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An Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers

Key Institutional Features of American Job Centers

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Conducted on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor, the Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers (AJCs) study team visited 40 comprehensive AJCs in 2016 to document key characteristics and features of AJCs. Data were collected when the workforce system, particularly at the local level, was still in the early stages of implementing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Thus, the study provides a useful picture of the AJC system during the early days of WIOA. The findings offer insights into the changes and potential challenges WIOA raises for the existing AJC service delivery system in its efforts to fully implement WIOA and achieve its vision of an integrated workforce system.

American Job Centers (AJCs) are the cornerstone of the nation's system for delivering public workforce services, providing "one-stop" resources for millions of Americans seeking employment information and access to employment, work-related training, and education. Created by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and continued under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014, AJCs bring together key workforce, education, and other partners with the goal of providing comprehensive services to individuals searching for jobs and seeking to build their skills, and to employers looking for skilled workers to fill their job openings. Building upon the efforts under WIA, WIOA reaffirms the role of this customer-focused AJC service delivery system and encourages greater collaboration and coordination across a wide range of partner programs to achieve an integrated service delivery system for job seekers and employers.

The AJC service delivery system is made up of about 2,500 comprehensive and affiliate centers, as well as virtual access points. At a minimum, each local workforce area ("local area") and its policymaking body, the local board, must establish at least one comprehensive AJC—a physical location where job seekers and employers can access the programs, services, and activities of all required partner programs. Both Federal Acts, WIA and now WIOA, require certain programs and agencies to support and deliver AJC services and allow additional partners to participate. In particular, WIOA requires closer coordination between a core set of programs that are funded by different Federal agencies: WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth (Title I); Adult Basic Education and Literacy (ABE) (Title II); Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) (Title III); and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) (Title IV). In addition to these programs, WIOA requires 13 partner programs, and allows local areas to involve other programs as they see fit.

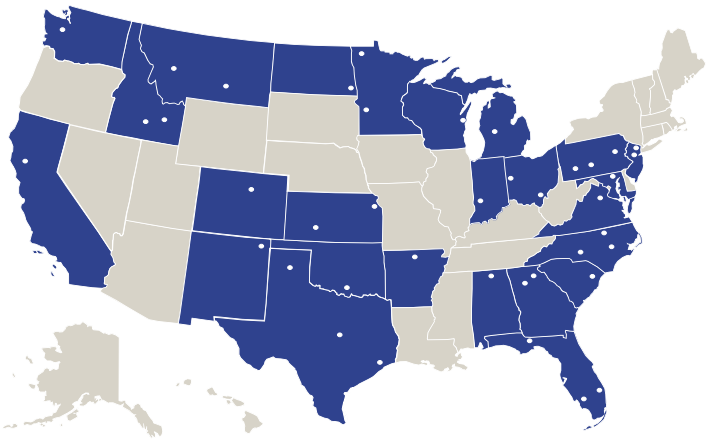
Although the AJC service delivery system operates under Federal law and rules, states and local boards, which have responsibility for implementing the AJC service delivery system, receive considerable latitude to translate and adapt the national vision for an integrated, customer-focused workforce system. This local-level discretion and flexibility, combined with the involvement of numerous partner programs and agencies, have resulted in a complex service delivery system that varies widely across states, local areas, and AJCs. This variation is reflected in the branding of AJCs. Historically, AJCs across the country, and even within a single state, have not shared consistent branding. To remedy this issue, the Department of Labor created The American Job Center Network as a unifying name and brand to identify a single national network of workforce services (see Branding box for more detail).[1]

This paper presents an overview of key institutional features of the AJC service delivery system across the country that shape day-to-day operations and customer experiences. To do this, we identify common patterns and variations in (1) administrative One-Stop Operator structure and AJC management, (2) AJC partner programs and staffing, (3) funding and resource sharing, (4) data systems and sharing, and (5) AJC services. Given the long standing goal to align the workforce system and the increased emphasis under WIOA to promote collaboration and seamless service delivery, our examination of these topics focuses on ways in which collaboration and coordination occurs, and challenges. This paper concludes with implications for WIOA implementation.

The findings are based primarily on site visits conducted from July to December 2016 to 40 comprehensive AJCs located in 25 states and 38 local areas (see study description box). Taken together, this analysis provides a picture of the AJC service delivery system at a time when the workforce system was in the early stages of transitioning from operating under the requirements of WIA to WIOA.

Study AJC Locations

Thirty-five AJCs were located in states with multiple local areas and five AJCs were located in single-area states (Idaho, Montana, and North Dakota).



Note: Visited states are shaded in blue. AJC locations are the white dots.

Urbanicity of study AJCs

The AJCs' locations included a mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities. The number of counties in the local areas in which the AJCs were located ranged from 1 to 65.

10 AJCs

In metro areas with 1 million people or more

8 AJCs

In metro areas with 250,000 to 1 million people

6 AJCs

In metro areas with fewer than 250,000 people

4 AJCs

In nonmetro areas with 20,000 or more people and adjacent to a metro area

12 AJCs

In rural areas with fewer than 20,000 people and not adjacent to a metro area

Branding

The Department of Labor first announced the American Job Center brand in June 2012, and strongly encouraged its use. WIOA requires each AJC service delivery system to adopt the AJC logo, or the tag line phrase "A proud partner of the American Job Center network" on all AJC materials by July 1, 2017. To encourage states and local areas to adopt the AJC branding, the Department of Labor in 2016 developed a branding toolkit for outreach materials, websites, and other communication.[2] As of the study's site visits, about half of the AJCs had added or planned to add the AJC logo to their signage, publications, and electronic resources, but also retain their state, local, or AJC-specific logo as the dominant brand.

27 state-branded AJCs

6 Local board-branded AJCs

4 One Stop Operator-branded AJCs

3 AJC-branded AJCs

At the majority of the AJCs (27 of 40), the state workforce agency dictated AJC branding requirements. In these states, the local AJCs had a consistent look to ensure that job seekers and employers would recognize an AJC across the state. For example, in Pennsylvania, all of the AJCs used the Pennsylvania CareerLink logos. In contrast, local boards, Operators, and the centers themselves in 13 AJCs controlled the branding. The branding styles for these AJCs differed from those of other AJCs in their state.

An Institutional Analysis of AJCs: Study background and design

To systematically document the institutional features of AJCs, Mathematica and its partners—Social Policy Research Associates, The George Washington University, and Capital Research Corporation—conducted the Institutional Analysis of AJCs for the U.S. Department of Labor. For this study, the team selected 40 comprehensive AJCs located in 25 of the 48 continental states, using an approach that purposively selected centers to ensure that they varied in geographic location and urbanicity. The sample also included a mix of administrative structures represented by different types of One-Stop Operators. Thus, study findings apply only to the 40 comprehensive study AJCs and cannot be generalized to the nation's approximately 2,500 comprehensive and affiliate centers operating when the study AJC sample was selected in 2015.

From July through December 2016, the study team conducted, on average, a three-day visit to each selected AJC to collect information on and identify key variations in the AJC service delivery system, organizational structure, and administration. On most visits, team members interviewed the local board administrators, Operator entity staff, the AJC manager, AJC partner managers, and frontline staff providing services to AJC job seekers and employers. Across the study team, site visitors interviewed over 725 individuals at the 40 study AJCs, usually on an individual basis but sometimes in small groups.

In addition to interviews, the study team conducted structured observations of each AJC's layout and operations. Site visitors used observation worksheets to collect information on topics such as: the location of the AJC (for example, in a mall, a stand-alone building, or a suite in an office building); the signage for the AJC; the layout and customer flow of the AJC; and where the resource room and various partners were located. Prior to site visits, study team members also requested documentation related to AJC operations, partnerships, services, and finances from local boards and AJC managers. Documents requested included consortia agreements, memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with partner programs, resource sharing agreements, operating budgets, Operator agreements, and documentation related to service delivery.

The study team analyzed the information collected from all sources to describe the primary institutional features of the AJCs and identify common patterns and key variations in AJC organization, administration and service delivery. The team's analysis included the following three steps: (1) organize the qualitative data from site visits; (2) use the secondary data to identify partners, policies, and procedures, including resource sharing; and (3) identify themes in the data within and across AJCs.[3] This paper is one of four resulting from the study.

Other papers in the Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers series include:

- One-Stop Operators of the AJC System;
- Resource Sharing Practices Among AJCs; and
- AJC Service Delivery in Rural Areas.

These papers and a study summary are available at https://wdr.doleta.gov/research/keyword.cfm.

SECTION NOTES

[1] U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. "Advisory: Training and Employment Guidance Letter, WIOA No. 16-16." January 18, 2017. Available at https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?DOCN=8772.

[2] American Job Center — Graphics Style Guide for Partners. Available at https://www.dol.gov/ajc/.

[3] Site visit data was organized using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. The study team coded the files by topic and site to conduct the analysis.

I. ADMINISTRATIVE ONE-STOP OPERATOR STRUCTURE AND AJC MANAGEMENT

To coordinate service delivery across the AJC partner programs and service providers, local boards select an entity or consortium of entities to serve as the One-Stop Operator for one or more AJCs in their local area. Local boards can also specify other roles for Operators, such as managing the day-to-day operations of their AJCs, providing services, or coordinating services across several AJCs in their local areas. This section describes the role of One-Stop Operators within the AJC service delivery system, including the types of organizations that served in this function among the AJCs, the processes through which they were selected, and their management structure. In addition, it discusses some changes related to the One-Stop Operator selection underway due to WIOA. This section is adapted from a more in-depth paper from this study on One-Stop Operators.[1]

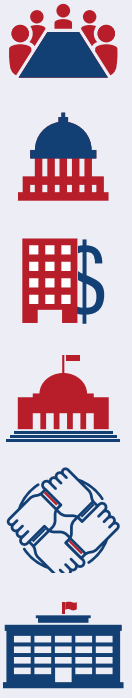
Types of One-Stop Operators

Under both WIA and WIOA, One-Stop Operators can be a single organization or a consortium of three or more required AJC partner programs. Single entities may be postsecondary educational institutions; government agencies, including Employment Service (ES) agencies; private for-profit entities; private nonprofit organizations, including community-based organizations; local workforce boards; or other interested organizations or entities. WIOA further clarifies that workforce intermediaries, local chambers of commerce or other business organizations, and labor organizations can serve as Operators.[2]

Of the 40 AJCs in this study, three-quarters (30 of 40) of the One-Stop Operators were single entities. Among these single-entity Operators, one-third (10) were local boards or the workforce board's administrative entity, and about one-third (9) were state ES agencies (Figure I.1).[3]

The 10 consortium One-Stop Operators each included three to seven organizations. The mix of organizations in these consortia varied, but the majority included the state government agency that oversaw the bulk of government-administered labor-related programs, and four consortia included the local board as a member.

Figure I.1. Number of AJCs with single-entity Operators, by organization type



10 AJCs with local board Operators

9 AJCs with state ES agency Operators

5 AJCs with private for-profit entity Operators

4 AJCs with local government Operators

1 AJC with private nonprofit entity Operator

1 AJC with educational institution Operator

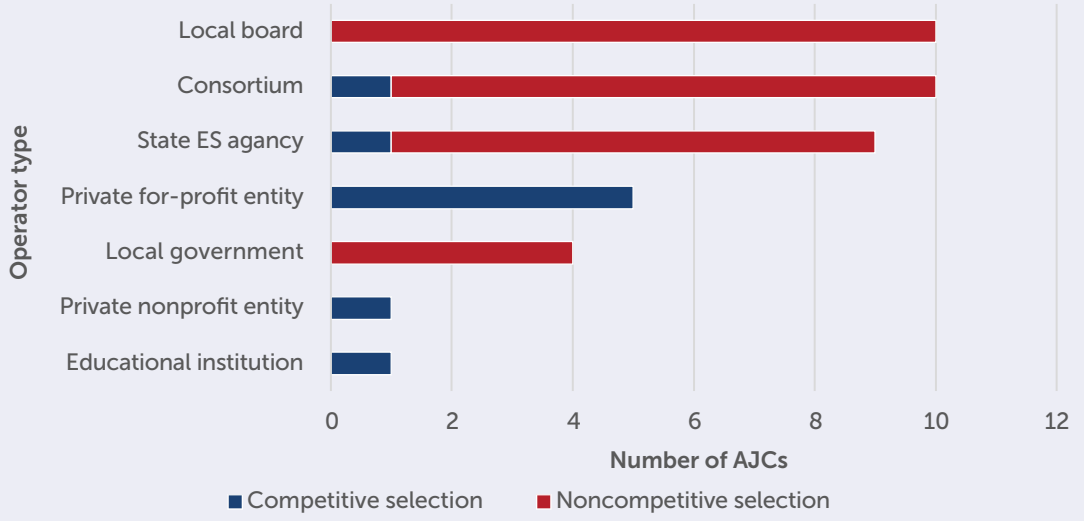
Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.
Note: N = 30 study AJCs with single-entity One-Stop Operators.

Operator selection process

Although WIA encouraged local boards to select Operators through a competitive process, it also permitted them to select their Operator in other ways. In contrast, WIOA mandates that all Operators are selected through a competitive process, effective July 1, 2017.[4] At the time of the site visits in the latter half of 2016, about one-quarter (9 AJCs) of the AJCs had Operators selected through a competitive process; the rest were selected noncompetitively under pre-WIOA rules.

All five of the private for-profit Operators were competitively selected. The remaining four competitively selected Operators were one consortium, a state ES agency, a private nonprofit entity, and an educational institution (Figure I.2). Because so few of the Operators had been selected competitively, most local boards were preparing to initiate new competitive contracting processes for the Operator role.[5]

Figure I.2. Use of a competitive selection process, by One-Stop Operator type



Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.
Note: N=40 AJCs

Management of AJC services by One-Stop Operators

Under the direction of local boards, Operators are required to coordinate the delivery of partner program services at their AJCs. Local boards can also specify other roles for Operators, such as managing the day-to-day operations of their AJCs, providing services, or coordinating services across several AJCs in their local areas.

