A Snapshot of Maryland's TANF/WIOA Alignment Process: "It's the Right Thing to Do"

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If you have questions about this report or other TANF-related topics, please visit OFA Peer TA's website at https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov for more information or to make a technical assistance request.

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INTRODUCTION

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is the first federal legislative reform of the public workforce system in over 16 years. It presents unique opportunities to increase the economic opportunities and stability of disadvantaged jobseekers. WIOA replaces the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, and retains and amends the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 with the goal of expanding access to employment, training, and supportive services for low-income individuals and jobseekers who have had difficulty obtaining employment.

Under the leadership of Governor Larry Hogan, Maryland became one of only 29 states and 2 territories that opted to develop a Combined State Plan which aligns its workforce and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)[1] programs across the state, requiring its 12 Local Workforce Areas to design distinct implementation plans responsive to the population needs in each of Maryland's 24 counties (and Baltimore City). Maryland's WIOA realignment philosophy "places people before performance,"[2] with the goal of integrating supportive services as part of a "people-centered" system that will change how Maryland's workforce operates.

Maryland's TANF/WIOA initiative is significant for a number of reasons:

1) It is the first state to attempt to fully implement its TANF/WIOA vision, born out of eight states that were part of the Office of Family Assistance's Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy (described below in Figure 1) and the leveraging of the Peer TA resources.
2) The state's workforce plan represents the first time in Maryland's history that the workforce development activities of three state agencies is produced in one document with unprecedented input from a wide variety of state, local, national, and federal staff and experts: Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR), Department of Human Services (DHS), and Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS).
3) There are no financial or administrative incentives to include TANF as a mandated partner in Maryland's WIOA workforce overhaul. Maryland's decision to implement a "combined state plan" with equal and meaningful access to TANF recipients reflects its devotion to serve *all* Maryland jobseekers simply because "it's the right thing to do."[3] In fact, adding a TANF alignment to WIOA's implementation significantly increases the complexity of effort required to successfully combine Maryland workforce efforts across multiple agencies and locales.[4]

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[1] Maryland also elected Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program, Reintegration of Ex-Offenders Program, and Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers Program as Combined Plan partner programs.

[2] http://www.dllr.maryland.gov/wdplan/wdstateplan.pdf, page iii.

[3] Sue Page, Assistant State Superintendent, Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Rehabilitation, Maryland Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Initiative: Increasing Earnings of TANF and Workforce Clients, Opening Address, December 15, 2016, Arundel Mills, MD.

[4] Primarily individuals receiving services through the Maryland Department of Human Services' TANF program, as well as those with disabilities receiving services from the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services, and Maryland's adult education population.

4) Maryland's TANF/WIOA planning process provides a model other states can utilize to coordinate TANF/WIOA systems to better serve individuals with multiple barriers to employment. To that end, Maryland has documented its processes in detail resulting in multiple resources, highlighted in Figure 2, that other states and local areas can use, including a Best Practices Guide to assist local area implementation and a roadmap for stakeholder engagement contained in this document.

Figure 1: Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy 2015-2017

SYSTEMS TO FAMILY STABILITY
NATIONAL POLICY ACADEMY

The Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy (Policy Academy) is an 18-month initiative sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance. Through the Policy Academy, eight teams are designing and building collaborative systems within and across agencies to improve family economic security. The Policy Academy has three primary objectives: 1) Build career pathways through job-driven training and alignment of TANF and workforce systems; 2) Improve business processes and systems coordination; and 3) Enhance case management by understanding brain science and applying two-generation approaches. For more information, visit https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/ofa-initiative/388.

This snapshot of Maryland's efforts to date describes the impetus for Maryland's efforts, and the actions it took in advancing its vision through a planning process—described herein as "phases"[5]—which include authentically engaging a broad set of stakeholders and guiding implementation at local levels. It also details the different mechanisms Maryland has used to engage key stakeholders throughout the state.

Figure 2: Maryland TANF/WIOA Resources

Maryland TANF/WIOA Resources

Maryland's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Resource Page
Innovations in Maryland's Local Workforce Plans: A Best Practices Guide
Maryland WIOA Workgroups
Maryland State Combined WIOA Plan
Temporary Cash Assistance WIOA Readiness Surveys
Local Area snapshots of Maryland TANF Recipients
Guidelines for Developing 2016-2020 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Local Workforce Plans
WIOA Memoranda of Understanding & Resource Sharing Agreements

[5] The phases and steps taken by Maryland are described sequentially; however, they often occurred simultaneously or overlapped.

Figure 3 displays a timeline of the steps taken in Maryland and significant accomplishments along the way.

Figure 3: Timeline of Maryland's Efforts

- July 2014: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) passes
- January 2015: Maryland establishes nine WIOA workgroups
- Spring 2015: Upon agencies' and workgroups' recommendation, Governor Hogan decides that Maryland will opt in with TANF as a mandated partner and Maryland will submit a combined WIOA State Plan
- Spring 2015: Maryland participates in Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy and begins working with OFA and its technical assistance team to refine State Plan, develop a strategic action plan to guide implementation activities, and develop state benchmarks
- February 2016: Governor's Workforce Development Board approves State Plan
- April 2016: Maryland submits its Combined State Workforce Plan to federal oversight agencies
- April 2016: Maryland releases guidance for local and regional plans
- August 2016: First state-wide TANF/WIOA Convening
- August 2016: Local plans submitted to the state
- September 2016: DLLR, DHS, MSDE-DORS, and the Governor's Workforce Development Board issue joint policy on WIOA MOUs and RSAs
- October 2016: State Plan approved by federal oversight agencies
- December 2016: Governor's Workforce Development Board conditionally approves Local Plans
- December 2016: Second state-wide TANF/WIOA Convening with 12 Local Area Implementation Teams
- December 2016: WIOA compliant MOUs fully executed
- March 2017: Regional Plans Submitted
- June 2017: All Local and Regional Plans receive final approval from the Governor's Workforce Development Board

