
NTAR Leadership Center

STATE LEADERS INNOVATION INSTITUTE

SUMMARY OF STATE ACTION PLANS

In April 2008, the NTAR LEADERSHIP CENTER selected three states to participate in the STATE LEADERS INNOVATIONS INSTITUTE (SLII): Connecticut, Maryland, and Minnesota. The governors of these states were asked to designate high-level team leaders and members representing a range of agencies involved in workforce development, economic development, and disability employment. In May and June 2008, NTAR LEADERSHIP CENTER faculty conducted orientation meetings in each state, and the three teams attended a July 28-30th teambuilding and planning session at the Heldrich Center at Rutgers University. In August and September, the cross-agency SLII teams and their subcommittees continued meeting independently to develop the preliminary state action plans that will guide their future efforts. The three SLII teams will now begin implementation of specific tasks included in their plans.

Several themes are reflected in the state action plans. Each of the three SLII teams is involved in **systems change initiatives** seeking to improve employment opportunities for adults with disabilities by **tying disability employment to broader workforce and economic development efforts and by partnering to improve coordination of existing resources**. The states are developing processes that facilitate communication and collaboration across agencies and institutions, striving in different ways to include the needs of persons with disabilities in the states' demand driven workforce development initiatives. In doing so, they have also kept a focus on **promoting and increasing the use of universal design** in planning occupational skills training and other services. **Thus, the state action plans embody two key ODEP goals:**

- Increase partnership and collaboration among and across generic and disability-specific systems
- Increase the use of universal design as the framework for the organization of employment policy

Each of the three state teams has outlined plans to emphasize **employer outreach and engagement**, which is critical to any demand-driven workforce development initiative. The teams will rely on regional, business-led analysis to identify occupational skills that are needed, as well as to explore employer recruitment strategies. The teams have realized that the public workforce system, though a vital partner, is not always the first point of contact for employers seeking to hire new workers.

CONNECTICUT

The Connecticut SLII Team, under the leadership of the Governor's Office and The Workplace, Inc., has three primary goals:

Goal 1: Employer outreach and engagement

Goal 2: Develop functional talent development system

Goal 3: Maximize resources to ensure collaboration of all state departments, reduce redundancies, and develop a "single point of entry" for employers

The team will implement the following priority strategies as part of employer outreach and engagement:

- Establish the state as a model employer of people with disabilities, with the Department of Administrative Services taking the lead.
- Develop initiatives to promote the hiring of people with disabilities at the local level. Connecticut is planning a state-wide conference on how to make the business case for hiring people with disabilities. The Department of Labor and the Office of Workforce Competitiveness will organize the conference, and each of Connecticut's five workforce investment boards will be asked to contribute a \$5,000 investment toward the event. The event will include training for job development staff in diversity, networking, building relationships with employers and other topics, which will then be institutionalized at each CTWorks One Stop Career Center.
- Document all SLII activity into a how-to manual for other states interested in promoting employment of people with disabilities. The WorkPlace will draft the manual.

Connecticut will also be working to develop a network of employer champions for the hiring, retention and promotion of people with disabilities, and to undertake additional statewide resource and asset mapping of initiatives to advance employment for people with disabilities. (The Connecticut team will also coordinate with the regional WIRED initiative, which is collecting extensive data on people with disabilities.)

MARYLAND

Maryland's SLII focus is on activities tied to ensuring people with disabilities are included in plans to prepare the state for the job growth that will result due to the expansion of bases under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission.

The Maryland SLII Team, under the co-leadership of the Department of Labor and the Department of Disabilities (MDOD), is striving to achieve systems change in the

workforce development system that they believe will result in increased employment for people with disabilities. The team is developing strategies to ensure:

- jobseekers with disabilities have skills to match BRAC hiring needs
- BRAC employers can access qualified jobseekers with disabilities.

Towards this goal, the Maryland SLII Team, with assistance from the Governor's Workforce Investment Board (GWIB), will conduct an employer survey and/or focus groups to learn more about job qualifications, employer recruitment strategies, policies regarding telework, and other issues. In addition, the Department of Rehabilitation Services and the Department of Labor together with MDOD's Employment Leadership Team will work to develop a consistent statewide approach toward disability services in One Stops.

The broad-based Maryland SLII team is also focusing on the expansion of affordable, accessible housing and transportation as vital to enabling people with disabilities to participate in the state's job growth. Their efforts are tied to specific action items contained in the state's BRAC plan. Maryland is also interested in creating a Maryland-specific financial literacy curriculum that includes information on asset development, benefits counseling, and home ownership, furthering another of ODEP's five goals: increasing economic self sufficiency for people with disabilities.

To support its efforts, the Maryland SLII Team is making plans to create an employment data warehouse in order to make better use of labor market information as it relates to people with disabilities.

Maryland will use as one outcome measure the number of SLII recommendations that are included in the statewide BRAC plan, as well as the number of SLII recommendations that are implemented. Secretary of the Department of Disabilities Catherine Raggio will continue to communicate regularly with the Governor's Cabinet and the BRAC SubCabinet, which is also represented on the SLII Team.

MINNESOTA

Minnesota's broad goal under the SLII is "to create a multi-agency framework, as well as improved cross-agency systems, by which all adults will gain the skills, credentials, and work experiences they need to link with specific employers in key sectors."

Minnesota is a national leader in terms of initiatives to transform the workforce, education, economic and community development systems to meet changing demographic and economic realities. **The NTAR Leadership Center SLII project is now included as one of the state's ten 21st Century Regional Prosperity Initiatives.** As such, the Minnesota SLII Team, under the leadership of Kathy Sweeney of the Department of Employment and Economic Development, will strive to ensure that the needs of adults with disabilities are reflected in all regional initiatives.

Minnesota FastTRAC, which is funded by the Joyce Foundation, is currently selecting 4-6 “incubator” sites to assist adults by creating a “fast-track” to help them gain skills, credentials, and work experience to meet specific occupational demands in key regional industries.

The Minnesota SLII Team will launch an additional incubator, jointly funded by SLII and Pathways to Employment, with a special focus on inclusion of adults with disabilities. The state team has selected the Northeast Minnesota Arrowhead region for this incubator. The region is expecting significant job growth, and the SLII team will work with an existing employer group, the Area Partnership for Economic Development, to identify and fill unmet workforce needs. They will collaborate with area Workforce Centers, the Minnesota Employment First Coalition, and other efforts in the region such as *Stay Well, Stay Working*. The Minnesota SLII/Pathways incubator will include on-the-job training, internships and apprenticeship programs tied to regional job needs, combining training for demand jobs, work experience, career pathways, and bridges to employment.

Throughout the SLII process, Minnesota hopes to address the challenge of building a statewide framework for connecting and “horizontally integrating” existing program and initiatives that serve adults with disabilities, moving the programs of multiple agencies beyond the “silo” mentality that still exists. The team seeks to create linkages among existing programs and initiatives and foster a sustainable process for collaboration. The long-term goal is a new universal framework that fully integrates adults with disabilities into the workforce development system.