Most One-Stop Operators (23 single-entity and 4 consortia) filled a dual role: (1) they coordinated services provided by partners through the AJC, and (2) they managed daily operations at their centers. At these AJCs, the Operator either directly employed a full-time AJC manager or, if the Operator was a consortium, provided joint oversight of an AJC manager employed by one consortium member.

Among the remaining 13 AJCs (7 single-entity and 6 consortia), One-Stop Operators delegated the role of AJC manager to an on-site supervisor employed by a partner organization or to a single organization in the consortium. The primary reason for delegating this role was that the Operator lacked the resources to support such a position.

Most Operators (35 of 40) also provided direct services at the AJCs, typically for the U.S. Department of Labor-funded Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and the Employment Service (ES) program. Serving in dual roles affected the role of the Operators in center operations in that the Operator oversaw key center functions such designing referral processes, leverage available resources, and managed the entire AJC.

SECTION NOTES

[1] Dunham, Kate and Deborah Kogan. "An Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers (AJCs): One-Stop Operators of the AJC System." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office, 2018.

[2] Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Joint Rule for Unified and Combined State Plans, Performance Accountability, and the One-Stop System Joint Provisions; Final Rule.

[3] The local board's administrative entity is the organization that employs staff who provide support to the local board. Five of the nine study AJCs where the state workforce agency had been designated as the One-Stop Operator were in "single-area states" These are states with only a single workforce area, for which the state workforce board acts as the policymaking body, and the state workforce agency is the designated One-Stop Operator for all comprehensive and affiliate AJCs in the state.

[4] Under certain conditions, single-area states may contract for an AJC operator using a sole-source contracting process, if allowed under state procurement procedures.

[5] Under WIOA, local boards must also re-issue a request for proposals at least once every four years to competitively select Operators. This change is intended to promote each Operator's efficiency and effectiveness by regularly examining performance and costs.

II. AJC PARTNER PROGRAMS AND STAFFING

The structure and strength of the AJC service delivery system depends heavily on the involvement of multiple programs and organizations, and the partnerships that exist between them. Variation in the mix, roles and co-location arrangements of partner programs can lead to important differences in how comprehensive AJCs are staffed and managed.

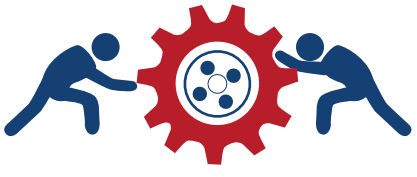
This section first describes the mix and co-location of partner programs. It then discusses the staffing structures including the size and common roles of staff at AJCs. It then examines staff management and supervision.

Mix and co-location of partner programs

WIA mandated more than a dozen specific programs to participate in the AJC service delivery system to facilitate job seekers' and employers' access to employment services. Underscoring the importance of an integrated workforce system, WIOA calls for even stronger partnerships between the workforce and education systems and establishes a core set of six partner programs in addition to other required programs (See Box II.1).[1]

Staff interviewed for this study were asked to identify the programs and/or organizations that they considered to be their AJC partners in practice, regardless of WIOA's designation of core and required partners. Staff at almost all AJCs reported strong and longstanding partnerships between Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and ES. Beyond these two DOL-funded programs, however, the extent to which other core and partner programs were identified by staff as their partners varied across AJCs.

No AJC listed all the core and required partner programs. On average, AJCs identified 7 of the 19 core and required partner programs; about one-quarter (9) indicated 5 or fewer of these partner programs. Overall, AJCs had an average of 10 partner programs with a full- or part-time regular presence. All AJCs also had non-required (optional) partners such as local nonprofits, mental health organizations, or child care. For example, one AJC had a partnership with a local public housing agency. Staff at this AJC reported that the community lacked affordable housing options and the housing agency was a critical partner to connect their customers to housing. Another AJC had a prisoner reentry program partner that provided services to the large ex-offender population in the community.



Box II.1. WIOA partner programs

WIOA Title core programs

- Title I: WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth
- Title II: Adult Basic Education and Literacy (ABE)
- Title III: Wagner-Peyser Employment Service (ES)
- Title IV: Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

WIOA required partners

- Department of Labor: Job Corps, YouthBuild, Indian and Native American programs, National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Unemployment Insurance (UI)[2], Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG), and Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO)
- Department of Education: Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education programs (CTE)
- Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): Employment and training programs
- Department of Health and Human Services: Community Services Block Grant employment and training programs and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF; newly added required partner under WIOA)

Other optional partners

- Like WIA, WIOA also encouraged AJCs to partner with other programs, including but not limited to:
- Social Security Administration: Ticket to Work
- Department of Agriculture: SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) and Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents
- Corporation for National and Community Service: AmeriCorps
- Other appropriate government or private sector programs, such as libraries and child care providers[3]

Co-location of partner programs

The co-location of multiple partner programs under a common roof is a defining service delivery design feature of comprehensive AJCs. Commonly viewed as a key mechanism for achieving seamless service delivery, co-location of services promotes the potential for sharing resources and can lead to increased communication between programs, improved access and delivery of services for customers, and the elimination of duplication of services.[4] At the same time, co-location does not guarantee greater collaboration or improved efficiency (see Box II.2). Other factors such as organizational cultures, philosophies, and goals of different programs also influence the extent to which coordination occurs, even when partners are located in the same space.[5]

WIA, and now WIOA, encourages the co-location of all required partner programs, if possible. However, the physical co-location of these program partners at the AJC is not mandatory (with the exception that WIOA requires the co-location of ES program services in AJCs). Therefore, the extent to which co-location occurs, and the mix and level of partner presence at comprehensive AJCs can vary.

To better understand co-location patterns, we examined the level of on-site presence of partners—core partners, required partners, and non-required partners—in the 40 AJCs according to the following categories:

- **Regular full-time presence.** Program had staff located at the AJC full time. For example, a partner program housed a full-time staff member at the AJC five days a week during regular business hours.
- **Regular part-time presence.** Program had staff located at the AJC part-time on a regular basis. For example, at one AJC, the VR staff came to the AJC every Monday for four hours. Although the hours spent on-site were relatively few, we classified this staff member as having a part-time presence as she came to the AJC on a regular schedule.
- **Periodic presence.** Program had staff (often referred to as itinerant staff) who used available space to meet with customers at the AJC as needed and did not have a set schedule there.
- **No on-site presence, off-site.** Program did not have staff located at the AJC, but provided services to AJC customers who were referred to them by other program staff based in the AJC or learned about their services through visiting the AJC resource room.

Box II.2. Barriers and other factors impeding co-location

Primary reasons provided by various AJC partners regarding why some partner programs were not co-located at the comprehensive AJCs included:

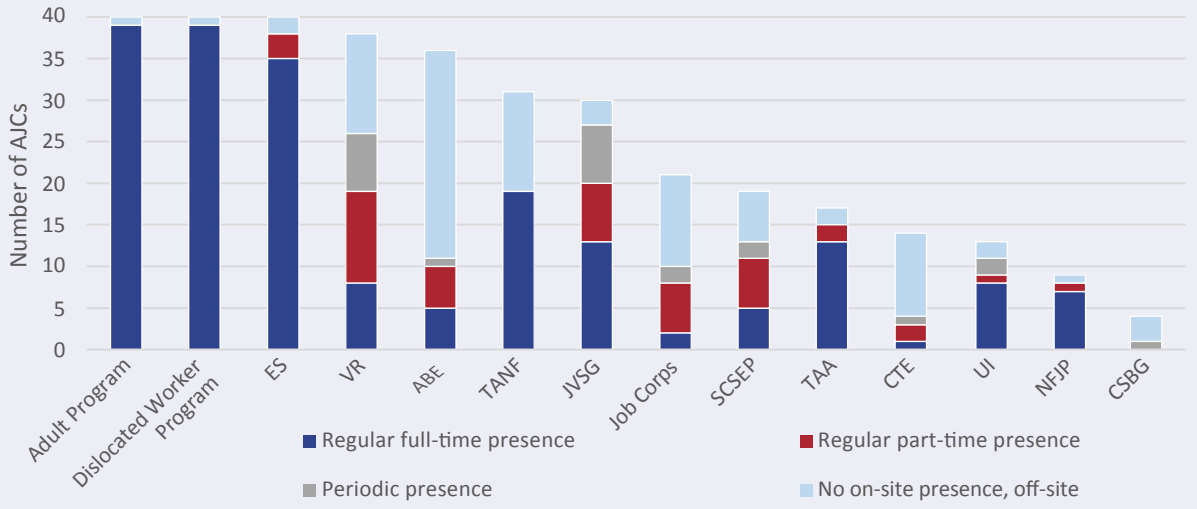
- Lack of available space in the AJCs to co-locate additional partners (this explanation was particularly prevalent in AJCs located in more rural settings)
- Lack of willingness on the part of the partner who holds the AJC's building lease to co-locate additional partners
- Partner programs already housed adjacent to the AJCs or in close proximity to the AJCs found it impractical to co-locate in light of other space and staffing considerations
- Preference on the part of some partners to co-locate with other providers more closely aligned to their service populations, such as serving ex-offenders at the parole office or providing career technical services and counseling at the local community college

WIOA core partner programs

As indicated in Figure II.1, the ES and the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs had the most on-site presence of all partners.[6]

- **Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and ES.** Of the 40 AJCs, all but one had Adult and Dislocated Worker programs located full-time at the AJC. ES had regular full-time presence at 35 AJCs, and regular part-time presence at 3 rural AJCs. One exception was located in a state where these programs had not co-located.[7] The other exception had recently contracted with a new Operator and was still determining the role and presence of ES.

Figure II.1. Presence of partner programs as reported by AJCs



Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.
Note: Few study AJCs reported presence of the following required partner programs: Community Services Block Grant funded programs; Indian and Native American programs; HUD employment and training programs; Reentry Employment Opportunities; and YouthBuild. This graph does not include non-required partner programs. N=40 AJCs

ES= Employment Service. VR=Vocational Rehabilitation. ABE= Adult Basic Education. TANF= Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. JVSG= Jobs for Veterans State Grants. SCSEP= Senior Community Services Employment Program. TAA= Trade Adjustment Assistance. CTE= Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education programs. UI= Unemployment Insurance. NFJP= National Farmworker Jobs Program. CSBG= Community Services Block Grant

- **Youth program.** Despite being designated as a core program by WIOA, the youth services program partners funded through WIOA were not identified as significant partners in the AJCs examined in this study. AJCs were not a major service delivery access point for youth under WIA, although this may change as a result of WIOA's increased emphasis on services for out-of-school youth.[8] Fourteen AJCs noted that they already had shifted to providing more services for youth, including paid and unpaid work experiences, and were trying to recruit more out-of-school youth through partnerships with other core workforce partners, or through schools and direct outreach in the community. In one AJC, WIOA youth funding in their local area was now fully dedicated to serving out-of-school youth, and staff were planning to develop additional options in the resource room in order to be able to continue serving in-school youth.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation.** VR had some on-site presence at 26 of the 40 AJCs. Of the 14 AJCs with off-site VR presence, many were located within the community in close proximity to the AJC. Staff in many of these AJCs suggested that establishing stronger linkages with VR posed challenges as the programs typically did not have established referral processes or relationships among staff, and had programmatic and cultural differences.[9] At the same time, several AJC managers and VR program managers reported working together to increase the coordination between VR services and AJC job seekers in response to WIOA. For example, one AJC was located in space adjacent to the local VR office for over 10 years. Despite their close proximity, the AJC and the VR at this site traditionally had little interaction. However, as part of planning for WIOA, the AJC and VR managers reported they had recently begun meeting and discussing how to better coordinate services and increase job seekers' access to VR services.
- **Adult Basic Education.** Of the core programs, ABE had the least amount of on-site presence at the AJCs. Only 11 AJCs had some kind of ABE presence on-site. At these AJCs, service providers typically offered high school equivalency classes for job seekers on-site. ABE partner program staff reported they were most closely connected to local educational institutions and therefore more likely to be co-located within schools and other educational institutions than in the AJCs.

The presence and collaboration between core programs at AJCs were continuing to evolve in response to WIOA. Taking into account part-time and periodic presence, about one-quarter (11 of 40) of AJCs offered all six core programs on-site at the time of the site visits. At nine AJCs, partner program staff reported WIOA had led to some co-location changes, with four AJCs noting greater presence of the VR partner. In addition, one AJC reported that Adult and Dislocated Worker staff were going to move from a separate office and co-locate at the AJC on a full-time basis, another reported that the Youth program provider would be co-located at the center for the first time, and a third AJC reported plans for ABE provider staff to increase their presence at the AJC.

WIOA required partners

Outside of the core programs, AJCs most frequently reported partnerships were with TANF and other DOL-funded programs.

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.** TANF employment and training partner programs had either a full-time (19 AJCs) or off-site (12 AJCs) presence. At 13 of the AJCs, the Adult and Dislocated Worker program provider also oversaw the TANF employment and training program. For example, in all AJCs in one state, the TANF employment and training partner program and the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs are administered by the same agency and, at the local level, the same frontline staff in the AJC provided services for TANF and the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. The manager of one of these AJCs viewed this as a strength, as these staff understood the different programs requirements and often the same customers could be served by these programs.
- **Other DOL-funded program.** The DOL-funded programs were typically provided by the same partner as the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs or ES. About half or fewer AJCs reported Job Corps, SCSEP, TAA, or NFJP as being located in the AJC when the study site visits were conducted. Due to the funding and model of JVSG, the presence of Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans and Employment Representatives (LVERs) tended to vary across AJCs. In most cases, the program did not have enough funds to support one staff person for every comprehensive AJC, so the staff often split their time between multiple AJCs in a local area. The physical presence of UI had changed at most AJCs over the last few years, with some staff reporting that it led to confusion and frustration among customers (see Box II.3).