Phase 1. Identifying and Assembling TANF/WIOA Alignment Leadership

Two key leadership roles crucial for a successful initiative are sponsors and champions.[6] Sponsors are individuals or agency representatives who have considerable standing, authority, and access to, or control over, resources they can use on behalf of initiatives or collaborations, even if they are not involved in the day-to-day collaborative work. Champions are people or

[6] John M. Bryson and Barbara C. Crosby, "Leadership for the Common Good: Creating Cross-Sector Regimes of Mutual Gain." A paper presented to the Center for Organizational Research initiative, University of California-Irving, January 28, 2005. A previous version of the paper was presented at the International Leadership Association annual conference, Washington, DC, November 5, 2004.

leaders who focus their attention on keeping the collaboration working and achieving its goals.[7] In many cases, champions of an initiative appear first and commit to identifying and engaging sponsors who will support the collaboration. This was the case in Maryland.

Step A. Initial Leadership – TANF/WIOA Champions Emerged

As with most system changes, it is essential for a champion or leader to emerge in the beginning stages who can mobilize stakeholders, sponsors, and support.[8] Representing Maryland's TANF sector, this person was Sara Muempfer, who served as director of workforce development at Maryland's Department of Human Services (DHS). [9] Sara's education and experience in the field of workforce development and her six years working at the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation made her an ideal champion to connect multiple disadvantaged populations to the larger workforce development system in Maryland.

In the area of workforce, one of Maryland's champions is Erin Roth, director of policy, Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning, Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR). In preparation for the development of a combined WIOA plan, Erin led sessions with subject matter experts to develop, draft, and implement multi-agency policy initiatives. She helps lead the legislative process for the division and chairs Maryland's statewide Policy Committee for WIOA—discussed in more detail below. Erin has been passionate and committed to working closely with other leaders from state and local government and a variety of other key stakeholder organizations to ensure effective implementation of the new combined plan.

> *Both Sara and Erin note they are just two champions of many who emerged at Maryland's state and local levels to develop and implement the TANF/WIOA Combined State Plan. According to the two leaders, "It has truly taken a village to move Maryland's system forward."*[10]

Step B. Leadership Partners and Sponsors Solidified: Maryland's Workforce Vision and WIOA Alignment Group are Established[10]

Under the leadership of Governor Larry Hogan, Maryland decided to "hit the reset button" on its workforce systems. This began with DLLR's recognition that other agencies were also engaged in workforce development. Since February 2015, DLLR, DHS, and the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) have been working in partnership to capitalize on the potential opportunities for collaboration and program change available through WIOA. This collaboration is marked by the establishment of a new vision for Maryland's workforce: Putting people before performance. This vision included the creation of the ***Maryland WIOA Alignment Group*** representing the meaningful involvement of state, local,

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7 Ibid

8 Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Stone, M. M. (2006). The design and implementation of cross-sector collaborations: Propositions from the literature. *Public Administration Review*, *66*(s1), 44-55.

9 Sara resigned as director in May 2017.

10 https://www.dllr.state.md.us/employment/wioaconvening.pdf, p. iix

and program leaders as the core partners in the system and acknowledging that 1) not all relationships are equal and 2) trust takes time and transparency.

In accordance with this vision, the WIOA Alignment Group was established to oversee and support the subsequently created WIOA workgroups in their implementation efforts. The Alignment Group includes a balance of key leadership in all core and combined programs represented in the Maryland State Plan.

> *"The renewed focus on serving these deserving populations requires a change in philosophy. Maryland's workforce system can no longer place a label on a job seeker as merely a customer of one single agency. Rather, under this new customer-centric workforce system, the agencies together, with their respective local partners, will identify the services that are needed for the customer. This will be done not by shuffling the customer from one referring agency to another, but through collaboration and increased communication. In doing so, the system focuses on the person before the performance measures an agency reports to federal agencies."*[11]

The Alignment Group is charged with

- ensuring Maryland continues to develop a baseline of performance for serving customers;
- ensuring the message set forth in the State Plan is carried out throughout the system;
- developing formalized customer flow strategies;
- ensuring maximized system efficiencies;
- ensuring the integration of resources connected to all employment and training-related funding;
- ensuring seamless access to information for businesses and jobseekers alike;
- developing shared assessment tools that emphasize customer service;
- ensuring new technologies are harnessed for ease of access for the consumer; and
- developing common branding to effectively promote Maryland's workforce system.[11]

This body is committed to meeting monthly for at least the first two years of implementation and consists of the leadership of state agency partners including DLLR's Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning, DHS's Family Investment Administration, the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services, the Governor's Workforce Development Board, Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS), Local Workforce Development Areas, and local WIOA adult education service providers, including the community colleges. The Alignment Group has served as an invaluable collaborative and governing forum for the discussion of alignment and implementation efforts. Often tackling sensitive issues at these partnership meetings, they are a forum based on honesty, accountability, and transparent communications that serve as opportunities to address real progress and needed improvements throughout Maryland's workforce system.

