provide greater connections between disability and employment;
- Develop solutions to challenge statements to be disseminated nationally; and
- Help cohort members address a challenge in their own State, region or local community.

What’s In It For Me?

Individual cohort teams will learn about peer innovations and service strategies, and other related resources that are available. There will be many opportunities for peer learning and sharing, which each State/regional team can use to apply to your own programs. In addition to peers, participants will have the opportunity to explore innovative approaches from private industry and work with talented Subject Matter Experts.

Quotes from Past Cohort Participants:

- “The cohort gave our state a reason and a purpose in convening our WIOA, TANF and SNAP partners.”
- “While we have had the opportunity to collaborate at various times in the past, it was a great opportunity to really share experiences and challenges each person experiences in their program.”
- “We hope that the cohort does not end completely and look forward to future sessions.”

Three Cohort Opportunities

1. **Accessibility Cohort** – Challenge Question: How might we further maximize physical and programmatic access for customers with disabilities using the services of an American Job Center?

   Topics you might explore:
   - Improving the application of the certification process of the American Job Center
   - Examining cross-partner workgroups that focus on disability/accessibility policy and program implementation;
   - Incorporating, cross-training, and sustaining all disability/accessibility policy and procedures for staff;
   - Assessing WIOA state and local leadership communication to program staff on how physical and programmatic policies are operationalized; and
   - Understanding the different types of assistive technology currently available.
NOTE: An updated Promising Practices in Achieving Universal Access and Equal Opportunity: A Section 188 Disability Reference Guide will likely serve as a key resource to explore, inform and guide virtual and local team discussions.

2. **Customer Service Cohort** – **Challenge Question**: How might we ensure individuals with disabilities experience seamless customer service across WIOA core programs?

   **Topics you might explore:**
   - Examining Common Intake processes;
   - Leveraging programmatic and fiscal resources;
   - Re-examining the One-Stop Vision & One-Stop Operating Plan TEGLS;
   - No wrong door approach mantra – “One Team. One Vision. One Conversation” Theme;
   - Improving internal processes (application of income calculation, universal design, or unified joint messaging with different external stakeholders about service delivery);
   - Processes WIOA partners may use to monitor and support program staff to ensure policies and procedures are implemented on an ongoing basis to maintain seamless delivery and access to services; and
   - WIOA accountability and resolution processes (e.g. the WIOA Complaint System).

3. **Employer Engagement Cohort** – **Challenge Question**: How might we more effectively engage employers with recruiting, hiring, and training job seekers with disabilities as an integrated strategy of the American Job Center service delivery?

   **Topics you might explore:**
   - Coordinating with different sectors on work-based learning opportunities;
   - Identifying effective strategies, outcomes, and best practices for replication;
   - Educating employers on the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities, such as tax incentives and existing resources on cost-effective accommodation to maximize an employee's productivity in the workplace;
   - Addressing employment gaps by hiring individuals with disabilities in positions through direct hire, work-based learning (WBL) opportunities, or competency-based hiring/training, especially in high-demand and growth occupations and industries; and
   - Learning how State/local VR and disability partners are working proactively with State/local Workforce Development Boards and American Job Center business services to identify sector industry needs, develop jobs, apprenticeships, and OJT opportunities.

### Cohort Process: A Series of Activities

- **Kick-Off and Virtual Meetings**: Virtual facilitated events to discuss project expectations and ongoing progress. These meetings provide teams an opportunity to network and discuss efforts underway in each state and collectively across the country. Anticipate 90-minute virtual sessions to occur every 3 to 4 weeks so there is enough time for team time to occur in-between the virtual sessions. The meeting days and times will generally remain the same throughout the Cohort.

- **Team Time**: Individual team meetings to share thoughts and discuss next steps on team/collective implementation, including completing any “team assignments”. Team time
allows the individual team to learn about cross-agency programs and explore approaches the state might select to pilot.

- **Wrap-Up Meeting:** Virtual session that showcases the finalized product or innovation, and gains consensus on next steps around dissemination.

- **Active Feedback:** Cohorts are designed to be participant-led requiring engagement, idea sharing, and feedback during the process. At the cohort’s end, participants will reflect upon the process and provide insights and recommendations aimed at improving the experience for future cohorts.

### Cohort Membership

Up to six individual teams will be selected to participate in each of the three cohorts. Selection criteria may include geographic diversity, size/population density, state organizational structure, and other criteria that may benefit the cohort’s learning environment.

The team membership varies for each cohort topic. Individual teams may engage other partners and colleagues to contribute to relevant “team assignments”, in-state working sessions, and virtual discussions.

- **Accessibility Cohort:** Your team composition may have up to 6 individuals – WIOA Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth programs with program representatives partnered with leadership/staff from a comprehensive AJC); WIOA Title II (Adult Education and Literacy – Department of Education); WIOA Title III (Wagner Peyser Employment Services). Two of the members must include WIOA Title IV (State Vocational Rehabilitation Program) and the Equal Opportunity Office.

- **Customer Service Cohort:** Your team composition may have up to 6 individuals – a member of each core program must be included WIOA Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth programs); WIOA Title II (Adult Education and Literacy – Department of Education); WIOA Title III (Wagner Peyser Employment Services); and WIOA Title IV (State Vocational Rehabilitation Program).

- **Employer Engagement Cohort:** Your team composition may have up to 6 individuals – WIOA Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth programs); WIOA Title II (Adult Education and Literacy – Department of Education); WIOA Title III (Wagner Peyser Employment Services); WIOA Title IV (State Vocational Rehabilitation Program), Economic Development, and other disability partners.

### How Can My State Participate?

Applications for Cohort participation are due by **October 15, 2018**. See the [Workforce Innovation Cohort Application Planning Document](#) for details on the application and then [Apply Online](#).

**Apply Today!**

*If you have questions or need additional information or assistance about the Workforce Innovation Cohort Challenge, please contact cohorts@mahernet.com.*