Box II.3. Co-location of UI at AJCs

Many AJCs reported that an increased presence or physical co-location of UI staff would more accurately reflect the vision of a one-stop location for services. Several AJC managers believed that the delivery of comprehensive services was not achieved because of the absence of UI staff at their centers. With the shift toward automated UI processes and changing AJCs' image from unemployment to employment offices among other reasons, most states had removed UI offices. UI staff had a physical presence at one-quarter of the AJCs. AJCs typically had a dedicated computer or phone line that linked job seekers to UI services. Many staff of programs across the AJCs reported that job seekers continued to see the AJC as the UI office and found it frustrating when they were unable to receive in-person assistance for that program.

Non-required (optional) partner programs

All AJCs expanded access to services for their customers through partnerships with organizations and programs beyond those required by WIA and now WIOA.

- Some of these partner programs had an on-site presence; however, most were referral relationships. These partnerships included nonprofits, such as Goodwill Industries; economic development organizations; local hospitals; fatherhood programs; Ticket to Work programs; disability serving organizations; SNAP E&T; child care; and community action agencies. For example, one AJC referred customers in need of housing assistance to the local public housing agencies and partnered with a local nonprofit that provided income support programs, job readiness assistance, and work clothing.

Common AJC staff roles

Although the size, mix, and presence of partner program staff within AJCs varied, staff filled a common set of responsibilities and functions (See Box II.4). Typical staff positions and their functions included the following:

AJC manager. All 40 AJCs had a manager who was located on-site at the center, usually full-time but sometimes part-time (7 AJCs). AJC managers typically carried out three types of activities: those related to managing service delivery, communicating with center staff members and existing or potential partners, and managing the facilities.

- All AJC managers reported performing duties related to managing service delivery such as ensuring the center was open and able to provide customers with the services, supervising center intake functions, and when relevant, supervising the staff of their own programs. AJC managers reported working closely with partner program managers on-site to ensure consistent service delivery.

- All AJC managers reported communicating with on-site partner program staff, and many communicated with off-site partner programs. AJC managers communicated with on-site partner program staff in multiple ways, including by phone, email, staff websites, walking around the center, and intranet networks. Most AJC managers also reported hosting cross-program meetings to discuss topics related to center facility, management, and staffing issues.

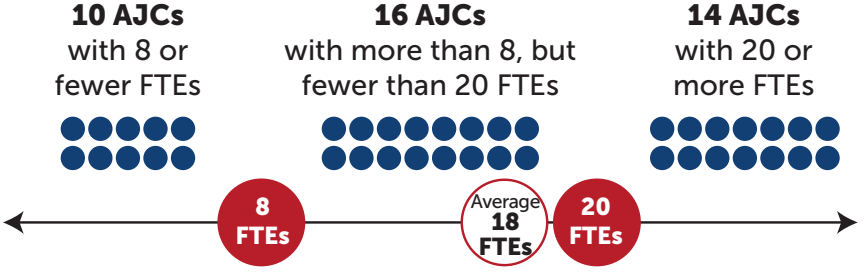
- Most AJC managers (32 of 40) reported spending significant time managing AJC facilities and logistics. These activities typically included dealing with the center's lease; facility maintenance; computer and phone infrastructure; rules for use of communal spaces (such as how to reserve conference rooms, and rules about food and drink in the resource room or kitchen/break room); common use of equipment (such as copiers and furniture); and issues related to center layout. In some cases, their duties also included managing building security and parking.

Box II.4. Size of staff at AJCs

To develop a comparable measure of the size of staff across the AJCs, the number of full-time equivalent staff (FTEs) per AJC was calculated based on the number of staff with a full- or part-time on-site presence.[10]

AJCs ranged from 3.8 to 84 FTEs, with an average of 17.9 FTEs (Figure II.2). AJCs with more FTEs tended to serve a larger volume of customers and have more partner programs co-located full or part-time than centers with fewer FTEs. For example, one large AJC had 36 FTEs representing 21 programs located full-time at the center. By contrast, the 12 AJCs located in rural areas typically had 8 or fewer FTEs located at the AJC. Most staff at these rural AJCs were cross-trained to serve multiple roles to provide services to job seekers and employers. The FTE calculation did not include work experience volunteers, such as SCSEP participants, or itinerant staff, which includes those staff with a periodic presence who used available space to meet with customers as needed and did not have a set schedule at the AJC.

Figure II.2. Size of AJCs by number of partner program staff present on-site



Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.
Note: The number of full-time equivalent staff were calculated by combining the number of full-time and part-time staff with an on-site presence. This number does not include those staff with a periodic presence.

Itinerant staff. Ten AJCs also provided access to a variety of program services through itinerant staff. Itinerant staff tended to be DVOPs and LVERs from the JVSG program, TANF E&T staff, VR, ABE, and staff responsible for administering SCSEP.[11,12] For example, the DVOP for one AJC served a 741-square mile geographic area and came to the AJC only by appointment to meet with a veteran.

Volunteers. Twelve AJCs expanded their staffing capacity by using work experience volunteers, typically TANF or SCSEP participants, who served as receptionists (typically known as AJC "greeters") or filled other day-to-day office needs such as answering the phones. TANF participants worked at the AJCs to gain experience and meet the work requirements of the TANF program to receive cash assistance. SCSEP participants worked part-time (less than 20 hours per week) and were paid directly by the program.

Partner program manager or supervisor. Managers or supervisors of programs oversaw the delivery of services to AJC customers by the frontline staff of their particular program or organization. They were responsible for making decisions about program staffing, ensuring their programs provided quality service delivery, and meeting reporting requirements. Managers and supervisors of partner programs were located either on-site or off-site, or both.

Frontline worker. Frontline workers, hired by and assigned to a specific program but housed either full- or part-time, or on an itinerant basis at the AJC, provided direct services to job seekers and employers.[13] Typically, the largest portion of the AJC's frontline workers were from ES and Adult and Dislocated Worker programs.

- ES frontline workers usually staffed the resource room, met with job seekers about resumes and job search strategies, engaged employers, and worked with employers to post jobs, recruit candidates, or fill openings.
- Frontline workers from the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs generally helped job seekers access education and training opportunities and provided services to employers.

Beyond staff from the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs or the ES, the most common types of frontline staff located in the AJCs were from VR, TANF, and JVSG (see Figure II.1).

Greeter. Twenty-seven AJCs had at least one assigned front desk greeter who directed customers to appropriate services such as the resource room or notified partner program staff that a customer had arrived. Greeters also commonly provided intake forms or gathered basic information for partner programs. Participants in SCSEP or TANF work experience programs often served as greeters at AJCs. If AJCs did not have a dedicated greeter position, staff from different partner programs typically assumed the greeter responsibilities on a rotating basis.

Twenty-two AJCs reported needing additional staff, primarily frontline workers, but were unable to fill these positions. Budgetary constraints, hiring freezes, and the low-paying nature of frontline positions were cited as the primary reasons for these hiring challenges.

Staff management and supervision

Despite the overarching goal to improve employment outcomes for job seekers and meet the needs of employers, most AJCs (29 of 40) did not have any performance data that were used for center-wide management purposes. The AJC manager therefore lacked the tools to assess the AJC's staff performance or customer outcomes. Instead, program managers and supervisors collected data and reported on their own program-specific measures required by the Federal or state governments. The data from these measures were typically aggregated and not available by AJC location. The AJC managers typically did not have access to these program-specific data, with the exception of any programs over which they had direct supervisory authority. Furthermore, program managers and supervisors reported that the federal and state performance measures often did not provide the information they needed to manage daily program operations.

About one-quarter of the AJCs (11 of 40) established performance measures beyond what was required by partner programs at the Federal or state level. Most of these AJCs used Excel spreadsheets or Access databases to collect and report information for these measures. The types of measures used by AJCs include employer contacts; the number of services provided; the number of customers who use the AJC; and the number of jobs created or retained for job seekers. But these data were not often collected and shared on a systematic basis, and staff commonly reported that the data were not reliable or useful. For example, one AJC was tracking the number of customers who used the AJC. The center used an automatic counter that recorded each time the AJC's door opened as an individual visit, which meant that it could not produce an unduplicated count of how many customers actually used the AJC on a given day.

Given the variation in the mix of partners, staff size of AJCs, and availability of shared data, the supervision models and practices varied. Some AJCs adopted supervision practices to improve coordination and collaboration, whereas others took a more program-specific approach. Typically, local boards oversaw Operators (11 AJCs), and Operator managers supervised AJC managers (33 AJCs). At the AJC level, most supervision tended to occur through a program-specific model in which staff reported to and were overseen by the partner program that employed them.[14] Eleven AJCs used a cross-program model in which the AJC manager supervised all staff of on-site partner programs (Box II.5).

Most AJC managers supervised the service delivery activities of staff members employed by their own partner program. Managers did this either directly or by supervising a lower-level manager. At 29 of the AJCs, the partner program manager oversaw daily activities, hired new staff, conducted performance reviews, and managed reporting.

Consistent with WIOA's emphasis on program and service alignment, AJC managers at 11 AJCs served as cross-program supervisors for all staff of on-site partner programs.[15] AJC managers who served as a cross-program supervisor typically oversaw partner employees' day-to-day activities but did not conduct their official performance appraisals, sign their timesheets, or approve their vacation days. In addition, cross-program supervisors did not typically play a role in hiring. These human resources-related roles were instead handled by an off-site supervisor for each partner program who worked for those staff members' employer of record. However, in a few cases, cross-program supervisors provided input on employee performance, hiring interviews, and vacation approvals.

Staff from AJCs with cross-program supervision were more likely to report that they worked well across programs and generally felt that this approach to supervision better integrated their AJCs. In one AJC, the AJC manager and local board staff felt that the cross-program supervisor role enabled their AJC to serve customers more quickly, as the manager could quickly assign staff members from any organization he supervised to assist customers. Staff members also commented that this supervision enabled partner organizations to save resources because they did not have to assign a supervisor to each AJC where they had co-located line staff. Despite these benefits, staff reported cross-program supervision was challenging to establish. One challenge reported by staff from multiple AJCs related to the effort required to work out differences in partners' operating procedures, such as different office hours or dress codes.

Box II.5. Examples of supervisory models

Present in most of the AJCs, the program-specific supervisory model assumed that supervision occurs at the partner program level, and managers or supervisors only oversaw their own staff. The less frequent cross-program supervisory model (sometimes also referred to as "functional supervision") varied across AJCs in terms of specific responsibilities, but generally the AJC manager supervised all staff located at the AJC.

Program-specific supervisory model. The partner program manager or supervisor was responsible for day-to-day administration of the program. At one AJC, each program had a manager located on-site or in the local area who would oversee his or her staff. Managers for each program did not coordinate with each other on hiring decisions or staff performance. In addition, staff from different programs located within the same AJC had different personnel rules and policies to follow, such as about requesting sick days or vacation time, as well as holiday schedules.

Cross-program supervisory model. In one rural AJC, the AJC manager supervised all the staff with a regular on-site presence. A state ES employee, this AJC manager went beyond handling basic center logistical issues relating to center hours, layout and staff coverage of initial intake into the center and the resource room. She also participated in the hiring process (although did not make the final decisions) for staff from other partner programs and handled absences of staff in all programs located at the AJC. The program managers conducted the staff performance reviews of their staff. Frontline staff reported that if they had any questions, she was the person they turned to for answers.

Cross-training at AJCs

Slightly more than half (25) of AJCs provided cross-training opportunities to at least some partner program staff but only two reported that they offered cross-training to all on-site partner staff.[16] Staff from ES and Adult and Dislocated Worker programs were most commonly cross-trained. Staff from TANF, ABE, VR, SNAP E&T, and UI were also included in cross-trainings to varying degrees at 11 of those AJCs. Cross-training was more common among partners who were co-located and if supervisors were responsible for overseeing more than one partner program at the center. Because rural AJCs had few staff, they relied heavily on cross-training to ensure that they always had on-site staff who were knowledgeable about the range of required programs.[17]

Cross-training often took the form of group sessions in which a staff member who worked on a certain partner program shared information about that program to a group of other AJC staff members. Typically, this included a mix of staff who worked for the same organization and those who worked for partner programs. Cross-training also sometimes took place one-on-one through job shadowing, in which a staff person who was not familiar with a certain program or a role, observed an experienced program staff member carry out his or her duties.

SECTION NOTES

[1] WIA required more than a dozen partner programs, almost all of which are also required by WIOA. WIA required partnerships with Welfare-to-Work programs authorized under the Social Security Act that no longer exist. WIOA requires TANF as a partner, unless the Governor takes special action to make TANF an optional partner. More information on WIA required partners is available at https://www.doleta.gov/programs/factsht/pdf/onestoppartners.pdf. More information on core and required WIOA partner programs is available in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Joint Rule for Unified and Combined State Plans, Performance Accountability, and the One-Stop System Joint Provisions; Final Rule.

[2] UI is formerly known as Unemployment Compensation (UC).

[3] Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Joint Rule for Unified and Combined State Plans, Performance Accountability, and the One-Stop System Joint Provisions; Final Rule.

[4] U.S. Government Accountability Office. "Workforce Development: Community Colleges and One-Stop Centers Collaborate to Meet 21st Century Workforce Needs." GA0-08-547. Washington, DC: GAO, May 2008.