Phase 2. Collaboration as a Foundation for Planning and Preparing Program Environments for TANF/WIOA Alignment

Key partners from DHS, DLLR, DORS, and other state agencies, as well as representatives from the Governor's Workforce Development Board and 12 Local Workforce Development Areas

[11] From http://www.dllr.state.md.us/employment/wioaworkgroups.pdf.

(Local Areas) worked together to develop a WIOA workforce plan. In addition to establishing the Maryland WIOA Alignment Group, the state used different techniques to provide multiple opportunities for a broad set of stakeholders to offer input on the State Plan. (See Appendix A for an overview of Maryland's stakeholder engagement strategies.)

Step A. Received Technical Assistance

DHS, DLLR, the Governor's Workforce Development Board, and local Baltimore City representatives applied for, and were accepted to participate in, OFA's *Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy* (Policy Academy) in the spring of 2015. During Policy Academy convenings, Maryland developed a solid action plan with the technical assistance provided by OFA federal project officers and Mathematica Policy Research. Maryland leaders report this time as being incredibly helpful, as each agency learned about the others' systems and how each interacts with the workforce system. To illustrate, Maryland is organized as 24 Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) offices, each with its own director and 12 workforce development areas. The relationships between LDSS offices and the workforce development area vary greatly depending on the location. For example, Anne Arundel County, Baltimore County, and Harford County have vendor relationships with workforce entities to operate their TANF programs—meaning they operate separately and distinctly from WIOA. The Policy Academy allowed leaders from different systems an opportunity to ask honest questions and drill deeper into the challenges of working together, such as how to reconcile being governed by or beholden to different respective statutes or laws, performance measures, and federal entities. Discussions facilitated through participation in the Policy Academy ultimately resulted in the establishment of benchmarks for success for Maryland's workforce system.

> *"Understanding the importance of WPR to TANF was crucial in building a meaningful collaboration with DHS."*
>
> *~Maryland DLLR*

Step B. Established and Retooled WIOA Implementation Workgroups

To ensure Maryland's effective implementation of the requirements of the new federal law, Maryland's DLLR also established nine WIOA workgroups comprised of subject matter experts and leaders from a variety of state and local agencies, community colleges, businesses, and key advocacy groups. By design, all workgroups had distinct goals and were co-chaired by DLLR leadership staff and local leadership staff, including representation from LDSS, in an effort to ensure collaborative decision-making and constructive pushback.

Maryland's nine WIOA workgroups initially included

1. Governance,
2. Policy,
3. Fiscal Accountability,
4. American Job Center Operations and Partnerships,
5. Youth Services and Partnerships,
6. Business and Industry Partnerships,
7. Performance Accountability,

8. Labor Market Information and Sector Strategies, and
9. Adult Education and Career Pathways.

Workgroup teams consist of representatives from DLLR, DHS, DORS, adult education providers, LDSS, and the business community, as well as representation from the Governor's Workforce Development Board. These groups, in addition to the Maryland WIOA Alignment Group described in Phase One, were used to inform the WIOA State Plan.

Step C. Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA)[12]/WIOA Readiness Surveys

LDSS partners noted it was essential to provide other partners with a deeper understanding of TANF participants. This was a crucial step in removing any preconceived notions about TANF recipients. As such, TCA readiness surveys were completed by both the LDSS and Local Workforce Development Areas that included Local Area snapshots of TANF recipients[13] assessing each Local Area's current levels of coordination regarding

- assessment tools,
- data sharing,
- co-location of staff and/or services,
- shared performance goals,
- cross training,
- braiding/blending of funding,
- involvement on the local workforce development board, and
- innovative strategies.

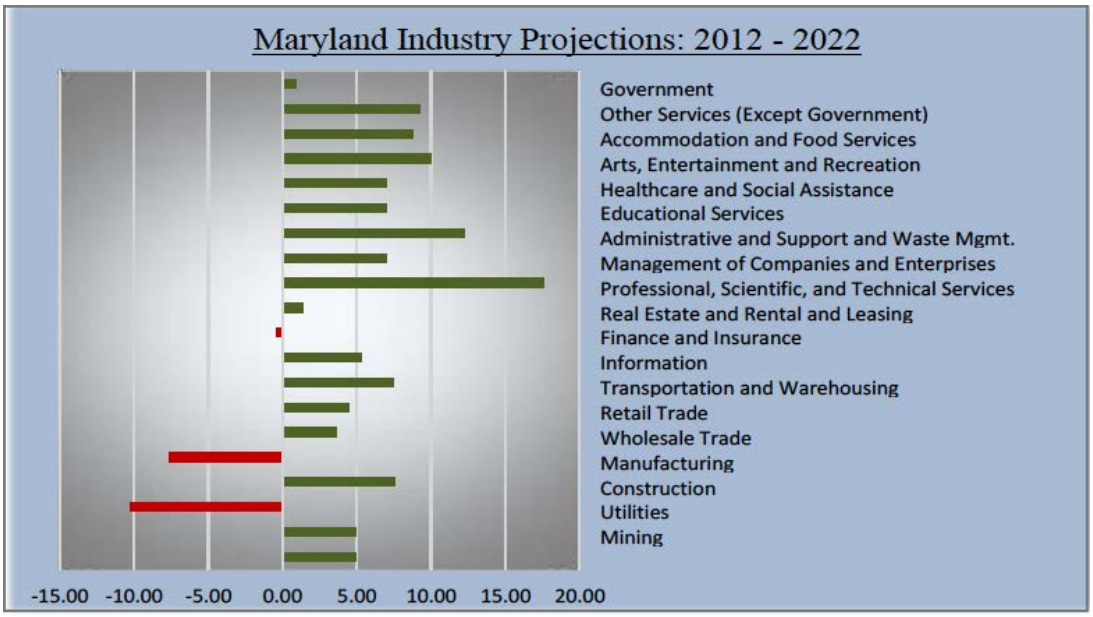
> *"I always thought their people [DLLR] didn't want to serve our [DHS/TANF] people until I found out we are serving a lot of the same people and families anyway and duplicating services."*
>
> *~Local DSS staff person*

Maryland's state and regional economic conditions were also assessed, including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations (see Figure 4).

