

Northeast Iowa PY20 WIOA Annual Report Narrative

Executive Summary

Program Year 2020 was certainly a year of changes in Northeast Iowa. PY20 began with the convening of 20 Chief Elected Officials (CEOs) to tackle the tasks to develop a new Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) to meet Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) compliance. The former Regions 1, 2, and 7 were merged to form the Northeast Iowa LWDA.

Although the largest of the 9 LWDAs in Iowa, the CEOs worked closely to ensure equal representation of the counties was maintained, in both the CEO leadership and the selection of the local board members. After developing a shared liability agreement, bylaws for the local board, and the selection of the new fiscal agent, the Northeast Iowa Workforce Development Board (NEIWDB) was established. The NEIWDB immediately began the competitive selection process to establish the provision of Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth services for the local area.

Goodwill Industries of Northeast Iowa was selected as the Title I provider and began providing services in early 2021. At the end of PY20, the State Public Policy Group (SPPG) won the formal bid to serve as the One-Stop Operator beginning in PY21. The Central Iowa Juvenile Detention Center (CIJDC) was selected by the CEOs to serve as the fiscal agent for Title I funds.

Throughout PY20, the CEOs and NEIWDB met virtually to continue the work to reach full compliance. A few of the accomplishments made beyond the procurement of key services, included board certification, state monitoring, the execution of the Memorandum of Understanding and the development of draft language for the new Local Plan. The Northeast Iowa LWDA also partnered with several other LWDAs to provide a statewide professional development event for members of the local workforce development boards.

While the CEOs and NEIWDB worked to establish compliance and create a foundation to support the needs of the local area, workforce partners were faced with providing much needed services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Existing partners ensured services continued, including Title I programs, as Goodwill Industries of Northeast Iowa came on board. The changes of PY20 brought on many challenges, but this new local area experiences many successes.

Local Workforce Development Area System

The Northeast Iowa Local Workforce Development Area consists of Allamakee, Black Hawk, Bremer, Buchanan, Butler, Cerro Gordo, Chickasaw, Clayton, Delaware, Dubuque, Fayette,

Floyd, Franklin, Grundy, Hancock, Howard, Mitchell, Winnebago, Winneshiek, and Worth counties.

The Northeast Iowa Local Workforce Development Area is made up of three comprehensive centers and one affiliate center. The Iowa**WORKS** comprehensive centers are located in Mason City, Waterloo, and Dubuque. The affiliate center is in Decorah. Northeast Iowa also maintains a presence in Postville to provide Title I services. Title I, III and IV are co-located at the Mason City, Waterloo, and Decorah locations. Title II is not currently co-located; however, they do have a presence in these three centers. Titles I and III are co-located in Dubuque. Title II and IV have a presence at this location.

LWDA Strategic Objectives

Northeast Iowa LWDA Strategic Objectives:

- The Area's employers will have access to advanced, skilled, diverse, and Future Ready workers.
- All Iowans in the Area will be provided access to a continuum of high-quality education, training, and career opportunities.
- The Area's one-stop delivery system will align all programs and services in an accessible, seamless, and integrated manner.

COVID-19 Pandemic Response

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WIOA partner programs in the Northeast Iowa LWDA made accommodations to ensure high-quality, integrated service delivery for job seekers and employers was continued, but also to adjust for a surge in pandemic-related employment and training needs.

Iowa**WORKS** centers were closed to in-person services for the majority of the program year with the exception of about 6 weeks in the fall of 2020 and then when office reopened to provide limited in-person services starting in May 2021. PROMISE JOBS participants had services available, but were not required to complete participation hours due to the pandemic. Job seeker services were available to participants remotely via Title I staff. Business services were also made available virtually or over the phone toward the end of the program year. A few targeted workshops were adapted or created for virtual delivery starting September 8, 2020 with a full slate of workshops which started in June 2021.

Sector Strategies

During PY20, the Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker team, in coordination with Title III and other WIOA partner programs, responded to the hiring needs of in-demand sectors, including healthcare, information technology, and advanced manufacturing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Training and education programs in these targeted demand sectors were funded with the aim of providing a skilled pool of work-ready candidates to employers in these sectors.

Business Services & Employer Engagement

With services such as talent recruitment and retention assistance, labor market information, accessing untapped labor pools and employee up-skilling; the Title III team ensured effective, demand-driven products and services were provided to employers during PY20. By creating and maintaining relationships, this team was able to provide targeted workforce information and solutions throughout the Local Area.