[5] Barnow, Burt and Christopher T. King. "The Workforce Investment Act in Eight States." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2005. Occasional Paper Series 2005-001; Kirby, Gretchen G., Julia Lyskawa, Michelle Derr, and Elizabeth Brown. "Coordinating Employment Services Across the TANF and WIA Programs." Final report submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, January 2015; D'Amico, Ronald. "Enhanced Intake for All American Job Center Customers: A Functionally-Aligned Model." WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation Issue Brief. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, November 2015; D'Amico, Ronald, Kate Dunham, Verenice Chavoya-Perez, Deborah Kogan, Melissa Mack, Marian Negoita, Anne Paprocki, Sheena McConnell, and Linda Rosenberg. "Providing Public Workforce Services to Jobseekers: Implementation Findings from the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Program Gold Standard Evaluation." Prepared by Social Policy Research Associates and Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, November 2015; and Bradley, D. H. The Workforce Investment Act and the One-Stop Delivery System. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015.

[6] In some of these AJCs, these staff could also determine eligibility for the Title I Youth program services. However, the program services were typically provided off-site by youth providers contracted by the local boards.

[7] U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. "Advisory: Training and Employment Guidance Letter, No. 16-16." states: A major change to the AJC network under WIOA is the discontinuance of separate, stand-alone Wagner-Peyser Act ES offices that were permitted under WIA (20 CFR 678.315, 34 CFR 361.315, and 34 CFR 463.315).

[8] Under WIA, the Youth program typically focused on serving in-school youth whereas WIOA places priority on serving older out-of-school youth. It requires local areas to spend at least 75 percent of their youth funding on out-of-school youth, an increase from 30 percent under WIA. In addition, consistent with the YouthBuild program, WIOA revised the definition of eligible youth from 14 to 21 to include those ages 14 to 24.

[9] WIOA places increased emphasis on serving individuals with disabilities. In the past, AJCs were not particularly accessible for individuals with disabilities. See, for example, Holcomb, Pamela and Burt Barnow. "Serving People with Disabilities through the Workforce Investment Act's One-Stop Career Centers." Paper prepared for the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Advisory Panel, November 2004.

[10] The FTE calculation did not include work experience volunteers, such as SCSEP participants, or itinerant staff. That is, those staff who used available space to meet with customers as needed and did not have a set schedule.

[11] DVOP specialists provide intensive services to meet the employment needs of disabled veterans and other eligible veterans, with the maximum emphasis directed toward serving those who are economically or educationally disadvantaged, including homeless veterans and veterans with barriers to employment.

[12] LVERs conduct outreach to employers and engage in advocacy efforts with hiring executives to increase employment opportunities for veterans and encourage the hiring of veterans.

[13] In some AJCs, frontline workers could split time and be funded by two or more programs. For example, AJCs in one state, the frontline workers provided WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker program services and TANF employment and training.

[14] D'Amico, Ronald. "Enhanced Intake for All American Job Center Customers: A Functionally Aligned Model." WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation Issue Brief. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, November 2015.

[15] There is some but not total overlap between the 11 AJCs that have center-wide performance measures and the 11 AJCs that have cross-program supervision.

[16] Cross-training could include learning about the functions and requirements of different partner programs or simply learning what other partner programs do to facilitate referrals.

[17] See Betesh, Hannah. "An Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers (AJC): AJC Service Delivery in Rural Areas." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office, 2018; Dunham, Kate, Annelies Goger, Jennifer Henderson-Frakes, and Nichole Tucker. "Workforce Development in Rural Areas: Changes in Access, Service Delivery and Partnerships." U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration Occasional Paper 2005-07. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2005.

III. FUNDING AND RESOURCE SHARING

The mix of funding streams contributing to AJC operating costs and service provision differed across the study AJCs. This was in part due to variation in the types and level of involvement of these AJCs' partner programs and the extent to which local areas sought to augment resources through additional funding sources. WIA, and now WIOA, specified that all AJC partnering organizations must support the costs associated with operating their AJCs, including costs related to infrastructure and to providing AJC services that are shared across partner programs. This section describes funding sources used to support AJC operating costs and services, and discusses efforts to obtain additional funding. It then provides an overview of resource sharing arrangements by AJC partners that is adapted from a more in-depth study paper in this series on AJC resource sharing practices.[1]

Funding sources used to support AJC operating costs and services

The three primary partner programs located on-site at the 40 AJCs were (1) Adult Program; (2) Dislocated Worker Program; and (3) Employment Service (ES). The prominence of these programs in the AJC system was also reflected in their role as the primary contributors of funding to support AJC infrastructure costs and service provision.

Of the 40 AJCs, 20 provided to the study team fairly detailed information on funding sources used to support AJC operating costs and services. For some of these 20 AJCs, the local board or state workforce agency was unable to parse out detailed information for any one center located in the local area. For example, one local area took a single budgeting approach for all AJCs rather than maintaining and tracking separate operating budgets for each AJC in the area. At other AJCs, budget information broken out by funding sources was kept separate by partner programs and not available for specific centers.

Because AJCs had different sets of partner types, their mix of funding sources contributing to services available through these AJCs varied as well. The 20 AJCs with fairly detailed funding data had, on average, 18 funding sources (ranging from 7 to 34) used by 10 partners (ranging from 5 to 22). The funding sources included Federal formula funding such as Adult, Dislocated Worker, and ES programs; state government funds such as governors' initiatives or a state-funded training program; local government funds such as city or county discretionary funds; foundation funds; and nonprofits such as Goodwill Industries.[2]

The number of funding sources was not associated with the size of the AJC, as defined by the number of full-time equivalent staff (FTEs) located on-site. Some of the smallest AJCs had the largest number of funding sources, whereas some of the larger AJCs had fewer funding sources. For example, one AJC, with only 7 FTEs located on-site, had 21 funding sources (see Box III.1). In contrast, another AJC with 20.5 FTEs only was able to identify 11 funding sources, primarily DOL-funded programs such as the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs, ES, TAA, and JVSG.

Box III.1. Example of diverse funding sources used by one AJC

Federal funds

- Department of Labor: Wagner-Peyser (ES, Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments, National Emergency Grant); Trade Adjustment Assistance; Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs; Senior Community Service Employment Program
- Department of Agriculture: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training; Emergency Food Assistance; Commodity Supplemental Food Program
- Department of Housing and Urban Development: Community Development Block Grant
- Department of Energy: Weatherization Assistance Program
- Department of Health and Human Services: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program; Community Services Block Grant; Chafee Foster Care
- Department of Homeland Security: Emergency Food and Shelter Program

Foundation funds

- AT&T Foundation
- Jobs for America's Graduates
- Coalition of Advanced Maunfacturing

Efforts to obtain additional funding to support AJC operations and services

To supplement formula funding sources, most AJCs used additional funding to support AJC operations and services, and serve specific populations. Staff of partner programs located at these AJCs typically were not responsible for pursuing additional funding opportunities; the local board or state workforce agency most often led these efforts (Figure III.1).

Figure III.1. Types of organizations that pursue funding on behalf of study AJCs

Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.
Note: Buildings represent number of AJCs. N= 40 AJCs

Across the 40 AJCs, almost three-quarters (29 AJCs) reported efforts to pursue additional sources of funding to support staff and services, including grants, foundation funds, and other federal sources from non-required partners. Staff from the five AJCs located in single-state local workforce areas noted that the state workforce agency pursued additional funding and then allocated it to the local AJCs. State efforts to obtain and distribute grant funding were not limited to these single-area states, however. Two AJCs located in other states reported that the state workforce agency pursued grant funding opportunities on behalf of all their local areas. AJCs noted that this approach enabled local areas to access their state's grant writing capabilities and capacity.

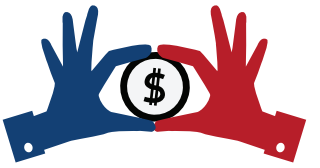
At 12 AJCs, additional funds were primarily provided through local boards; however some AJCs received funds directly. Eight AJCs had multiple organizations such as the local board, State, or partners at the local or regional level pursue funding on their behalf. Only two AJCs pursued their own additional funding opportunities.

Among the 11 AJCs that did not pursue additional funding (or have other organizations do so on their behalf), respondents reported two key reasons for not doing so. Staff of local boards and partner programs at two AJCs noted that their centers did not need additional funding to maintain operations and services, so looking for opportunities to obtain additional resources was not a priority. The other nine AJCs, particularly the smaller AJCs located in rural areas, cited lack of capacity as the key reason for not pursuing additional funding. For these AJCs, their local boards did not have enough staff to dedicate time to identifying and developing proposals for funding opportunities, or they did not have staff with grant writing experience.

Staff from AJCs that had received grant funding stressed that these additional funds helped them cover formula funding shortfalls and enabled them to support additional staff and provide additional services for special populations, such as veterans or the reentry population. For these centers, staff also noted that grant monies typically could not be used to cover AJC infrastructure costs, increasing the importance of resource sharing across partners to cover those costs. In addition, they acknowledged that these were only short-term solutions to address longer term declines in funding and persistent resource constraints, as these funds were only available for a limited amount of time and, often, targeted to serve specific populations.

Three AJCs received donations from foundations or private industries to support their services and operations. Staff from another AJC reported actively pursuing multiple approaches for securing additional funding to support both services and operations. In this AJC, only 25 percent of its funding came from Department of Labor formula fund grants; the bulk of its funding came from nontraditional grant sources (that is, non-Department of Labor grants) and funds used to pilot state-initiated services.

Resource Sharing



To support the operations of comprehensive AJCs, both WIA and WIOA required local boards to engage required partner programs in resource sharing agreements—called Infrastructure Funding Agreements under WIOA—to help fund their fair share of the costs of operating the AJC service delivery system.[3] WIOA strengths expectations for all core and required partners to make financial contributions toward AJC infrastructure costs, including requiring contributions from "virtual" partners. Partner programs may also negotiate contributions for additional AJC operating costs and shared services.[4]

The study's data collection activities (July to December 2016) occurred prior to the issuance of federal guidance related to resource sharing and AJCs were operating under WIA's resource sharing parameters.[5] At that time, local boards and partner programs overwhelmingly viewed the need to fill resource sharing obligations in relation to whether the partner had a full- or part-time on-site presence at the AJC. Therefore, in practice, resource sharing was commonly limited to a subset of partner programs co-located at the AJC, and they frequently provided in-kind contributions without assigning a financial value to the contribution and did not track this information.

Among AJCs, 32 of the 40 AJCs formally or informally shared resources at the time of data collection at the site visits. Of the 32 resource sharing AJCs, 27 shared resources following the terms outlined in formal agreements such as leases, MOUs, or resource sharing agreements that specified financial contributions to local areas' one-stop systems. Five AJCs are located in single-state workforce areas, and these followed resource sharing arrangements established at the state, rather than local or AJC, levels.

Despite the AJCs service delivery system's focus on engaging a multitude of partners to provide a seamless system of workforce services, the infrastructure costs to maintain the AJC's system relied on funding from the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and ES. Twenty AJCs were able to provide detailed information on their resource sharing practices and operating budget information. On average, about five partners per AJC shared resources in the form of cash contributions to support center operations. Adult and Dislocated Worker programs contributed to AJC operational costs in all 20 AJCs included in this analysis, and ES in all but one of these AJCs. In contrast, the two other core programs under WIOA—VR and ABE—provided financial support much less frequently among these same 20 AJCs. VR only contributed to operational costs in 10 of these AJCs and ABE in 9 of them.

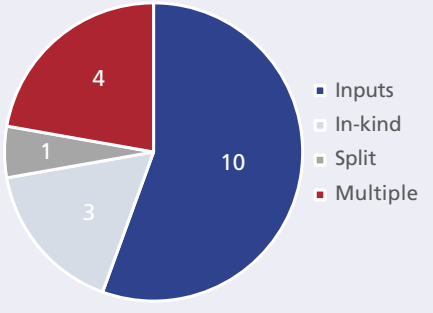
Across the eight AJCs that did not yet have resource sharing agreements in place, staff of partner programs and local boards offered four main reasons for the lack of resource sharing agreements included resource constraints, space constraints, sufficient resources, and awaiting more Federal or state guidance on resource sharing requirements under WIOA before finalizing agreements.

Cost allocation in resource sharing agreements

Across the 32 AJCs with resource sharing in place, the process and entities involved in negotiating and executing resource sharing varied. Negotiating resource sharing agreements among these AJCs was typically the responsibility of local boards and, in states with single-state workforce areas, the state workforce agencies. Given this dynamic, resource sharing arrangements with partner programs were typically negotiated for the entire local area (which could contain one or more comprehensive AJCs) or state, rather than on an AJC-by-AJC basis.[6] Local board staff, in particular, executive directors and fiscal managers, were typically responsible for negotiating resource sharing.

Although WIA required AJC partners to share resources, local boards were given discretion in selecting and applying the cost allocation methodology (or methodologies) they used. Of the AJCs that provided detailed information on their cost allocation methods, the majority used inputs (10 AJCs), such as square footage, to assign costs (Figure III.2). To a lesser extent, these AJCs allowed partner programs to provide in-kind contributions (3 AJCs), split costs by function (1 AJC), or use a mix of all these methods depending on the partner (4 AJCs).

