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# NTAR Leadership Center

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**SUMMARY ~ Audio Conference ~ March 12, 2009**

**The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)**

**Opportunities and Implications for the Employment of Adults with Disabilities**

The National Technical Assistance and Research Center to Promote Leadership for Increasing Employment and Economic Independence of Adults with Disabilities (**NTAR Leadership Center**) in partnership with the US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, sponsored an audio conference on March 12, 2009 for members of its State Leaders Innovation Institute and its State Peers Leaders Network.

**Topic: Overview of Key Employment and Training/Vocational Rehabilitation Provisions of the ARRA**

**What are states required to do? How can the state ARRA plans create employment and training opportunities for people with disabilities?**

**Considerations for States to Foster the Inclusion of People with Disabilities**

**Goal of the Audio Conference Session:**

- To help state policy makers generate a more promising employment outlook for people with disabilities in a tough economy by seeing the economy and stimulus dollars as an opportunity to insert creative ideas and develop partnerships and plans for the use of stimulus funds;
- To help state policy makers understand the dollars going into states and to take advantage of those funds to both stem the erosion of progress made and to help state policy makers understand the opportunities available through the blending and braiding of various resources; and
- To introduce state policy makers to some ideas and thinking from other states and the federal government.

**Audio Conference Agenda:**

Welcome and Introductions (2:00 pm)

Kathy Krepcio, Director, NTAR Leadership Center

Nanette Relave, Co-Moderator, Director, Center for Workers with Disabilities, APHSA

Chris Button, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, US Dept of Labor

Update on Key Employment and Training and Vocational Rehabilitation Provisions of the ARRA

Gina King, Office of Workforce Investment, Employment and Training Administration,  
US Dept of Labor

David Esquith, State Monitoring and Program Improvement Division Director, OSERS,  
Rehabilitation Services Administration, US Dept of Education

Katy Cashen, National Governors Association

Facilitated Discussion on State Plans

Nanette Relave and Kathy Krepcio - Moderators

Adjourn (3:00 pm)

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## Presentation Summaries:

### **Gina King, Office of Workforce Investment, Employment and Training Administration, US Dept of Labor**

- The US Dept of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA) was charged by Congress to issue formal guidance and distribute the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and Wagner-Peyser funding under the ARRA in an efficient and expeditious manner with full transparency and accountability for the expenditure of funds. The Act is intended to preserve and create jobs, promote the nation's economic recovery and assist those most impacted by the recession. It is important to note that the dollars distributed by ETA are intended to train workers for jobs that will be created through other provisions of ARRA. The emphasis is on training.
- The goal for the nation's service delivery and training system is to provide training and expand training capacity. The critical message is that the ARRA funding is a down payment on advancing transformation of the workforce system -- using this as an opportunity to leverage changes in the system's basic operations to develop a strong and innovative public workforce system. This system is one where adult education, job training, post secondary education and other activities are aligned with economic and community development strategies to meet the skills needs of existing and emerging employers and high growth occupations, as well as the needs of under skilled adults (dual customer approach). It is also a system where education and training at every level is closely aligned with jobs and industries important to local and regional economies.
- Key features include: a) emphasis on transparency and accountability of funds at all levels; b) expedited and effective use of funds with expenditures made concurrently with regular formula funds; c) funding of approaches that both meet the demands of today's economy and result in an improved workforce system; d) emphasis on and priority of services for hard-to-serve populations and needs-related payments and supportive services to help people get access to training; e) investment in training that aligns with regional economic development activities; f) focus on summer youth activities in 2009, in particular for disadvantaged youth (increased age for youth from 21 years to 24 years and an expansion of summer to begin in May and end in September); g) funding to be spent by June 30, 2011; and h) competitive grant program that supports worker training and placement in high growth and emerging industry sectors with a priority for green jobs and health care.

#### Funds include:

- \$500,000,000 for grants to the States for adult employment and training activities;
- \$1,200,000,000 for grants to the States for youth activities, including summer employment for youth;
- \$1,250,000,000 for grants to the States for dislocated workers employment and training activities;
- \$200,000,000 for the dislocated worker assistance national reserve;
- \$400,000,000 for Wagner-Peyser activities; \$250,000,000 to support reemployment services for unemployment insurance (UI) claimants;
- \$50,000,000 for YouthBuild activities; and
- \$750,000,000 for a program of competitive grants for worker training and placement in high growth and emerging industry sectors.