A collaborative Business Services Team was established, bringing together business services and placement specialists representing all the Core Partner programs. The purpose of this team was to align outreach and communication efforts with local employers. Unfortunately, the Business Services Team meetings were halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the workforce system realignment, and the addition of the new service provider.

The obstacles of PY20 provided the opportunity to be creative when it came to employer outreach and engagement. The partners held a virtual job fair using the Brazen platform in May 2020 for about 30 employers in the area. This LWDA was recognized for strong employer and job seeker registration and participation compared to other virtual events that had been held around the state. The LWDA also held an outdoor career fair in each Iowa **WORKS** community in June 2020. This was the first in-person event for offices in over a year and employers were thankful for the opportunity. Many of them considered it a successful event based on survey feedback.

Program Highlights & Innovation

Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, & Youth

Title I staff routinely reached out to all local schools in Northeast Iowa during PY20 to provide information regarding services available in hopes of fostering linkages and increasing referrals for youth and young adults in need of Title I services. Several school counselors continued to reach out to request more information and make referrals for at-risk youth.

Rapid Response

In PY20, six employers were served by Rapid Response services.

Virtual Worker Information Meetings (WIMs) were put together in collaboration with the businesses along with mailing or emailing necessary paperwork. The meetings were held at various times to accommodate the schedules of affected employees. Trade participation and informational meetings were also held virtually for businesses who qualified for trade programming.

Registered Apprenticeship, OJT, OST, WEPs

Title I was able to provide funding for a six-week summer Work Experience Program (WEP) at Swiss Valley Nature Preserve in Dubuque County (June 21-July 30). Each year, eight high school age or recent high school graduates from the local Special Education Programs in Dubuque are

invited to apply for an opportunity to participate in the program. In addition to learning basic work skills that will help them maintain employment in the future, participants in this program also participate in education days where they have learned about a nature related topic (plant safety, fish stocking, etc.) and job-related topics (resume writing, interview skills).

Offender Re-Entry

Goodwill Industries of Northeast Iowa developed a committee in May 2021 devoted to providing supportive services to individuals coming out of jail and prison with a focus on connecting individuals to training, increasing employability, and connecting them with the resources needed to obtain and maintain permanent employment. Title 1 and partner programs, Title 3 and Vocational Rehabilitation are involved in planning efforts as active members of this committee. Currently the committee is focused in the Dubuque area, but plans to expand throughout the Northeast Iowa LWDA in the next year. The committee has grown to include a wide range of community partners focusing on all aspects of successful re-entry supports including; Dubuque County Jail, Sherriff's Department, Prison Ministry, NICC, Housing Authority, public transportation, Fountain of Youth.

Serving Job Seekers with Disabilities

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) staff is co-located or has a presence in each of the Iowa**WORKS** Centers in the Local Area (Dubuque, Decorah, Mason City, Waterloo), and has worked hard toward having a completely accessible facility. In addition, customers accessing Wagner-Peyser or Title I services that attest to having a disability or barrier to employment were referred to IVRS as appropriate.

Veteran Services

Veteran's utilizing Iowa**WORKS** services receive priority regarding service access, intensive Case Management and have a dedicated employment specialist called a Local Veteran Employment Representative (LVER) to facilitate connections and placement with employers who are veteran-focused. In addition, these activities are supported through ongoing training to Iowa**WORKS** staff and partners on the importance and the legislation related to Priority of Service.

During the pandemic as team members were assisting with the ACD Customer Service Unemployment call center, if a veteran was on the call, staff thanked them for their service and reached out to the Iowa**WORKS** office closest to the claimant. The Iowa**WORKS** office then followed up with the veteran to see if there were any other services needed during this time.

Implementation of Priority of Service

The pandemic and related challenges did not affect the local partners commitment to priority of service, when providing limited in-person services, staff ensured that they kept track of veteran status so when customers had to wait for the next available computer or staff member,

staff was able to ensure that veterans were being served in accordance with the veteran's priority of service policy.

Participant Success Story

Army Veteran "Chrystal," in conjunction with IWD, ECIA/WIOA, IVRS and NEI3A, has participated in several teleconferences to provide guidance on her path of upskilling, en-route to a job as an administrative assistant. Veteran services has been working on her typing speed, completing the CareerScope assessment and making preparations to get a Basic Computer Certification from NICC in October.

Annual Performance Analysis

A total of 232 participants were served by Title I programs in PY20. A total of 1,424 participants received Title III services in PY20.