12 MD refers to TANF as Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA)

13 http://www.dllr.state.md.us/employment/wioaworkgroups.pdf. University of Maryland School of Social Work.

Figure 4: Maryland Industry Projections: 2012-2022[14]



Phase 3. Continued Collaboration Resulting in an Approved Maryland WIOA Combined State Plan

Under WIOA, states were required to create a plan that described the overall strategy for workforce development and how it will be implemented to meet the skill needs of workers, jobseekers, and employers. Maryland's concurrent interagency work on the Combined State Plan (via WIOA Workgroups and participation in OFA's Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy) lasted nearly one year. As an early implementer, Maryland had to balance its initial implementation timeline with the process necessary to create a strong plan with broad stakeholder support and data-driven decision making. This included:

Step A. Strengthening Partnerships and Planning through WIOA Workgroups

In addition to participating in the Policy Academy, Maryland leaders from DHS continued working on the combined plan with DLLR through WIOA workgroups. Workgroups were tasked with providing content for the combined plan and determining Maryland's guiding principles. DHS's goal for this process was to make sure a DHS state-level staff person and at least one LDSS staff person participated on all respective workgroups. This was difficult at first because of WIOA's labor-focused affiliation. Some leaders from LDSS and DORS, for example, felt like they didn't really have a "voice" in process. This perception improved greatly over the following year as more local voices were added to workgroups. According to some Maryland leaders, each respective agency feels like a true partner thanks in large part to DLLR for establishing a truly "transparent" process. Historically, policies and plans of this nature have been developed with no local input, or input is not reflected in what is submitted and finalized. That was not the case with the WIOA planning process in Maryland. Appendix A provides an overview of Maryland's process for engaging stakeholders which lead to the success of the planning process.

[14] http://www.dllr.maryland.gov/wdplan/wdstateplan.pdf, p. xli

Over time, the nine WIOA workgroups were retooled to respond to shifts in focus and goals, resulting in the eight current WIOA workgroups. These eight workgroups operate to ensure effective implementation of the Maryland WIOA State Plan. For example, one new WIOA Workgroup—Monitoring—will concentrate its efforts on monitoring across the system to share best practices and ensure the local systems are complying with WIOA provisions, including priority of service for the WIOA Title I adult program.

All workgroups are charged with

- cultivating best practices;
- developing a systems approach that fosters the inclusion of all core and combined program partners; and
- identifying professional development needs for the system and its partners.

Table 1 below shows the current WIOA workgroups and their specific goals.[15]

Table 1: Maryland's Eight WIOA Workgroups and Key Goals

Work Group	Key Goals
1. Policy	▪ Review statewide policies and programs ▪ Develop guidance for Maryland's workforce system for the implementation of WIOA ▪ Issue policy for the continuous improvement of Maryland's workforce system
2. Fiscal	▪ Determine needed and required fiscal and monitoring policies ▪ Ensure that Local Areas are receiving the guidance they need that is consistent with WIOA ▪ Continue to improve processes re: Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Resource Sharing Agreement (RSA) formulation
3. Performance	▪ Implement new performance accountability measures ▪ Develop data dashboards to "tell the story" of Maryland's workforce system ▪ Ensure that Local Areas are receiving the guidance they need that is consistent with WIOA
4. Business Solutions	▪ Create a robust strategy to increase business involvement in the state's workforce system ▪ Foster the development of Maryland's business services team ▪ Cultivate innovative strategies to address the needs of Maryland's businesses
5. Monitoring	▪ Create a strategy to develop joint monitoring across core and combined partner activities ▪ Ensure partner integration ▪ Share best practices throughout the system

[15] http://www.dllr.state.md.us/employment/wioaworkgroups.pdf.

6. Professional Development	▪ Develop a systems approach to professional developmental needs ▪ Determine best practices for the administration of professional development ▪ Ensure partner integration and cross-training opportunities
7. Career Pathways and Work and Learn Models	▪ Develop a plan to foster career pathway development in Maryland's Local Areas ▪ Create technical assistance opportunities ▪ Ensure partner integration
8. Reemployment Initiatives	• Develop a strategy to foster greater integration of unemployment insurance recipients throughout the workforce system

Step B. Submitting the Combined Plan

Workgroups synthesized ideas and input from group meetings, the state's WIOA Convening working sessions, the state's WIOA policy listserv, and other stakeholder engagement into the combined state plan. The plan was submitted to the Governor's Workforce Development Board for review and was approved on February 11, 2016. In April 2016, Maryland then submitted its Combined State Plan to the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), and that document was approved on October 1, 2016. It was the first time in Maryland's history that the workforce development activities of three state agencies were incorporated in one plan. The combined plan emphasizes customer service and government efficiency, and how Maryland can meet the needs of businesses and the state's jobseekers.

Step C: Measuring Success

Maryland's team utilized the technical assistance provided by the Policy Academy to develop clear strategic goals and potential measurable benchmarks to define the state workforce system's success.

