
NTAR Leadership Center

Solicitation Guidelines

State Leaders Innovation Institute to Expand Employment for Adults with Disabilities

- Solicitation Release Date:** January 28, 2008
- Information Teleconference:** February 11, 2008 (2:00-3:00 p.m. Eastern Time)
- Proposal Due Date:** March 31, 2008 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time)
- Selection Announcement:** April 14, 2008
- Funding:** Three selected states will be eligible for:
- Up to \$50,000 per state for project implementation;
 - Travel, food, and lodging expenses for up to 10 state team members to attend NTAR Leadership Center events; and
 - Flexible, ongoing technical assistance and coaching throughout the project lifespan.
- Period of Performance:** April 2008-July 2009

About the NTAR Leadership Center¹

Established by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, the National Technical Assistance and Research Center to Promote Leadership for Increasing the Employment and Economic Independence of Adults with Disabilities (NTAR Leadership Center) is located in the **John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, at Rutgers The State University of New Jersey**, an organization whose mission is strengthening the nation's workforce and building workforce and economic development partnerships. The NTAR Leadership Center is operated through a consortium of partners including:

- The American Public Human Services Association, Center for Workers with Disabilities, Washington, DC;
- National Leadership Consortium on Developmental Disabilities, University of Delaware, Newark, DE;
- Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities at The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ;
- The Community Solutions Group, LLC, Alexandria, VA; and
- The Program for Disability Research, School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ.

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BACKGROUND

Seventeen years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, substantial research and successful demonstration projects have shown that people with all types and levels of disabilities can successfully work in competitive situations. To date, in spite of multiple government efforts and compelling reasons for hiring people with disabilities, backed up by this research and best practices, people with disabilities remain disproportionately out of the workforce. According to Census Bureau data, only 38% of Americans with disabilities aged 21-64 were employed in 2005, compared to 78% of Americans without disabilities.²

Several demographic and workforce trends — including the aging of the workforce — now reinforce the need for states, employers, economic development and workforce systems to partner on devising strategies to improve employment outcomes for adults with disabilities. More than ever, America's economy needs people with disabilities to work in the mainstream environment of businesses large and small.

Since 2001, the U.S. Department of Labor's (USDOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) has supported multiple demonstration initiatives that have resulted in the following lessons learned:

- Increasing employment and economic self-sufficiency for adults with disabilities requires meaningful partnerships and collaboration across workforce development and disability-specific systems, as well as the buy-in of key leaders and policymakers;
- Blending and braiding resources across generic and disability-specific systems can enable the workforce system to respond to the varying needs of job seekers with disabilities and increase opportunities for client self-direction;
- The use of universal design as a framework for organization and implementation of services benefits people with disabilities as well as other job seekers with barriers to employment;
- Economic self-sufficiency for workers with disabilities is created not just by the earning of wages but also by leveraging existing tax incentives, financial education, work incentives, and other strategies; and
- The use of customized employment strategies and other forms of flexible work options can result in integrated, competitive employment for individuals with disabilities as well as other individuals with barriers to employment.³

At the same time, a number of states have explored strategies to increase the effectiveness of their workforce and talent development systems by connecting workforce policies to economic development goals, making these systems more demand-driven and responsive to employers. In simple terms, a demand-driven workforce development system builds in processes for identifying and responding to employer needs. This requires engaging employers as partners in planning and implementing workforce and economic development strategies and allows for

² Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics. *2005 Disability Status Report*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2006.

³ For more information on these and other ODEP demonstration projects, please visit <http://www.dol.gov/odep/>.

ongoing communication and feedback. Demand-driven systems reflect the region's industry and occupational needs and may take the form of sector-based strategies. Using this information, demand-driven systems strive to help individuals acquire the skills they need to get and hold a job.

The NTAR Leadership Center, with support from USDOL ODEP, is seeking three states, dedicated to building on these lessons learned and on other successful models, to become the nation's leaders in developing and implementing strategies for increasing employment for adults with disabilities. The Center has a particular interest in states willing to connect disability employment strategies to demand-driven state economic growth policies.