Figure III.2. Cost allocation methods of AJCs



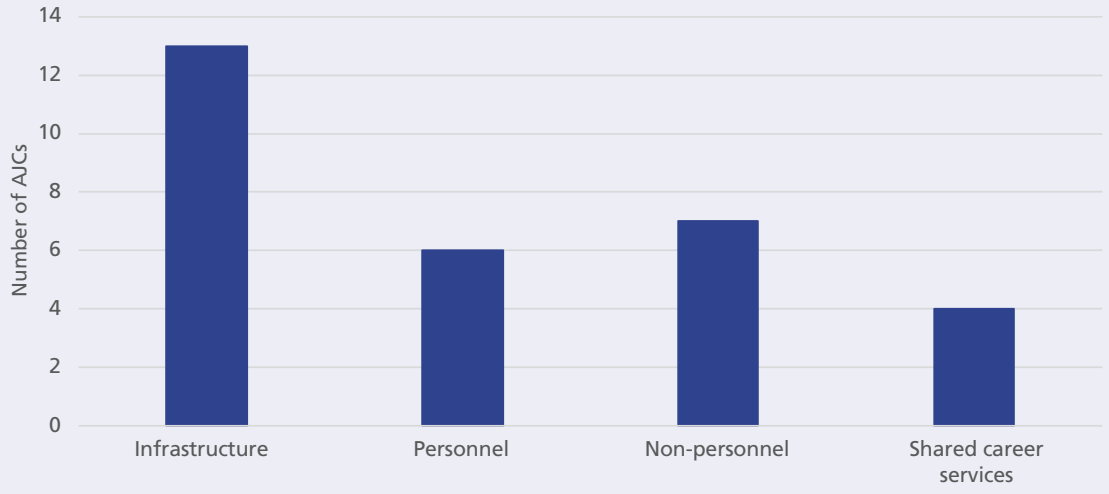
Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.
Note: N=18 AJCs

Types of costs shared

When AJC partner programs participated in resource sharing, they most often contributed to infrastructure costs. Under WIOA, all partner programs are required to contribute to the infrastructure costs and certain additional costs of the AJC service delivery system in proportion to their use and relative benefits received. Partner programs at AJCs can share in four categories of costs: infrastructure (for example, facility rent, utilities, maintenance, equipment, and technology); personnel additional costs (that is, salaries/wages and benefits); non-personnel additional costs (for example, vendors/contractors, supplies, additional operating costs); and shared career services costs (for example, center greeters, resource rooms).[7]

About two-thirds of the 20 AJCs shared infrastructure costs, such as rent, telephones, and computers (Figure III.3). Shared career services costs included assessments and resource room services ("career services") and public relations/marketing. None of the AJCs' documentation described sharing vendor or contractor costs, but 7 AJCs shared other non-personnel (supply) costs.

Figure III.3. Number of sample AJCs sharing costs, by cost category



Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.
Note: N = 20 AJCs

SECTION NOTES

[1] English, Brittany and Sarah Osborn. "An Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers (AJCs): Resource Sharing Practices Among AJCs." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office, 2018.

[2] Under WIOA, states receive Adult and Dislocated Worker program funds and allocate them to the local areas based on formulas specific to each program. The statutory formula for the Adult program factors in (1) the relative number of unemployed individuals compared with that number for areas of substantial unemployment, (2) the relative number of disadvantaged adults, and (3) the relative excess number of unemployed people. In determining the formula for the Dislocated Worker program, states factor in (1) the relative number of unemployed individuals, (2) the relative excess number of unemployed individuals, and (3) the relative number of long-term unemployed people—people who have been unemployed 15 weeks or more. Funding for ES is allocated to the states by a formula based on the relative size of the state's civilian labor force and state unemployment rates. For more information on these formulas, see 29 USC 3172.

[3] Under WIA, resource sharing was defined as "the methodology through which partners will pay for, or fund, their equitable or fair share of the costs."

[4] U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. "Advisory: Training and Employment Guidance Letter, WIOA No. 17-16." January 18, 2017. Available at https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL_17-16.pdf.

[5] U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. "Advisory: Training and Employment Guidance Letter, WIOA No. 17-16." January 18, 2017. Available at https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL_17-16.pdf

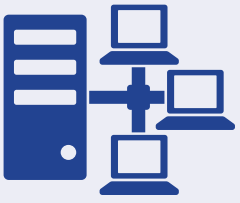
[6] Under WIA, local boards were responsible for approving all resource sharing agreements. Similarly, under WIOA, local boards are responsible for negotiating the AJC operating budgets and infrastructure funding agreements.

[7] U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. "Advisory: Training and Employment Guidance Letter, WIOA No. 16-16." January 18, 2017. Available at https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?DOCN=8772

IV. DATA SYSTEMS AND SHARING

Each AJC partner may have its own data system for performance management, reporting, and other purposes (see Box IV.1). Partner program staff located at the AJCs used their data systems to collect and store background and outcome information on customers, record services that customers received, and access state labor market information. The extent to which partners shared data systems varied considerably across the AJCs. This section describes the data systems and sharing at AJCs, starting with a discussion of the number of data systems used by core programs at AJCs. It then describes data sharing practices, including the extent to which it occurs, and reported challenges to achieving greater data sharing across partners within the AJC system.

Box IV.1. Multiple automated data systems in use at AJCs



Staff from partner programs at AJCs used 2 to 16 data systems for the WIOA core programs, with an average of 5.

State workforce agencies were typically responsible for selecting automated data systems used by ES, and Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. State VR and ABE agencies required separate data systems for their programs. The functionality and complexity of the data systems ranged across the AJCs. At 21 AJCs, state workforce agencies selected national software vendors such as America's Job Link Alliance (AJLA), Geographic Solutions, or Efforts to Outcomes to use for their labor exchange, case management, and reporting by their programs located at AJCs. In almost all of these AJCs, the state workforce agency held the contract with these vendors for use by all AJCs in the state. These software packages had different modules the state could purchase depending on the functionality required. For example, one state in which an AJC used AJLA for the labor exchange for many years had only just begun to use the system's module for case management functions.

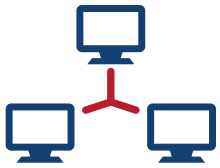
Data systems used by core partner programs

About half of the AJCs were required to use custom data systems purchased by the state or local board. Many of these systems used a legacy programming language and were patched together to meet the changing demands of Federal, state, local, and funder (such as foundations) reporting requirements. The other AJCs used national data reporting systems with limited customization for the state, local area, or AJC. These systems often hindered AJCs in accessing and storing information that would be useful for program performance management beyond reporting requirements and daily AJC operations.

All AJCs used a combination of the automated data systems in tandem with homegrown "work-arounds" to collect, record, and report data and monitor customers' services and outcomes. Most staff reported supplementing official state or local board data systems with work-arounds such as Access databases, Excel spreadsheets, and Google Docs to help them ensure accurate and timely accounting of their customers, financial information such as training costs or supportive service payments, and contact logs. These staff reported that the state or local board data system lacked the functionality to assess a frontline worker's or AJC manager's performance or record the information needed to manage their caseloads. For example, at one AJC, a frontline worker for the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs said the state's automated data system was unable to provide real-time data on expenses necessary for her to monitor her budget. The information would show up in reports in the month following the transaction. Thus, this worker kept an Excel spreadsheet to monitor how much money she approved for training programs and work supports for her customers.

At almost two-thirds of the AJCs, staff reported they regularly entered the same data into multiple systems. For example, staff entered data in a state system for performance monitoring and reporting purposes, a local system for case management purposes, and another system for financial and budget tracking purposes.

Data sharing across multiple programs



Data sharing across partner programs requires cooperation of multiple programs with different legal requirements to protect customer data, organizations, and staff.[1] WIOA encourages states and local areas to streamline services for customers and improve the use of workforce data by integrating intake, case management, and reporting systems.[2] This focus on integration has motivated states to consider ways to link and integrate data tracking across partner programs, particularly core programs, to improve communication and reduce the duplication of services.

At the time of the visits, there was some movement at the state level toward more data sharing and integration to improve service coordination and delivery across the core WIOA partners. In five states, seven AJCs noted that their state was either discussing or implementing a plan to create a new common automated data system that multiple core partners would use. For example, three centers located in two states noted that their states had received national grants for this purpose. Another AJC indicated that the state had commissioned a study of all the existing data systems used at AJCs in the state to identify options for an integrated system for use by all core partner programs.

In almost all (38 of 40) of the AJCs, at least Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and ES shared an automated data system. Limited data sharing occurred between other core partners. Staff from Adult and Dislocated Worker programs, ES, and VR shared a system at seven AJCs, three of which were located in the same state. Staff from each of these programs were co-located at the AJC. However, in all but three AJCs (all of which were located in the same state), VR maintained a separate data system that provided exclusive access to VR staff. Other partner programs at AJCs did not have access to the VR automated data systems primarily due to confidentiality concerns. ABE partner programs shared a data system with other partner programs at only two AJCs.

Program staff located at AJCs reported several benefits to sharing data systems. They noted that shared systems in which they could view cross-program information helped them coordinate service delivery. In addition, shared data reportedly reduced the administrative burden on staff and customers in that staff had to request and enter information only once (see Box IV.2). At the same time, it was also noted that most shared systems limited the type of information staff could see depending upon the program and the staff person position such as supervisor or frontline worker. Thus, for example, even though front-line staff from different programs might enter data into a shared system, their ability to access data from that system for service planning or case management purposes was limited.

Box IV.2. Example of using a shared data system to improve customer service

A staff member from the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs described a job seeker who had been using the center's resource room for several weeks and received resume assistance from an ES staff member. The case notes indicated that the job seeker had been on several interviews, but lacked the skill set to obtain the desired job. This job seeker was then referred to the staff member from the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. This staff member read the case notes in the system describing the job seeker's previous contact with the ES program, and therefore did not have to ask the job seeker for duplicate information. The job seeker received information about training options and in-demand occupations in the community and was later enrolled in a training program that would give him the skills needed to obtain an in-demand, desirable job.

Figure IV.1. Data sharing challenges reported by staff at AJCs

Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.

Data sharing challenges

Partners, located on- and off-site, raised four main challenges to sharing data.

- Partner program staff most frequently identified separate, incompatible data systems as a challenge to sharing data (Figure IV.1). As noted above, while almost all of the AJCs had a shared data system for the Adult and Dislocated Worker and ES programs (38 of 40), only seven VR and two ABE partner programs had access to these same data. VR and ABE staff in particular commented on the incompatibility of their data systems with those of other core partner systems.
- Partner program staff noted confidentiality concerns as a challenge to sharing data across programs. As described in several previous studies, confidentiality concerns can limit the types of information shared and who has access to that information.[3] In particular, VR program staff and other non-required partners serving individuals with disabilities had access to medical information. This type of information required more safeguards and strict requirements regarding who could have access to the data.
- Program staff at about a quarter of the AJCs suggested that lack of sufficient resources was an issue for shared data systems. These staff reported that the state or local area had insufficient funds to create a shared data system or mechanism by which to share data (such as a data warehouse) or that resources were needed to address other priorities. For example, a data manager from one AJC said that he would like the state to create a single data system for all core programs to simplify data reporting under WIOA. However, the state recently invested in separate systems for the core programs, so, it seemed unlikely in this case that the legislature would allocate more money for a shared data system.
- Several staff at more than half of the AJCs cited cumbersome data entry and lack of user-friendliness as data sharing challenges. Many staff from different programs that shared a system reported that access was permission-based and, beyond very basic information about the customer, only information directly relevant to their program was available. For some staff this meant that even though their programs shared systems, they did not actually have access to much of the information included in the system that could be useful to them for serving customers.

SECTION NOTES

[1] Data sharing can take a variety of forms ranging from approaches that focus on sharing data between existing systems to approaches that consolidates existing data systems. For the purpose of this study, we use the term data sharing as a general term to cover the range of approaches. See U.S. Government Accountability Office. "Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Information on Planned Changes to State Performance Reporting and Related Challenges." GAO-16-287. Washington, DC: GAO, March 2016.

[2] Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Joint Rule for Unified and Combined State Plans, Performance Accountability, and the One-Stop System Joint Provisions; Final Rule.

[3] King, Christopher T. and Dan O'Shea. Integrated Performance Information for Workforce Development: Framing the Issues. Austin, Texas: Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, December 2003. Van Horn, Carl, Tammy Edwards, and Todd Greene. "Transforming U.S. Workforce Development Policies for the 21st Century." Kalamazoo, Michigan: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2015.

V. AJC SERVICES

A primary goal of the AJC system is to provide coordinated, seamless services for AJC customers— job seekers, workers, and employers. The mix of services available to AJC customers depended on the types of partner programs connected to the AJC, available staff, program eligibility criteria, and the customers' needs. This section provides information on AJC services available to job seekers, workers, and employers, including outreach efforts, types of services, and service delivery approaches.