Maryland's benchmarks for success are intended to allow stakeholders to look at outcomes important to the state's system, beyond federally mandated WIOA and Work Participation Rate measures. Originally, these benchmarks were being developed solely for TANF/WIOA jobseekers; however, after six weeks of public comments from more than 900 stakeholders through the WIOA listserv, their utility became clear. Comments were reviewed and additional, intensive technical assistance was provided through the continued support of HHS.

The state now intends to use the benchmarks for all WIOA populations as they measure outcomes not typically captured through workforce systems, but indicative of financial stability and systems change. The Benchmarks for Success include the following five goals organized around an overall vision to "increase the earning capacity of Marylanders by maximizing access to employment, skills and credentialing, life management skills, and supportive services."[16]

[16] https://www.dllr.state.md.us/employment/wioagoalbenchmarks.pdf

Table 2 below describes Maryland's strategic goals and provides examples of benchmarks to be measured.

Table 2: Strategic Goals and Benchmarks

Strategic Goals	Benchmarks
Strategic Goal 1: Increase earning capacity of Maryland's workforce system customers by maximizing access to **employment**	▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who obtain employment and earn at least 200% of the federal poverty level from X% to Y% by date ▪ Increase the median wage of Maryland's workforce system customers by X% ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who earn at least 200% of the federal poverty level for 4 consecutive quarters from X% to Y% by date ▪ Increase the number of business that are formally engaged in the workforce system
Strategic Goal 2: Increase earning capacity of Maryland's workforce system customers by maximizing access to and use of **skills and credentialing**	▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who obtain an industry recognized credential from X% to Y% by date ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who increase in their Educational Functioning Level ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who earn a High School Diploma ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who obtain an occupational skills training completion from X% to Y% by date
Strategic Goal 3: Increase earning capacity of Maryland's workforce system customers by maximizing access to and use of **life management skills**	▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who complete a financial literacy course ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who demonstrate essential workplace skills from X% to Y% by date ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who actively

	participate in their individual case plan from X% to Y% by date
Strategic Goal 4: Increase earning capacity of Maryland's workforce system customers by **eliminating barriers to employment**	▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who receive needed **child care services** from X% to Y% by date ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who receive needed **transportation services** from X% to Y% by date ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who receive needed **substance use services** from X% to Y% by date ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who receive needed **mental health services** from X% to Y% by date ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who receive needed **physical health services** from X% to Y% by date ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who receive needed **housing services** from X% to Y% by date ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers who receive needed **custodial parent child support services** from X% to Y% by date
Strategic Goal 5: Strengthen and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Maryland's workforce system	▪ Create and use a common comprehensive employment readiness assessment accessible to all across the workforce development system by date ▪ Create and use a common case management tool across the workforce development system by date ▪ Increase the % of workforce partners that are integrated through co-location, cross-training, and/or technological access by date

	▪ Create and implement a professional development system for the workforce development system by date ▪ Increase the annual %of workforce development system partner organizations who provide formal benefits counseling ▪ Increase the annual % of Maryland's workforce system customers co-enrolled in WIOA workforce programs

The creation of, and agreement on, Maryland's benchmarks for success has been a long and difficult process. It took approximately 18 months of challenging conversations to agree on the vision and goals for the final benchmarks.

All stakeholders are committed to developing these measures. They have set the bar high for several reasons:

- to drive stakeholder conversations regarding resource allocations and how the system can improve,
- to push the system toward difficult conversations it might not otherwise have, and
- to intentionally set a high-performance bar for the entire TANF/WIOA and workforce systems.

> *"This strategy does not mean that Maryland is going to forsake all performance measures. Rather, it requires a change in focus from numbers and figures on a page to people who walk through the doors of any one of Maryland's American Job Centers, local Department of Social Services offices, or other local career centers. It means that Maryland's workforce system is dedicated to improving the lives of Marylanders."*[16]

Next steps to making the benchmarks actionable include

1. the formulation of a reference guide containing common definitions and guidance on how to use the guide as a leadership tool,
2. the establishment of data collection methods,
3. the creation of data dashboards to measure success,
4. the collection of baseline data, and
5. the inclusion of different partners who may not yet be involved but are key to achieving the benchmark vision.

Table 3 outlines a timetable of activities associated with implementing Maryland's benchmarks for success.

[17] http://www.dllr.maryland.gov/wdplan/wdstateplan.pdf, p. ii

Table 3: Benchmarks for Success Implementation Timetable[18]

Timeframe	Action
August – October 2016	Departments of Labor, Human Services, and Education held a public comment period to vet the benchmarks of success for Maryland's WIOA system with experts from across the state
December 2016 – June 2017	Finalized the benchmarks of success for the Maryland WIOA system Made the benchmarks actionable; the state worked to define variables, determine appropriate data sources, identify benchmarks that were not yet measurable, etc. to be used for measuring the success of Maryland's workforce system
July 2017 – August 2017	Developed action plan to implement this major system change
September 2017 – December 2019	Execute action plan

Phase 4. Advancing Maryland's Vision for a New Workforce System: State Implementation and Local Area Guidance

The same spirit of collaboration and dedication to communication that formed Maryland's combined state plan is also the approach being taken for the implementation process. Maryland's established WIOA Alignment Workgroup will ensure that, like its development, the implementation of the plan and the integration of services is as seamless as possible.