SUMMARY AND PURPOSE OF SOLICITATION

The NTAR Leadership Center invites state and local teams representing the Governor's office, the employer community, economic development, workforce development, and adults with disabilities to apply for a 15-month *State Leaders Innovation Institute*.

The three states selected through this competitive solicitation will commit to:

- Attending Innovation Institute state team events;
- Developing and implementing a strategy that ties increasing employment opportunities for adults with disabilities to economic development, economic growth and/or sector strategies, and that emphasizes bridging the gap between generic and disability-specific workforce development; and
- Conducting planning and preliminary implementation of one or two local/regional pilot efforts reflecting the strategy.

Each selected state will receive:

- A discretionary grant of up to \$50,000 per state for project implementation;
- Travel, food, and lodging expenses for up to 10 state team members to attend two (2) Innovation Institute events; and
- Flexible technical assistance and coaching throughout the project lifespan.

With support from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, the **NTAR Leadership Center *State Leaders Innovation Institute*** is designed to help states improve economic and employment opportunities for adults with disabilities. The Innovation Institute will provide support for state leadership teams and encourage innovation, creativity, and the development of sustainable partnerships among the states' workforce development, economic development, disability programs and agencies, and employers. The Innovation Institute will accomplish this by offering customized and flexible training and coaching to support state and local leaders. It will also offer opportunities for peer learning, on-site technical assistance, and targeted information and research to states.

The NTAR Leadership Center will select three state teams under this competitive solicitation and provide them with access to nationally respected experts who will deliver intensive and customized training and technical assistance over the course of a 15-month period. The NTAR Leadership Center project will devote its resources to assisting the three Innovation Institute states to become the nation's leading examples for pioneering models to promote employment for adults with disabilities by enhancing partnerships with statewide workforce development and economic development efforts as well as linking and leveraging expertise across relevant generic and disability specific systems. Toward that end, the NTAR Leadership Center will provide assistance geared to specific state challenges and conduct as-needed, quick turnaround research to support inventive approaches to resolving issues that arise during the experience.

INNOVATION INSTITUTE BENEFITS TO STATES

Innovation Institute State Team Meeting and Training Events

For the three states that are selected, the Innovation Institute will provide opportunities for state and local team members to step outside of their day-to-day work roles to facilitate refreshed thinking and problem-solving around adult disability employment issues. Innovation Institute events include:

- One-day **on-site orientation** by a team of NTAR Leadership Center faculty, with an emphasis on initial state planning and goal setting (April-May 2008);
- Participation in a 2.5-day **teambuilding and strategy development session** to exchange ideas and share experiences with national experts, state and local peers, employers, and key federal partners to be held at Rutgers University (mid-June 2008); and
- Participation in a two-day **Peer Network Leaders Training** at the University of Delaware (early 2009).

The NTAR Leadership Center will directly cover the costs of transportation, food, and lodging for up to ten (10) individuals per state for participation in the State Team Meetings to take place at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and the Peer Network Leaders Training to take place at the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware. The NTAR Leadership Center will also cover the costs associated with the on-site orientation.

NTAR Leadership Center Innovation Institute Customized Technical Assistance

To support new approaches and reinforce ongoing state efforts to increase employment opportunities for adults with disabilities, pilot states will be able to select from a menu of technical assistance, research, and consultancy options on such topics as:

- Techniques for increasing partnerships and collaboration across systems;
- Creative methods for improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities including tapping into sector strategies for high-growth industries;
- Customized employment;
- Strategies for entrepreneurship, self employment, and asset building; and
- Training on sustaining these efforts for the long-run.