AJC services for job seekers and workers

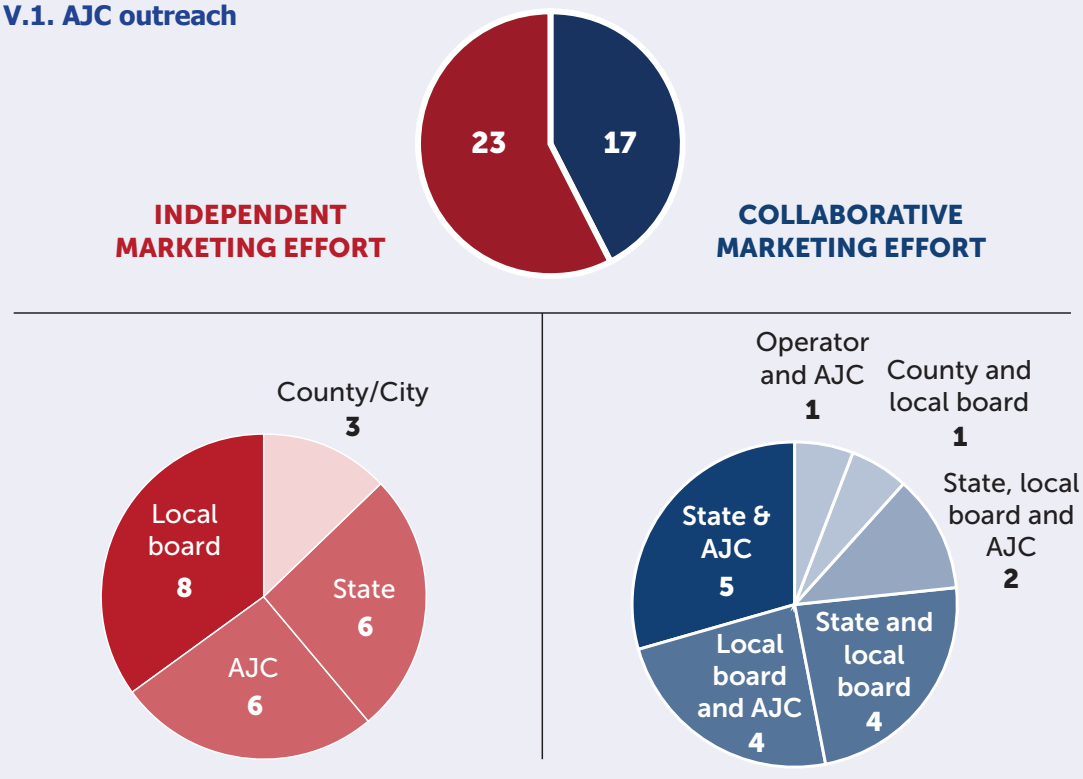
Programs at the 40 AJCs offered an array of services for job seekers and workers looking to upgrade skills including career planning, training, education opportunities, and supportive services. The AJCs employed different outreach efforts to job seekers and various ways to access, offer, and refer them to available services.

Outreach to job seekers

AJCs' outreach efforts to increase awareness and use of the services available to job seekers are as diverse as the local communities they serve. Some AJCs devoted substantial time and resources to job seeker outreach, whereas others relied primarily on word of mouth to bring customers in the door. Single organizations or collaborations of multiple organizations carried out outreach efforts for the AJCs (Figure V.1):

- In 23 AJCs, single organizations assumed primary responsibility for providing outreach materials and activities. The local boards most commonly assumed responsibility for outreach to jobseekers for the entire local area, followed equally by the state workforce agency and individual AJC.[1]
- Multiple organizations carried out this function in the other 17 AJCs. The organizations involved in the collaborative outreach efforts tended to vary, with different combinations of the state workforce agency, the AJC, and the local board teaming up.

Figure V.1. AJC outreach



Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.
Note: N=40 AJCs

A range of outreach strategies were employed to increase awareness and use of the AJCs services available to job seekers. These strategies included producing materials such as flyers or trifold brochures, giving presentations to local community groups, posting on social media such as Facebook, and producing television or radio advertisements (See Box V.1).

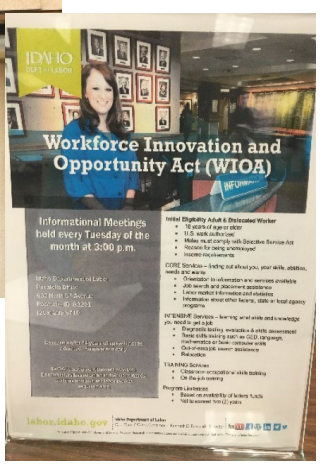
Box V.1. Examples of outreach activities

To change the public's perception that AJCs were the same as the "unemployment offices" of years past, the state workforce agency took on a rebranding effort in 2016 to develop a consistent logo for local AJC signage and informational materials. The state workforce agency specifically hired staff to develop a branding guide and templates for brochures and flyers. Although these materials were produced before the site visits to two AJCs in the state, neither had adopted the new uniform branding. The AJCs reported that their budgets were already stretched and did not include any additional funding for new signage or printing costs during the current fiscal year.

At another AJC in a different state, the local board served as the One-Stop Operator and was part of the local county government. This organizational relationship enabled the AJC to take advantage of additional county resources. The local board staff, who were county government employees, collaborated with the county's communications department to develop all large-scale outreach efforts, including flyers, press releases, and job fair materials. Staff located at the AJC relied on the local board and played a minimal role in developing outreach materials, but assumed responsibility for distributing the materials produced.

AJCs reported that word of mouth and community engagement such as giving presentations and job fairs were the most useful methods for reaching out to job seekers. Program and partner staff from three rural AJCs noted that word of mouth was particularly important because people in small communities tended to rely heavily on friends and family for information and recommendations.

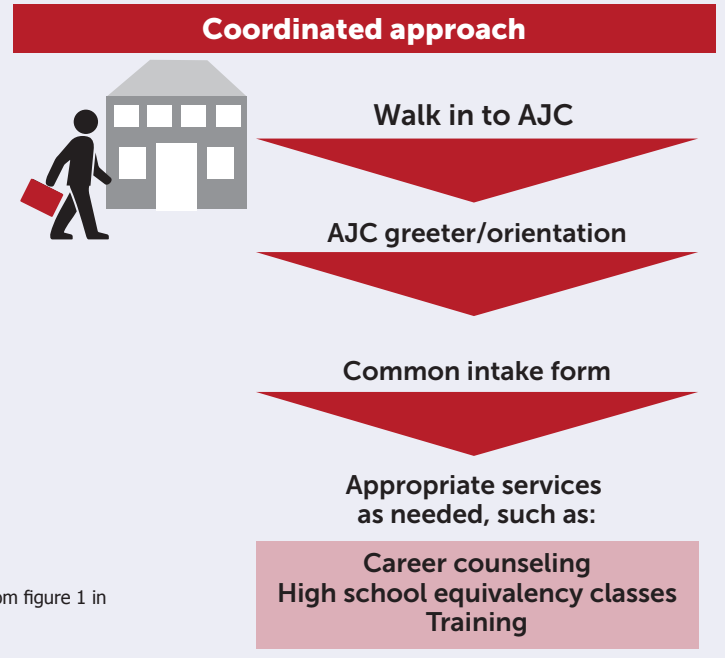
According to staff, the greatest barriers to effectively reaching job seekers were: (1) insufficient funding to pay for new or more visible signage and outreach materials and (2) limited staff resources to conduct outreach activities. In one AJC, for example, neither the local board nor AJC had any dedicated funding for direct outreach so the AJC manager "made do" by designing and producing her own flyers to distribute to local partners and at community events.



Customer flow

AJCs deliver services in different ways, with some having a clearly articulated service path based on customer characteristics and others addressing needs as they arise. Under WIA, job seekers typically received services sequentially, from core to intensive to training services. WIOA eliminates this sequencing requirement.[2] At the time of the site visits, 30 AJCs reported that they did not use a sequential service approach and determined service paths based on the needs of the customers. Figure V.2 illustrates a coordinated service delivery path, which occurred at the majority of the AJCs.

Figure V.2. Model of a coordinated AJC customer flow



Note: This figure is adapted from figure 1 in D'Amico (2015).

In a coordinated approach, job seekers were welcomed by a greeter and typically signed up to receive an individual or group orientation to all AJC services. Some AJCs offered online orientations or prerecorded videos that could be viewed. Most AJCs had program staff assigned to present the orientations. These staff could be from a specific program (such as ES) or assigned on a rotating basis from multiple programs (such as ES, Adult, or TANF programs). At most AJCs, these orientations were optional and only required if the job seeker wanted to apply for a training program. They then completed a common intake form that provided all partner programs on-site with basic information and input for their service delivery plans. Common intake forms were typically developed by the AJC manager, Adult, Dislocated Worker, and/or ES program partner. If the AJC had a strong TANF program presence, the TANF manager also contributed to developing the form. Greeters would then direct the job seekers to the appropriate program(s) to receive services. The services might include self-directed services in the resource room, career counseling from a staff member in the ES or Adult or Dislocated Worker programs, a referral to the ABE partner for high school equivalency classes, or training through the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs or VR. This process could occur in a single day or multiple days depending on the AJC.

Few AJCs used a more sequential approach when providing services to job seekers. For example, new job seekers who walked into the AJC talked with a greeter at the front desk. Some of these AJCs had an informal intake process where the greeter asked questions to find out the purpose of job seekers' visits. Job seekers would then register for ES if they had not already attended an ES orientation. Next, they would be directed to the resource room for self-directed services and some minimal assistance. If the job seekers required more individualized assistance, they could request to meet with frontline staff from partner programs, who would collect information to assess eligibility for their specific programs. Job seekers would then be connected with the appropriate services; however, this could require job seekers speaking with multiple program staff to determine the best fit for them.

Service offerings at AJCs

AJCs offered job seekers a variety of services, many of which were available on-site. These services could include self-directed services in resource rooms, assessments of skills and barriers to employment or economic self-sufficiency, and career planning. Job seekers also could access other services, such as education, training, and support services, through programs that might conduct intake at the AJC, but offer the actual service off-site. As noted earlier, WIOA eliminated the service sequence requirement and replaced core, intensive, and training services under WIA with "career services." Box V.2 lists the types of services provided in the three categories of WIOA career services.

Box V.2. WIOA career services

As defined by WIOA, career services include:

Basic career services

- Eligibility determination for the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs
- Outreach, intake, and orientation to services available from One-Stop partner programs
- Initial assessment of skill levels, aptitudes, abilities, and supportive service needs
- Labor exchange services
- Provision of referrals to One-Stop partner programs and other workforce programs
- Provision of labor market information and other workforce statistics
- Provision of performance and cost information on the local area and workforce programs
- Provision of information on supportive services
- Meaningful assistance with filing a claim for unemployment compensation
- Assistance with eligibility for financial aid for education and training programs not provided under WIOA

Individualized career services

- Comprehensive and specialized assessments of skill levels and service needs
- Development of an individual employment plan
- Group or individual counseling
- Career planning
- Short-term pre-vocational services
- Internships and work experiences
- Workforce preparation activities
- Financial literacy services
- Out-of-area job search and relocation assistance
- English language acquisition and integrated education and training programs

Follow-up services

- Counseling regarding the workplace for Adult or Dislocated Worker program participants placed in unsubsidized employment for up to 12 months after the first day of employment

Source: 20 CFR 678.430

Resource rooms

Since the establishment of comprehensive AJCs under WIA, resource rooms have been an important feature of the AJC service delivery system. All 40 AJCs provided a resource room that had individual computer workstations with Internet access. These computers offered job seekers access to free assessments, tutorials, and software to write resumes. Job seekers could also use computers to register with and view the state labor exchange. All state labor exchanges housed labor market information (LMI) and job listings, and such information was often posted in the resource room. On average, AJCs had 15 computers available in the resource room, with a site's total ranging from 4 to 34. All AJCs had at least one accessible computer station for individuals with disabilities.

The resource rooms were typically staffed by ES, Adult, or Dislocated Worker programs and provided job seekers access to job listings, online tools and assessments, the Internet, and other resources needed for finding employment such as printers and telephones. Under WIA, resource rooms offered self-directed services—the first step in the required sequential process—but partner programs that staffed them often provided minimal one-on-one assistance to job seekers such as answering questions.[3] The level of individualized assistance provided in the resource rooms of the 40 AJCs ranged from a high-level of assistance to a very basic self-service model (see Box V.3).

Most AJC resource rooms were located within or adjacent to the center's main front lobby and reception (greeting) area, which job seekers could access through a variety of methods.

Resource room access methods:

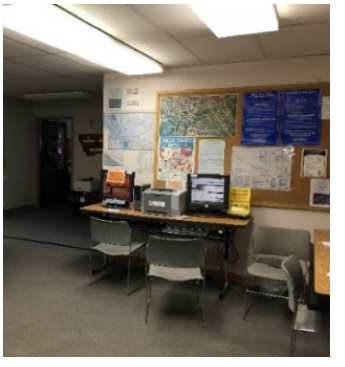
21 AJCs used hard-copy sign-in sheets

9 AJCs used a kiosk with username and log-in

2 AJCs used an electronic access card

1 AJC used a ticket system in which job seekers received a color-coded pass that allowed them access to the resource room[4]

7 AJCs provided customers open access to their resource rooms and did not require any sign-in method



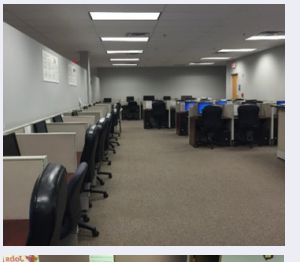
Box V.3. Individual assistance in resource rooms

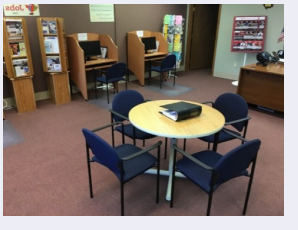
AJCs had different policies about providing assistance within the resource room. With no sequence requirement for services under WIOA, staffing capacity or a continued embrace of the self-serve philosophy reportedly influenced the level of assistance provided in resource rooms.

Sixteen AJCs offered a high level of assistance in the resource room in which dedicated staff offered one-on-one assistance to each customer who entered. For example, in one of these AJCs, the resource room manager reported that he spoke individually with each customer who entered the resource room. When asked how he could be of assistance, most job seekers requested help accessing the online labor exchange or completing resumes.

Seventeen AJCs provided assistance when requested, but generally followed a self-serve approach in the resource room. In many of these AJCs, staff of partner programs rotated resource room responsibilities or had greeters who did double duty. At one of these AJCs, job seekers tended to use computers independently, but staff checked in occasionally to see if they needed help.

Seven AJCs did not offer any assistance in the resource room. Most relied on this approach because they did not have staff available to offer assistance in the resource room, but some also felt this approach was more appropriate. For example, in one AJC, a staff person from the resource room monitored the room but reported that she did not provide individual assistance because she believed job seekers should "figure it out on their own."