Step A. State Issues Local Area Guidance

In April 2016, Maryland released formal guidance for local and regional plans through its *Guidelines for Developing 2016-2020 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Local Workforce Plans*. However, Maryland is dedicated to ensuring that communication regarding the state's implementation efforts is not a singular event. The WIOA partners are committed to incorporating mass communication systems, such as GovDelivery, and social media (#WIOAinMD) to ensure that important messages regarding implementation are continually provided to frontline staff and local providers. Furthermore, Maryland is dedicated to utilizing WIOA implementation funding to ensure that local and state staff are provided with professional development and other training opportunities.

[18] https://www.dllr.state.md.us/employment/wioagoalbenchmarkstimeline.pdf

Step B. Local Area Plans are Submitted and Implemented

Local Areas submitted their plans to the governor in July 2016, and plans were conditionally approved in January 2017 and finally approved in June 2017. DLLR and the Governor's Workforce Development Board took an intensive, collaborative approach to reviewing the WIOA Local Plans and intentionally included partners from DHS and DORS on the evaluation teams. This was a first for the state and it was done in an effort to ensure partner perspectives were well-represented in the WIOA Local Plans. By modeling strong collaboration at the state level, state partners hoped to encourage its Local Areas to work hard to include partner perspectives when developing the Local Plans. In cases where local partners were not engaged in the drafting, state reviewers asked Local Areas to regroup and discuss with partners, revise, and resubmit. This was a time-consuming, but worthwhile, process.

Maryland's state plan will be implemented locally through TCA/WIOA partnerships and phased in over a four-year period across the 12 Local Areas to allow for strategic planning and evaluation of chosen interventions and strategies within each Local Area. All 24 of Maryland's Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) fall into the 12 Local Areas and roll into the phase-in schedule respectively. The implementation schedule is based on the data gleaned from the TCA/WIOA readiness surveys completed by both the Local Areas and LDSS. This allows for strategic and thoughtful roll-out, flexibility based on crucial local needs and input, rapid cycle evaluation of implemented strategies, and the ability to change course as needed.

Step C. Local Area Plans are Given Specific Policy Guidance

Because states must comply with the Resource Sharing Agreement (RSA) requirements under WIOA, Maryland issued Local Area policy guidance for WIOA Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) & Resource Sharing Agreements, including sample MOU, RSA, and Dispute Resolution templates. The MOU/RSA policy took a year to develop and requires that WIOA MOUs contain provisions regarding several key components, including priority of service. This policy is significant because at its root, it represents structure, money, and power. Maryland's MOU/RSA policy is the first of its kind, representing a substantial shift in standard operating procedures from the previous autonomy local areas experienced with respect to how resources were shared. The MOU/RSA policy is the outcome of profound collaborative efforts on the state's part that were able to transcend discord, disagreement, politics, and personalities.

Phase 5: State Leverages TANF/WIOA Collaboration for Additional Opportunities and Funding Mechanisms

WIOA has laid the groundwork for state and local level system coordination. Making TANF a mandatory WIOA partner creates more impetus for improved career pathways design, the development of job-focused sector strategies, and the inclusion of strategies and populations that may have previously been unattended to or otherwise overlooked. Recognizing this potential and momentum around its TANF/WIOA collaboration, Maryland has already begun leveraging additional opportunities and innovations throughout the state. The following projects/programs are moving the state's WIOA efforts forward, and Appendix B provides a more detailed overview of each respective project/program.

1. Project IMPROVE
2. Sector-based strategies
    a. Apprenticeship Demonstration Grant
    b. EARN Maryland
3. Two-Generation Family Economic Security Commission
4. MD Think
5. The Maryland Skilled Immigrants Task Force

CONCLUSIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER STATES

This snapshot of Maryland's TANF/WIOA combined state plan efforts offers a useful example for other states looking to align their WIOA work programs to increase and expand TANF participation in WIOA services. At the state level, under Governor Larry Hogan's leadership, Maryland's goal is to increase the earning capacity of Marylanders by increasing wages, engaging employers, offering occupational skills training and credentialing, addressing personal and family challenges that interfere with employment, and improving interagency partnerships. To that end, the state developed WIOA workgroups, guidelines for Local Areas, implementation plans, and benchmarks that stand to become a one-of-a-kind national model. All of the state's efforts have

- recognized customer, program, and partner needs;
- built authentic partnerships based on transparent communications;
- continued to strengthen internal partnerships and alignment; and
- documented practices for replication by other states.

Throughout the various phases of Maryland's experience, some noteworthy lessons emerged.

Lesson One: **Strong, committed champions, sponsors, and stakeholders are key in seeing efforts through to fruition.**

> Maryland leaders understood that cross-sector collaboration is a difficult and lengthy process. Part of Maryland's success was
>
> - starting with a clear vision,
> - consistently bringing leaders together through the WIOA Alignment Workgroup, and
> - making room at the table for a variety of stakeholder voices and opinions.
>
> For example, in 2016, more local voices and representation were added to the Alignment Group to balance out the state voices. Such actions go a long way in establishing and maintaining a true collaboration where there is a high level of buy-in from stakeholders at every level. As Erin Roth notes, "This isn't top-down leadership; this is a collaborative process."

Lesson Two**: Building a collaboration structure representing different agencies and sectors and informing collaborators of the interconnectedness of their services is essential for effective partnerships, planning, and implementation.**

Maryland leadership's ability to include, listen to, and integrate feedback (positive and negative) from a diverse set of stakeholders, as well as to make needed course corrections was essential to successful collaboration. Maryland accomplished this through a variety of mechanisms, most notably, the formation of cross-agency, multiple stakeholder WIOA workgroups that proved key in helping states concentrate their planning efforts.