US Department of Labor Recovery Website: <http://www.dol.gov/recovery/>

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**David Esquith, State Monitoring and Program Improvement Division Director, OSERS, Rehabilitation Services Administration, US Dept of Education**

ARRA funds administered by RSA include:

- \$540 million for Part B of Title I of the Rehabilitation Act;
- \$140 million for Parts B and C of Chapter 1 and 2 of Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act, including \$18.2 million for state grants, \$87.5 million for independent living centers, and \$34.3 for services for older blind individuals

RSA has developed principles to help guide the distribution of funds; these include:

- Recovery Act funds must be distributed quickly and recipients are urged to act rapidly in the distribution of these funds;
- Recovery Act funds must be used to improve program outcomes;
- Transparency, and accountability of the funds are important and program recipients must report publicly on how funds are being used including being subject to additional and more rigorous reporting; and
- When recipients invest their funding, they must be cognizant of the 'funding cliff'; that is, recipients of funding must not invest what is temporary funding in ways that are unsustainable in the long run.

Vocational rehabilitation funds must be used to improve program infrastructure including increasing the capacity to improve their Vocational Rehabilitation programs. In addition, funds can be and should be used to serve people on waiting lists so states should review their order of selection.

Unless otherwise specified in the ARRA, existing RSA rules apply to the use of stimulus funding; however, the matching requirement is waived. All other rules are the same. The fundamental rule is however you use your funds now under the Rehabilitation Act; you can use them that way under the ARRA.

RSA will issue fact sheets on the ARRA funds. They are also developing a series of Questions and Answers to be available on the US Dept of Education website. They will also hold a series of webinars to give participants an opportunity to share ideas. These will be available on the RSA website as well.

US Department of Education Recovery Web Site: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/index.html>

## **Katy Cashen, National Governor's Association**

What some states are doing to better position themselves to organize, plan, implement and better report on stimulus funds:

- Some states are designating ARRA 'Czars' to coordinate planning, implementation and reporting;
- Some states have created workforce and human services 'czars' to make sure dollars and efforts are being coordinated, blended and not duplicative; and
- Some states are creating public websites to provide the public information, share ideas and solicit program ideas.

Ideas on ways that states are jump starting their efforts include:

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- Looking at adding stimulus funding to existing contracts (to get funding out the door quicker and to overcome procurement barriers);
- Also looking at using waivers to promote and enhance system change efforts; and
- Considering staff and system capacity issues. Strategies may include rehiring staff who have left employment in the workforce system or bringing on temporary staff as a way to quickly increase the capacity of the state/local system to meet demands.

Key to states' efforts will be sharing best practices.

## Comments and Ideas from Audio Conference Participants:

**Connecticut** workforce officials are using this occasion to create and facilitate partnerships (new and old) to get bigger and better ideas. Examples included seeking expert professional advice, bringing in some 'great minds' and thinking in new ways to be in a better position for the competitive grants. CT officials are also looking to focus stimulus dollar activities on three underserved populations -- people with disabilities, ex-offenders and victims of domestic violence.

**Florida** vocational rehabilitation officials are under an order of selection so will use ARRA funds to serve the waiting list. FL is looking to try to hire laid off vendor/provider agency employees to help work to get people off of the waiting list. They are also seeing this as an opportunity to engage in some creating thinking about job placement such as paying wages in an on-the-job training arrangement to jump start employment efforts.

**New Jersey** vocational rehabilitation officials are looking to stimulate employment through the use of paid internships or subsidizing the first month of employment, especially among college graduates with disabilities. NJ may also use stimulus dollars to fund one stop Disability Program Navigators and expand some of their small business initiatives.

**Chicago's disabilityworks** is working to place students (high school, college) in internships with IT employers.

**District of Columbia** disability services and vocational rehabilitation officials are meeting with public school officials to explore opportunities to leverage additional VR dollars for transitioning youth. Officials are also partnering with the workforce development agency to think about options for funding apprenticeships and internships.