The three selected states will be provided:

- Ongoing access to national experts in the workforce development, economic development, asset development, and related disability and employment fields;
- Customized, on-site intensive coaching and technical assistance from NTAR Leadership Center faculty and consultants, including support for frontline staff and mid-level state and local managers implementing specific disability employment initiatives;
- On-demand, short turnaround information and research in key workforce, economic development, and disability areas of unique interest and need to the state;
- Evaluation assistance and documentation of targeted state strategies and local pilot efforts, with the ultimate goal of developing models that can be replicated in other regions and states; and
- Participation in an NTAR Leadership Center Peer Learning Network and other continuous learning opportunities that will help to further position the state as an innovator and model for leadership in the area of disability and employment.

Training, technical assistance, and research will be provided to the Innovation Institute states at no cost.

NTAR Leadership Center Pilot State Discretionary Grants

Each selected state will be eligible for a discretionary grant of up to \$50,000 to be used to support the implementation of state and local innovations tied to the state's strategic plan developed under this initiative, and to defer other costs associated with participating in Innovation Institute activities.

SOLICITATION PROCESS

State Team Composition and Participation

The NTAR Leadership Center requests that states identify core team members who will participate in Innovation Institute activities. Core team members should have a commitment to:

- Increasing employment for people with disabilities by developing and implementing innovative demand-side approaches tied to state sector, economic growth, and development efforts;
- Implementing new strategies that seek to improve the economic wellbeing of adults with disabilities, perhaps within the context of broader economic participation efforts for older workers, veterans, welfare recipients, and low-income adults and youth; and
- Testing leading-edge universal and customized approaches for the organization and delivery of state workforce policy that improves connections to training and work for all job seekers including (but not limited to) people with disabilities.

Core team members should include people who have the knowledge and authority necessary to develop and implement state action plans to improve employment and economic outcomes for

adults with disabilities as part of this broader statewide workforce development-economic development strategy.

Each state should identify either the entire state or 1-2 local regions or communities/cities that are prepared to plan and begin implementation of pilot activities connecting disability employment efforts to economic development and bridging the gap between generic and disability-specific systems.

State core teams should include a mix of state-level policymakers and local-level representatives from the pilot areas. **Teams *must* include individuals representing:**

- Workforce development system,
- Economic development,
- Disability employment,
- Private-sector businesses, and
- Adults with disabilities.

***Potential* core team members could include:**

- A representative from the Governor's office, such as a senior policy advisor in the workforce development or economic development area;
- A representative from an employer association in the state and/or employer from a key economic growth sector and/or organization representing private-sector human resource management interests;
- Officials from relevant state agencies including labor or workforce development, state workforce investment board, economic development or commerce, health, Medicaid, human services, vocational rehabilitation, mental health, mental retardation and developmental disabilities;
- A state, regional, and/or local representative(s) from relevant significant federal systems change grant programs operating in the state (e.g., U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Innovations in Regional Economic Development [WIRED], Medicaid Infrastructure Grants, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration);
- A representative from a community organization representing interests in the disability employment area and that has demonstrated success in facilitating integrated, competitive employment options;
- A representative from one or more One-Stop Career Centers;
- A representative from state or local SBDC or Micro-enterprise council promoting self employment;
- A representative from key economic development-workforce development efforts such as community colleges, governor's economic advisory councils and/or commissions, key industry-based sector advisory groups, or institutions of higher education;
- Representatives of the state legislature;
- Officials from other relevant state agencies such as those representing aging, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, small business development, veteran's affairs, etc.;
- Other community-based organizations involved in the provision of employment-related services, including community development agencies, transportation, nonprofit benefits and financial planning institutions, healthcare;

- Other key stakeholders and thought leaders in the state that can influence change and support systems change efforts (e.g., influential community-based agencies and advocates; organizations representing disability, aging, or veterans; other employer associations or organizations representing human resource or workforce diversity and workplace flexibility interests); and
- A representative from Special Education school-to-work transition programs.

The NTAR Leadership Center expects core team members to be consistent throughout the project's lifetime. The continued involvement and commitment of core team members is crucial to the success of the *State Leaders Innovation Institute* in bringing about change at the state and local level. States should also identify individuals and groups that will support and implement the work in the states and who will be invited to attend in-state activities and site visits. It is expected that state core and extended team members will participate actively in the development and implementation of action plans.