***Lesson Three*: Building and maintaining TANF/WIOA partnerships requires transparency and authenticity from all parties and a willingness to make needed changes and improvements.**

Maryland understood that partners must be engaged continually—this means meeting regularly and often, which requires implementing processes for ongoing communication and feedback that are inclusive of all stakeholder and partner voices and the ability to manage disagreement and varying viewpoints. Maryland provided multiple opportunities for authentic input from a broad variety of stakeholders to ensure their plan was informed both by those who will implement it and by those intended to benefit from it.

***Lesson Four*: Have realistic expectations. Not all local areas will be ready to move forward with implementation at the same rate.**

Maryland developed local area guidance *based on local input* (including local level frontline staff). Collecting this input and information was crucial and is ongoing, evidenced by the multiple opportunities Maryland leaders created for local areas to meet and develop implementation plans based on their respective, unique needs and circumstances. This process helps ensure local level buy-in and willingness without a loss of autonomy in the implementation process.

***Lesson Five*: It is critical to view the business sector as a partner and a client.**

Maryland has positioned itself to make certain that investments in the state's workforce system result in the continuous improvement of a comprehensive and robust system providing the state's businesses with the skilled workforce needed to compete in an ever-changing global economy. In doing so, Maryland will continue to take a customer-focused approach to workforce development issues to successfully meet both jobseeker and business needs.

Starting with a clear vision, developing multiple ways to authentically engage key agencies and a broad range of partners, providing clear and transparent implementation guidance, encouraging co-location of staff and data sharing, and having realistic expectations, states can develop plans that can be used to realize the full innovation and opportunity WIOA offers.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: An Overview of Maryland's WIOA Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

Stakeholder engagement is a key element of every state's WIOA planning and implementation process. In Maryland, DLLR had more recently incorporated a partnership-oriented process for policy development, but its stakeholder engagement and collaboration around the WIOA Combined State Plan formulation process has been nearly unprecedented. The process has included the following.

- Representation of all major stakeholder agencies and organizations in WIOA workgroups
  - DLLR, DHS, DORS, the Governor's Workforce Development Board, research partners, the business community, the philanthropic community, and technical assistance providers were invited to the table. In Maryland, workforce development is locally driven; therefore, DLLR highlighted how this partnership benefited each respective agency and its clients. This was essential in building partnerships because change can be difficult. Local Area agencies have been used to doing things a certain way, so highlighting the benefits of change for them was essential.

- Adequate TANF stakeholder representation and participation
  - Maryland has made it a point to have local DSS (LDSS) representation on all Local Area workforce boards, even though this representation is not mandated by WIOA at the federal level.
    - Maryland also administered readiness surveys assessing each Local Area's current levels of TANF/workforce coordination and collected and reviewed data on state and regional economic conditions, including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations.
  - Maryland made certain that high-level leaders from the LDSS and other decision-makers from partnering agencies have adequate representation on local workforce development boards and continue to serve on the WIOA Alignment Group. This ensures there is local TANF program representation for alignment, effective operations, compliance, evaluation, and partnership purposes.
  - The state conducted monthly in-person WIOA Alignment Workgroup meetings.

- Mechanisms for virtual partner and stakeholder engagement
  - Online WIOA resources that include meeting schedules, workgroup information, minutes, members, and key documents and resources.
  - WIOA listerv with electronic feedback/submission.
    - After the initial phase of policy drafting was complete, Maryland disseminated the draft policy to key stakeholders for a review and comment period through its listserv of 900+ self-subscribed members.

- The review and comment period provided stakeholders with a minimum of two weeks for comment and review of the policy.
    - Maryland did multiple review and comment periods, starting with sending initial drafts to a primary network of stakeholders selected to review and provide initial feedback and guidance on early drafts, and then sent subsequent drafts out for review to the entire listserv.
- Maryland's WIOA Alignment Group and subject matter experts then reviewed, discussed, and vetted more than 200 specific comments before revising and finalizing the combined state plan.

- Webinars on WIOA topics with discussion guides for attendees.
- Incorporation of mass communication systems, such as GovDelivery and social media (#WIOAinMD), and branding a new, state-wide workforce logo reflecting the partnering entities to ensure that important messages regarding WIOA implementation are continually provided to, and reflective of, stakeholders, including frontline staff and local providers.

➢ State-wide convenings

- Maryland held two state-wide convenings that communicated the vision for an integrated system, discussed best practices, and afforded partners from all levels the opportunity to discuss issues as the combined plan was developed and was being implemented.
    - In August 2016, delegations from Maryland's 12 Local Areas met to review Maryland's Combined State Plan, obtain final regulation guidance, and to formulate local plans. Attendees included Local Area representatives, DHS, DLLR, DORS, LDSS, adult education community colleges, local workforce boards, the public school system, community service organizations, Department of Corrections, and Job Corps.
    - A second Maryland Workforce WIOA Convening was held in December 2016. This meeting focused on how the state and Local Areas might design and implement WIOA initiatives that will increase the earnings of low-income jobseekers who are served by the TANF and/or workforce systems. Approximately 146 representatives from Maryland's DHS, MSDE, and DLLR were present, forming 12 Local Area teams. Also present were approximately 50 state and federal staff providing support to the Local Area teams.

Appendix B: Additional TANF/WIOA Collaboration

1. Project IMPROVE: Due to Maryland's strong performance with the Policy Academy in jumpstarting the WIOA/TANF partnership, Maryland was selected as a recipient of additional technical assistance via Project IMPROVE.