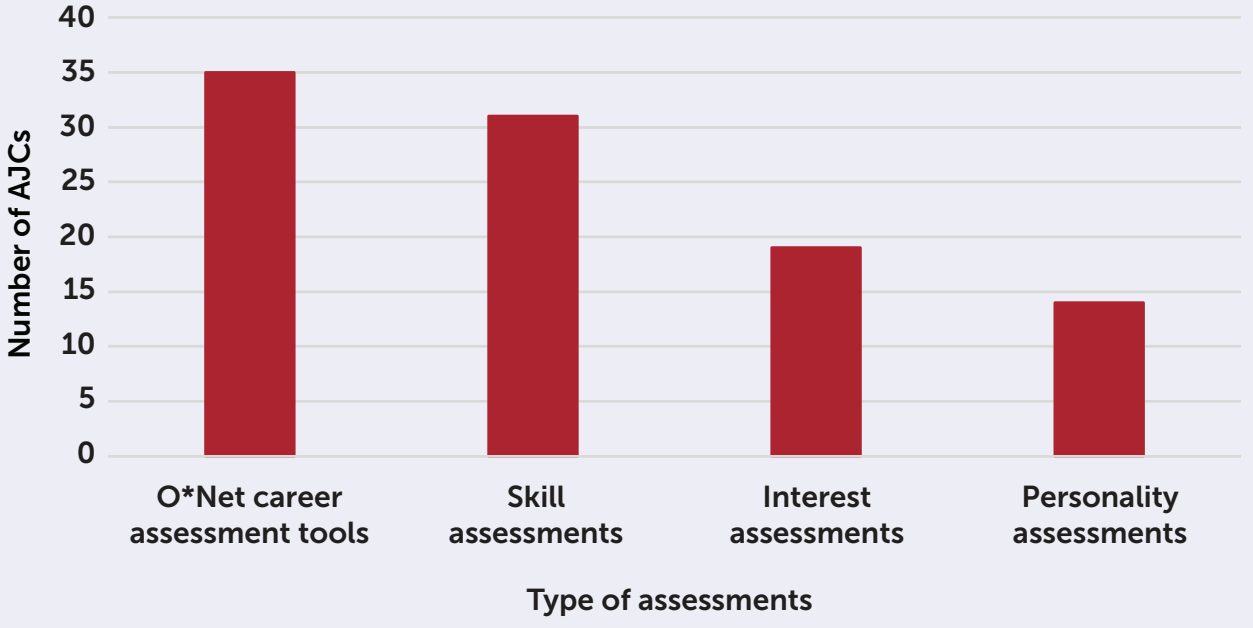




Assessments

AJCs provided job seekers access to free assessments to provide information on a career path or prove a certain skill level. Many assessments were online and accessible from home or other locations, but resource rooms provided customers an introduction to these assessments and, in some cases, someone to help answer questions. Available assessments were a mix of those self-administered and online (such as O*NET® career exploration tools that include a self-directed interest profiler) or proctored by qualified staff (such as the Test of Adult Basic Education [TABE®]).[5] The most common assessments were O*NET® assessment tools; skill assessments (such as TABE®, Workkeys®, and Prove It!®); interest assessments (such as CareerScope® and Career Information System); and personality assessments (such as the Strong Interest Inventory® and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®) (Figure V.3). Some resource rooms designated computers specifically for assessments. Several staff noted that employers referred potential job candidates to the AJCs to complete assessments to prove their skill levels, such as typing, analytical thinking, or math and reading abilities.

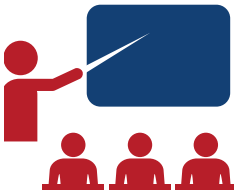
Figure V.3. Types of assessments offered by AJCs



Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.
Note: N=40 AJCs

Career planning and job readiness

All AJCs provided on-site access to career planning, individualized job readiness, and LMI. The ES, Adult, and Dislocated Worker programs were the most common providers of these services. Job seekers could access LMI through online state labor exchanges or portals, primarily at the resource room. In addition, many staff reviewed LMI with job seekers to help them make informed decisions about training options or postsecondary education.

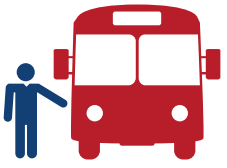


Training

At AJCs, customers could explore training options and, if eligible, enroll in programs that offered training, such as the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs or VR. Training program options could include classroom-based training, work-based training, and incumbent worker training. Although on-site staff from these programs often determined eligibility, the actual training took place off-site at training providers, community colleges, and vocational-technical schools. For example, many AJCs' partner programs paid for job seekers to obtain credentials such as certified nursing assistant or a commercial driver's license.

Education

At AJCs, customers could explore training options and, if eligible, enroll in programs that offered training, such as the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs or VR. Training program options could include classroom-based training, work-based training, and incumbent worker training. Although on-site staff from these programs often determined eligibility, the actual training took place off-site at training providers, community colleges, and vocational-technical schools. For example, many AJCs' partner programs paid for job seekers to obtain credentials such as certified nursing assistant or a commercial driver's license.

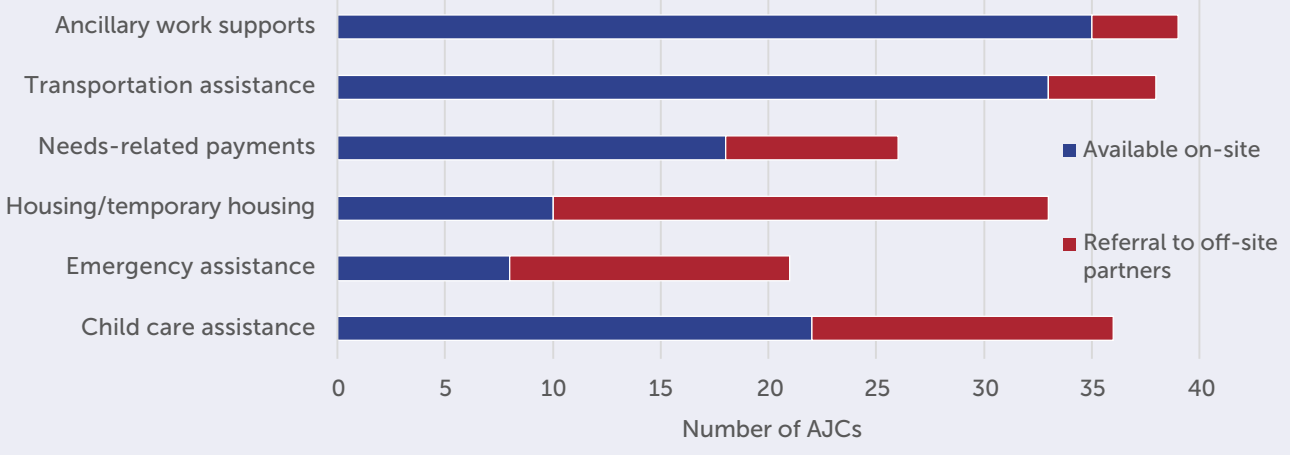


Supportive services

A variety of supportive services were available to a subset of job seekers enrolled in different training and education programs offered by programs such as Adult, Dislocated Worker, TANF, and/or other programs. These support services were available on-site or through referrals to partner programs located off-site (Figure V.4).

Ancillary work supports such as funds to pay for training clothing and tools, work uniforms, and books were available at 35 AJCs to job seekers enrolled in Adult and Dislocated Worker programs, TANF, and VR. These job seekers also had access to transportation assistance, such as bus passes or gas money, through these programs. Needs-related payments, housing assistance, and child care also tended to be available to these job seekers, but less commonly, and more often through referrals to off-site partner programs. In addition, job seekers were generally referred to off-site program partners such as community action agencies, Goodwill Industries, or faith-based organizations for additional services available through these organizations.

Figure V.4. Support services available to subset of job seekers through partner programs

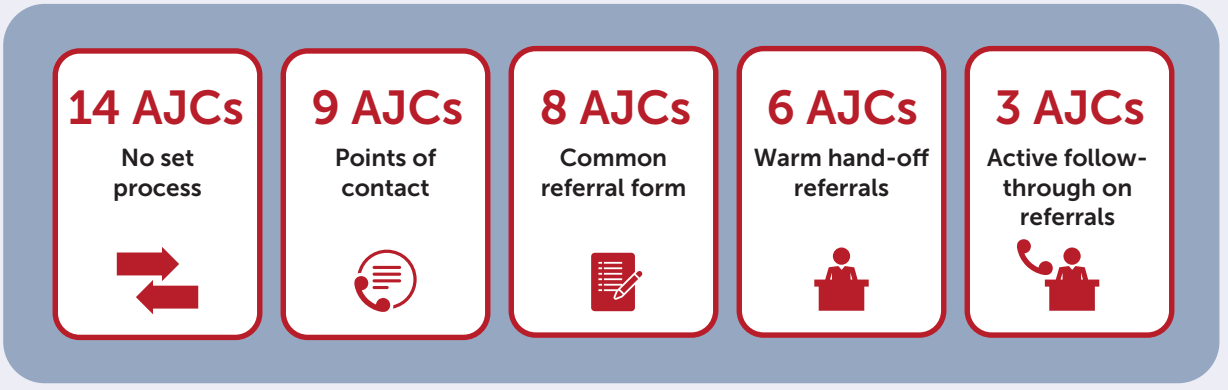


Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.
Note: N=40 AJCs

Referral processes at AJCs

Because AJCs serve customers with diverse needs, AJC programs' staff often referred customers to services that could best be provided by other partner programs. The type of referral processes ranged from having no set process to follow-through of all referrals (Figure V.5).

Figure V.5. Types of referrals processes at AJCs



Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.

- **No set process**. Fourteen AJCs reported that they did not have a formal process in place to make referrals. At these AJCs, staff used their own discretion on how to make referrals, either by giving contact information to the customer or directly calling staff at another partner program.
- **Points of contact**. Nine AJCs had designated points of contact. Program staff at these AJCs provided job seekers with a name and contact information of partner programs. It was the job seeker's responsibility to contact the partner program.
- **Common referral form**. Eight AJCs used a common referral form. The programs at these AJCs collaborated to develop a form that all partners used when making referrals. One AJC developed a common referral form to use for referrals for program services that were off-site. These common referral forms tended to be hardcopy forms that the job seekers would take with them to contact the partner program on their own.
- **Warm hand-off referrals**. Six AJCs that used a formal warm hand-off referral method generally would walk a job seeker to the desk or staff member located within the AJC, or telephone the other program staff member if located off-site. At one AJC, staff called the referral process "desk referrals," meaning that they would introduce the customer to staff from the other program at their desk inside the AJC. After establishing these connections, it was up to the customer to follow up with the referrals as part of the customer's development process.
- **Active follow-through on referrals**. Three AJCs, as a follow-up measure, made contact with the organization to which customers had been referred. Staff at these AJCs referred customers to a partner by calling or escorting the customers to the correct staff person (similar to the warm hand-off) and then followed up with customers and the staff person to check on the status of the referral. One AJC set the expectation that partner programs would refer customers and coordinate services among shared customers. Staff reported that their data-sharing agreements and strong professional relationships promoted this type of referral process.

AJC services for employers

Under WIA, the AJC system aimed to address the needs of both job seekers and employers. WIOA affirms the importance of employers as AJC customers and places even greater emphasis on employer engagement and services—such as by encouraging local boards to create a workforce sector partnership or engaging employers in training curricula design.[6] In addition, coordinating employer services among programs located at the AJC to reduce duplication of employer outreach efforts continues to be a goal of the workforce system.[7]

WIOA's requirements and guidelines for the workforce system recognize that efforts to engage and serve employers can occur at all levels—the state level, regional-based workforce areas, local boards, and AJCs. In developing state plans, WIOA required states to describe how the partner programs would coordinate activities and resources to provide "comprehensive, high-quality services to employers."[8] In addition, as with WIA, WIOA requires that employer representatives comprise the majority of each local board to ensure that employer needs are expressed and incorporated into local workforce development policy and planning.[9] These higher-level efforts guide and provide structure for the direct employer services that AJCs provide and the coordination across partner programs.

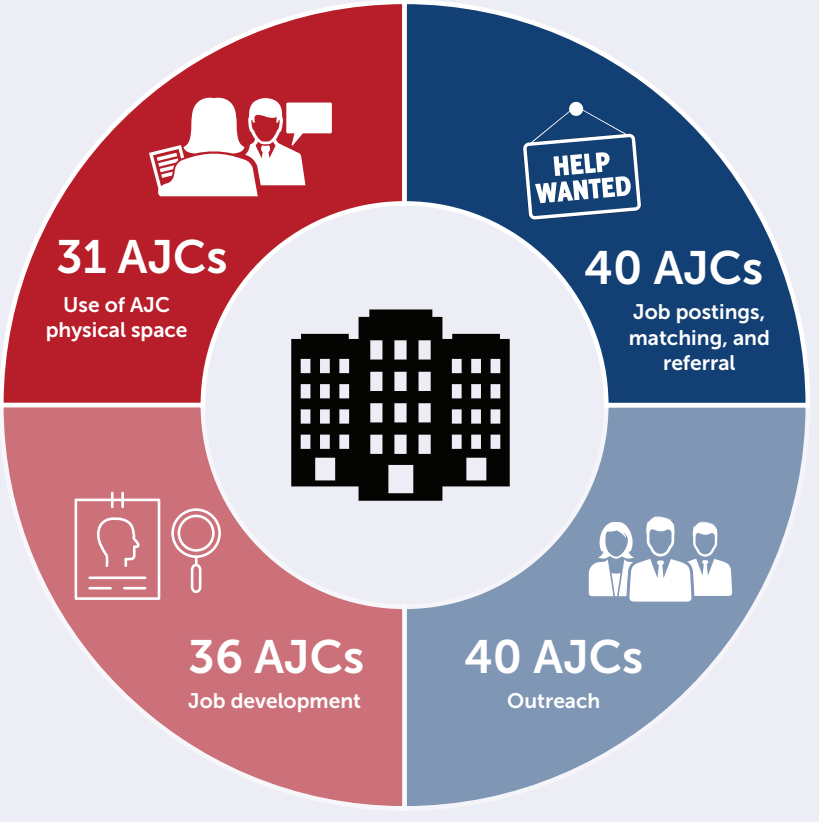
Twenty-four AJCs noted that they had increased their focus on employer engagement because of WIOA. Ten AJCs were increasing staff capacity to serve employers, either by increasing the number of dedicated business services staff, training more existing staff to work with employers, or by leveraging more of the partner programs in the AJC to centralize employer relationships for more agencies and customers. Partner program staff also discussed the push under WIOA for more sector partnerships and an increased focus on employer needs.