Each state must designate a team leader from the workforce development, labor, economic development, or employer communities who will be responsible for coordinating the state team, organizing and managing the state's project activities, and coordinating with the NTAR Leadership Center.

Expected Outcomes from the State Leadership Teams

The three selected states will be responsible for bringing together teams to:

- Develop cross-systems strategies that build on existing state systems change efforts and disability-employment strategic plans. These actions should look to further enhance the prospects for employment for adults with disabilities by seeking to:
 - Integrate disability employment policy and practices into the state's economic development, economic growth, or targeted sector strategies;
 - Develop and implement innovative demand-side approaches to increasing the employment of people with disabilities, focusing on understanding and meeting the needs, concerns, and culture of employers;
 - Implement strategies that improve the economic wellbeing of adults with disabilities including older workers, veterans, welfare recipients, and others; and
 - Establish leading-edge universal and customized approaches for the organization and delivery of state workforce policy that improves connections to training and work for all job seekers including (but not limited to) people with disabilities.
- Implement one or several of the strategic actions either statewide or in 1-2 designated pilot areas, focusing on one or more of the five goals ODEP has established for the NTAR Leadership Center. The goals are:

1. Increasing partnership and collaboration among and across generic and disability-specific systems that provide employment or employment-support services, which should produce more effective and efficient services through leveraging resources and funding across multiple systems;
 2. Increasing use of self-direction in service and integration of funding among and across cross-generic and disability-specific systems, including the blending and braiding of resources and funding across systems and programs, and the use of self-directed accounts providing choice and control to the individual job seeker;
 3. Increasing economic self-sufficiency through leveraging relevant generic and disability-specific tax incentives, financial education, social security work incentives, benefits planning, and other strategies for enhancing profitable employment resulting in the ability of people with disabilities to accrue assets and resources through employment;
 4. Increasing the use of universal design as the framework for the organization of employment policy and the implementation of employment services; and
 5. Increasing the use of customized and other forms of flexible work options for individuals with disabilities and others with complex barriers to employment.
- Participate in the documentation, evaluation, and dissemination of these processes and models; and
 - Participate in an information-sharing NTAR Leadership Center State Peer Learning Network.

Role of NTAR Leadership Center Faculty

Each state will be assigned a dedicated NTAR Leadership Center team member as a single point of contact for communication as well as technical assistance and research requests. This “conciierge” will provide ongoing coaching, customized support, consultation, communication, and feedback and work closely with each state to:

- Define goals and priorities to be accomplished by the state teams during Innovation Institute participation,
- Define state metrics for success,
- Develop a strategic framework for achieving outcomes,
- Outline resources necessary for success, and
- Provide a final report, including lessons learned and a roadmap for sustainability.

State Selection Criteria

The NTAR Leadership Center is seeking states that:

- Demonstrate an interest in being leaders and a commitment to sharing information as they develop and implement policy changes to improve prospects for employment and economic self-sufficiency for adults with disabilities within the context of the state’s generic workforce development system and state economic growth strategies;

- Have had experience implementing workforce development projects emphasizing the integration of employment and economic development initiatives, sector strategies, career pathways, U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Innovations in Regional Economic Development (WIRED), older worker and workplace flexibility initiatives, and others;
- Have had experience with recent federally sponsored disability employment initiatives such as those sponsored by: Medicaid (including Medicaid Infrastructure Grants), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Social Security, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (including customized employment), U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (including Disability Program Navigators), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education; and
- Demonstrate an interest in developing and implementing targeted strategies based on the five ODEP goals areas established for the NTAR Leadership Center (see pages 7-8).

POST-AWARD SCHEDULE

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| Selection Announcement | April 14, 2008 |
| One-Day On-site Orientations | April 28-May 31, 2008 |
| Teambuilding and Strategy Development Session at Rutgers University (2.5 days) | June 16-18, 2008 |
| State Strategic Action and Budget Plan | Mid-September 2008 |
| Peer Network Leadership Training at University of Delaware | Early 2009 |
| Project Conclusion | July 2009 |
| Final State Reports | August 2009 |

COMPETITIVE SELECTION PROCESS: APPLICATION GUIDELINES

The NTAR Leadership Center will select three state teams to participate in the Innovation Institute. Each state may submit only one application. In evaluating proposals, the NTAR Leadership Center will look for:

- Evidence that state teams include members in a position to influence state policy changes, and
- Evidence of likely continuity of governance and leadership or indications of how projects will be sustained if changes are expected.

The NTAR Leadership Center will hold an information teleconference on February 11, 2008 at 2:00 p.m. (Eastern Time). Please email Maria Heidkamp at Heidkamp@rci.rutgers.edu to register.

The NTAR Leadership Center is asking interested states to submit a proposal including:

- A cover letter from the Governor that identifies a team leader and lead agency representing labor and workforce development, economic development, or the employer community;
- A list of confirmed state and local team members including employers, as well as organizations and individuals that may participate as potential expanded team members.
- Each state should indicate two preferred dates between April 28 and May 31, 2008 that work for all core team members for the initial one-day in-state orientation and goal-setting meeting.
- A 7-10 page (single-spaced) narrative that addresses each of the following topics:
 1. Why is the state interested in participating in the State Leaders Innovation Institute to Expand Employment Opportunities for Adults with Disabilities? What key problems will the state address during the process? How can you demonstrate the state's readiness for change? What makes your state a potential leader in the field? *(15 points)*
 2. How will the state strive to accomplish the NTAR Leadership Center goal of tying employment opportunities for adults with disabilities to broader economic development, economic growth, and/or sector strategies? Please indicate if the state has been involved in recent initiatives to integrate workforce and economic development (i.e., sector strategies, USDOL WIRED, career pathways for high-growth industries, etc.). If so, what opportunities do you see for coordination with and building on these initiatives in ways that might ultimately improve employment outcomes for adults with disabilities? *(30 points)*
 3. What strategies will the state use to bridge the gap between generic and disability-specific workforce development? Please indicate if the state has been involved in recent initiatives to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including Medicaid Infrastructure Grants, Disability Navigators, ODEP Customized Employment, and others. If so, what lessons have you learned from these initiatives? How might you translate these lessons into broader strategies and policies? *(30 points)*
 4. Please identify the entire state, or 1-2 local areas/regions where you propose to start implementation of pieces of the strategic action plan you will develop during the Innovation Institute process. Please explain how your projects will reflect one or more of the five goals listed on pages 7-8. *(10 points)*

5. Please outline how you expect to use and benefit from NTAR Leadership Center technical assistance, coaching, facilitation, research, peer networking, and financial resources. What best practices have you developed that you will build on, refine, or expand with customized assistance? What challenges have you faced in previous efforts to improve employment opportunities for adults with disabilities that you might resolve in part through working with the NTAR Leadership Center? Please identify specific subject areas in which you envision you might request assistance. *(15 points)*

Selection Criteria Total: 100 points

Applications are due to the NTAR Leadership Center by 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time), March 31, 2008.

Please submit proposals electronically via email to Maria Heidkamp at Heidkamp@rci.rutgers.edu.

Hard copy proposals will also be accepted and should be mailed to:

Maria Heidkamp
NTAR Leadership Center
c/o John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
30 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Questions about the proposal should be directed to Maria Heidkamp at (732) 932-4100, ext. 6313, or to Heidkamp@rci.rutgers.edu.

The NTAR Leadership Center will select and notify states by April 14, 2008.

APPENDIX

For additional information on the NTAR Leadership Center, please visit the NTAR Leadership Center Website at: www.ntarcenter.org

For information on recent initiatives of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, please visit ODEP at <http://www.dol.gov/odep/>