Service offerings for employers at AJCs

Most AJCs provided four types of employer services at the time of the site visits (Figure V.6):

- **Job postings, matching, and referral.** All 40 AJCs posted job openings, matched openings and job seekers, or referred of job candidates to employers. AJCs also helped employers post jobs on their state's online labor exchange and on bulletin boards located in their resource room. Most staff located at the AJC, particularly ES staff who typically provided this service, viewed job posting as one of the most important basic services offered to employers. They also helped employers by matching candidates or making referrals to employers with open positions. In response to WIOA's increased emphasis on employer engagement, staff located at two AJCs (located in the same state) reported that the state planned to centralize the job posting function at the state level to give the AJCs more time to engage with employers, including developing customized training opportunities.

Figure V.6. Four categories of service offerings for employers



Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.

- **Outreach.** All 40 AJCs reached out to employers to increase their awareness of the services they offered. Common reported engagement strategies included participating in networking events, calling or dropping in on employers, attending job fairs, and, to a lesser extent, engaging in media campaigns or special outreach events for employers. The most common strategy that staff located at AJCs reported for being effective in reaching employers was to network at business or industry-related events. Most staff located at these AJCs reported that relationships with Chambers of Commerce provided the best opportunity to broadcast AJC services and build relationships with employers.
- **Job development.** Thirty-six AJCs used LMI to educate employers on labor market conditions, such as wages and the number of available job candidates. For example, ES staff at one AJC believed their most valuable service was helping employers and the community understand the average wages in different industries. They described helping a food packaging employer who sought qualified applicants for a job opening. The ES staff worked with the employer to understand the general wage trends and, based on that information, the employer increased the position's hourly wage. The employer was then able to find qualified candidates and had worked with the AJC on subsequent openings. Some of these AJCs also worked with employers to design customized training or work experience opportunities. Two AJCs took a more regional approach to providing these services (see Box V.4).
- **Use of AJC physical space.** Thirty-one AJCs provided employers designated space to conduct job interviews or recruitment activities. One AJC provided a desk in the lobby where employers could recruit for openings and featured a different employer recruiting job seekers at least twice per week.

Box V.4. Two examples of regional approaches for delivering employer services

One AJC did not provide employer services because the state had adopted a regional approach. The state department of labor staffed a regional unit of employees to meet employer needs across 13 counties, encompassing the AJCs service area. This regional team worked with the directors of local economic development in each county to attract new businesses to the community and work with existing businesses to grow the local economy. The employer services team included a regional manager and two recruiters who coordinated with the local veterans' employment representative and AJC management staff. The team informed employers about the services and resources available through the state departments of labor and economic development, including their available customizable recruitment services.

At the other AJC, the local board coordinated employer services for the AJC and the other AJC in the local area. The employer services team, which included staff from the contractor of the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and other partner programs, was located at the non-study AJC. The employer services team helped employers fill job orders and navigate the state labor exchange, and conducted assessments for job applicants. The AJC referred employers to this nearby center to receive these services.

AJC organization and coordination of employer services

WIOA required alignment among partner programs to provide coordinated, complementary, and consistent services to employers.[10] A coordinated approach can help streamline communication between staff and reduce duplication of their efforts. Also, this approach can reduce burden on employers, as they only have to entertain requests from one employer service staff person.

Coordination of employer services at study AJCs at the time of our site visits ranged from no coordination among staff (that is, working independently) to an integrated team with staff from multiple programs (Figure V.7). The staffing structures within the AJC often dictated the level of coordination of the services.

Figure V.7. Coordination of employer services at AJCs

Source: Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers qualitative data collection, 2016.
Note: N=40 AJCs

- In about half of the AJCs (18 of 40), there was limited or no collaboration of employer services. Staff located at these AJCs focused exclusively on conducting employer services for their program's target population. The manager at one study AJC reported that each program had its own system and requirements to meet with employers and that coordination was not necessary.
- In 9 AJCs, particularly in some of the smaller, more rural AJCs, staff from different partner programs shared employer contacts or leads. The program staff reported that it was particularly important in smaller communities with few employers to know who was contacting employers to avoid irritating those same employers with multiple contacts. In addition, as the staff worked with different types of job seekers, such as those completing a training program or veterans, it helped to share contacts and job leads to increase the likelihood of a job placement.
- Thirteen AJCs implemented an integrated employer services team made up of multiple partner programs. Typically, team members would be assigned responsibility for recruiting and working with employers within a service area or industry, such as those involved in health care. Coordination benefited employers because it gave them a single point of contact, rather than one or more per program (see Box V.5).

Box V.5. Example of a collaborative team

At one AJC, staff credited their collaborative, cross-program team approach to being especially responsive to employer needs. As a result, they reported that employers would travel long distances and bypass other AJCs to receive services from their AJC team. One local employer interviewed said that, while she was working on establishing her human resources department, she relied on the AJC to help recruit and fill her open positions. After her positive experiences working with the AJC, she became more involved in the public workforce system, becoming a member and eventually the chair of the local board.

SECTION NOTES

[1] Three of the AJCs in which state workforce agencies conducted outreach efforts are single-area states. The state workforce agency conducts the same functions as local boards in states with more than one local area.

[2] D'Amico, Ronald. "Enhanced Intake for All American Job Center Customers: A Functionally-Aligned Model." WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation Issue Brief. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, November 2015.

[3] D'Amico, Ronald, Kate Dunham, Verenice Chavoya-Perez, Deborah Kogan, Melissa Mack, Marian Negoita, Anne Paprocki, Sheena McConnell, and Linda Rosenberg. "Providing Public Workforce Services to Jobseekers: Implementation Findings from the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Program Gold Standard Evaluation." Prepared by Social Policy Research Associates and Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, November 2015.

[4] This AJC used a ticket system due to the high volume of job seekers and need to keep track of where job seekers should be.

[5] The O*NET® career assessment tools are a set of self-directed career exploration/assessment tools to help job seekers more effectively consider and plan career options, preparation, and transitions. More information about these tools is available at https://www.onetcenter.org/tools.html.

[6] Barnow, Burt S., and Shayne Spaulding. "Employer Involvement in Workforce Programs: What Do We Know?" In Transforming U.S. Workforce Development Policies for the 21st Century, edited by Carl Van Horn, Tammy Edwards, and Todd Greene, pp. 31–264. Atlanta, GA: Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, 2015.

[7] Dunham, Kate. "Meeting the Needs of Businesses through the Workforce Investment Act Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs." WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation Issue Brief. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, November 2015.

[8] Required Elements for Submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Plan Modifications under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Available at https://www.doleta.gov/WIOA/docs/WIOA_State_Plan_ICR_OMB_Passback_Plus_Supplement.pdf

[9] Holcomb, Pamela, Rosa Maria Castaneda, and John Trutko. "The One-Stop Workforce Delivery System in Virginia's Local Workforce Investment Areas: An Assessment." Prepared for the Virginia Employment Commission. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2007.

[10] Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Joint Rule for Unified and Combined State Plans, Performance Accountability, and the One-Stop System Joint Provisions; Final Rule.

VI. KEY FINDINGS AND LOOKING AHEAD

This study of 40 comprehensive AJCs illustrates the complex and rich variation that defines and shapes the AJC service delivery system at a time when states and localities were in the early stages of transitioning from WIA to WIOA. Because the study sample is not representative, the study findings apply only to the 40 study AJCs and cannot be generalized to the nation's approximately 2,500 comprehensive and affiliate centers operating when the study AJC sample was selected in 2015. The study design does, however, present the opportunity to provide a systematic and detailed examination of key features and variations in AJCs' structure, operations, and services. This, in turn, provides grounded information about the AJC system that can be useful for generating approaches for better understanding the effects that WIOA may have on the AJC system as it continues to evolve. Here, we draw on these findings to offer some concluding observations about key changes and challenges that AJCs and their local boards may encounter as they continue to strive to incorporate WIOA's vision and requirements into their AJC service delivery systems.

Key findings

WIOA reaffirms the central role that AJCs play in the workforce system and places even greater emphasis on the goal of providing AJC customers—job seekers, workers, and employers—with expanded access to seamless service delivery across multiple programs. Overall, WIOA's vision for the AJC system stresses the importance of excellent customer service, seamless service delivery, innovative and effective service design, integrated management systems, and high quality staffing.[1] Of particular relevance for comprehensive AJCs, WIOA's vision of an improved and integrated AJC service delivery system emphasizes coordination across partners in ways such as a common intake system, joint outreach activities and referral processes between partners, cross-trained staff organized and managed by function rather than along program lines, shared case management and reporting systems, and integrated performance management.

Among the 40 AJCs, most AJCs sought to foster coordination of service delivery through techniques and mechanisms that could be implemented without requiring changes in federal or state policy, funding requirements, administrative structures, data systems and reporting requirements, or other factors beyond their control. These strategies included at least part-time co-location of a variety of partners at the AJC, center-wide staff meetings, cross-training of staff, coordinated outreach efforts, and a common intake process for customers entering the AJC.

However, although many AJCs pursued strategies to improve service delivery through increased collaboration and coordination between at least some partner programs, they did so within a framework that maintained a program-specific approach to management, staffing, and performance and constrained greater service integration. For example:

- Structural approaches to attain greater alignment of staff and seamless services were not common among the AJCs. About three-quarters of the AJCs had not moved toward a staffing and supervision model organized by function (for example, with a skills development team, a business services team, and so on). Instead, they continued to rely on the traditional program-specific lines for organizing staff and supervision.
- One-Stop Operators and AJC managers lacked center-wide measures or indicators to assess overall performance. Operators and managers also typically lacked access to data from partner programs (other than the data for which they were directly responsible) that might be used to better gauge performance and manage daily operations on a center-wide basis. Partners that ran different programs tended to each have their own management and supervisory hierarchies, along with separate performance measures, data systems, and data-reporting requirements.
- Data sharing across partners was generally very limited. In general, AJC staff at all levels indicated the need for major improvements in the capacity of automated systems to share data, coupled with more robust data sharing practices and procedures, which they thought would greatly facilitate efforts to manage performance across programs and better coordinate services. For example, it was commonplace for frontline workers to have to enter the same data multiple times but not have access to data from other partners' data systems or even their own system that could enhance their ability to serve customers and manage their caseload. Most staff at AJCs created work-arounds using spreadsheets and on-line services to store and retrieve information needed to manage performance and other job functions.

Looking ahead

Our findings suggest that many of the elements associated with seamless service delivery were already implemented by the AJCs in varying combinations and to varying degrees. However, many AJCs will need to make major changes to move toward more fully realizing WIOA's vision.

Looking ahead, two requirements under WIOA that could lead to significant change in AJC service delivery but had yet to be implemented at the time when site visits took place in 2016: (1) using a competitive procurement process to select One-Stop Operators, and (2) requiring all partners to support the costs of AJC infrastructure and shared services.

- **Improving service delivery through competitive selection of One-Stop Operators.** Among the study sites, about three-quarters had not competitively procured their Operators, and only a handful had developed detailed expectations of performance. The implementation of WIOA's competitive procurement requirements in these local areas—and potentially across the country—could prompt changes in the types of Operators (single-entity versus consortium), the types of entities that serve as Operators, and their roles in the management and direct provision of services. The additional requirement for competitive selection to occur at least once every four years might also spur the development of more detailed accountability metrics to gauge the performance of Operators and the AJCs for which they are responsible.
- **Strengthening partner involvement in AJC infrastructure costs.** WIOA strengthens expectations for AJC partner programs to work collaboratively to maintain the AJC service delivery system by specifying that one-stop partner programs must contribute to AJC infrastructure costs, regardless of whether they have an on-site presence. This was not practiced among the AJCs in this study and its implementation may require partners to adopt a very different approach to resource and cost sharing. Among the AJCs in this study, some level of co-location was overwhelmingly viewed as a prerequisite for negotiating partner contributions to support infrastructure costs. Many also relied on informal resource sharing arrangements that reflected and supported partnerships. In light of these attitudes and practices, there may be resistance from partners who have resource constraints or have not helped pay these costs in the past. Alternatively, successful implementation of resource sharing agreements that formalize and reflect partners' contributions may heighten partners' commitment to and involvement in the AJC system, including greater partner presence and co-location at the AJCs, and greater use and tracking of referrals to link customers to the others' services.

Due to the extensive variation across AJCs in terms of the institutional features we examined, WIOA's implementation will unfold differently across the country. It will be important to consider these organizational and institutional differences in AJC service delivery in future examinations of the AJC system—especially when assessing the system's overall effectiveness and its impact on outcomes for job seekers and employers.

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SECTION NOTES

[1] Training and Employment Guidance Letter WIOA NO: 4-15 Operating Guidance for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA or Opportunity Act), August 13, 2015.