Project IMPROVE provides training and evaluation technical assistance to sites that are developing a program intervention intended to improve outcomes for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients.

In collaboration with its WIOA partners, Maryland will leverage Project IMPROVE to focus on the continued development of the TANF and WIOA collaboration by further developing and refining program innovations that can improve outcomes for TANF participants. Three local sites—Baltimore County, Frederick County, mid-Maryland (Carroll and Howard Counties)—were chosen to participate based on their readiness, willingness, capacity, quality of local workforce plans, and the work their implementation team completed during the last state-wide WIOA Convening in December 2016.

Through Project IMPROVE, these sites will

- learn a process for innovation and continuous program improvement;
- develop and implement a plan to pilot, or "road test," a program intervention and collect data on the experience; and
- consider findings from the road test to refine and improve the intervention.

The WIOA Alignment Group is working on a mechanism to share what is learned from Project IMPROVE statewide, likely a Community of Learning. In addition, the University of Maryland School of Social Work will be intimately involved with the project to learn the process and assist with ongoing technical assistance and evaluation.

2. Sector-Based Strategies: Maryland recognizes that businesses are the principle stakeholders and customers of the workforce system insofar as they receive the benefits of a pipeline of skilled workers equipped with the knowledge and abilities needed for the changing workforce. Maryland's WIOA partners are working together to ensure quality customer service to businesses. Previously, Maryland's business outreach has been disjointed as agencies independently built relationships with businesses without collaboration or coordination. As a result, multiple agencies from state and local entities make multiple, and sometimes overlapping, inquiries of businesses. Thus, Maryland's workforce and economic agencies are coordinating their collaborations with the needs of and input from the business community. Many of the Maryland target recipients of sector-based strategies are underserved populations, who overlap with the state's TANF population.

- Apprenticeship Demonstration Grant: Maryland's DLLR has received exclusive federal funding to establish an Apprenticeship Innovation Fund. The federal grant allows Maryland to provide incentives for innovative apprenticeship solutions for Maryland's businesses. This initial investment of more than $620,000 is a part of a USDOL ApprenticeshipUSA Expansion Grant, which was awarded to Maryland in October 2016. DLLR plans to use this award to more strategically align apprenticeships with Maryland's workforce system, to expand existing traditional apprenticeship opportunities, and to create new opportunities grounded in labor market demand. The

Apprenticeship Innovation Fund will provide seed money to businesses committed to creating new, non-traditional, and registered apprenticeship opportunities to meet their workforce talent pipeline needs. Maryland was the only state awarded funding from the USDOL to create a fund to expand innovative, sustainable programs aimed at expanding Registered Apprenticeship strategies.

- EARN Maryland: EARN (Employment Advancement Right Now) Maryland, which has been recognized as a national best practice for its innovation, is an industry-led program that encourages collaboration among employers, non-profits, higher education, local workforce development boards, and local governments. EARN is a state-funded DLLR initiative that provides training opportunities for Maryland's jobseekers and those individuals seeking to obtain additional training to further their careers in a wide variety of fields. Partnerships have been formed to advance careers in health care, construction, biotechnology, cybersecurity and information technology, transportation and logistics, and many more. While there is wide variety in the partnerships funded through a DLLR competitive grant process, all partnerships are driven by industry needs and have many business partners involved in shaping each individual program. A recent study on the economic impact of EARN Maryland found that for every dollar that the state invests into the program, $14.88 in additional economic activity is created in Maryland. Comparatively, the national average return on investment for workforce development programs is $3.41. More than 700 employers have participated in the program, which has resulted in more than 1,771 (84%) Marylanders obtaining employment and an estimated 3,500 incumbent workers advancing their skills. Under Governor Hogan's leadership, the fiscal year 2018 budget for EARN Maryland is double that of past years, with an added $4 million investment in cyber and green jobs training.

3. Two-Generation Family Economic Security Commission: On March 9, 2017, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan signed an executive order establishing a Two-Generation Family Economic Security Commission (Commission) and pilot program to study the Two-Generation, or "Two-Gen," approach—a public policy initiative that seeks to break the cycle of multigenerational poverty through a family-centered approach to service delivery. The commission will investigate policy gaps, opportunities, and best practices while also considering how to better leverage funding sources to enhance and sustain the Two-Generation approach. The commission will develop recommendations on how the state can link programs and services that create opportunities for both parents and children, particularly in the areas of education, economic stability, and family engagement. The commission will be comprised of state officials, including representatives of the Maryland General Assembly, as well as several state and local agencies including DHR and DLLR. Additionally, Governor Hogan will appoint five members, including one parent with experience in child-welfare advocacy and community-action partnerships.

- DLLR's deputy assistant secretary, a champion of Maryland's Two-Gen efforts, participated in a webinar, *Pockets of Innovation and Promise for Maryland's Families*, as part of ACF's Advancing Family Economic and Social Well-Being webinar series, to highlight how Maryland is leveraging opportunities through its TANF/WIOA alignment to support Two-Gen efforts.

4. MD Think: DHS was awarded over $195 million in federal funding to build a groundbreaking technology platform that will transform the state's ability to deliver vital human services to Marylanders. Maryland's Total Human-services Information Network, or MD THINK, is a cloud-based data repository that will break down traditional silos and data barriers between state agencies and provide integrated access to programs administered by agencies including DHS, the Department of Health, the Department of Juvenile Services, and DLLR. MD THINK is the product of two years of work by DHS and other agencies to develop an innovative design and project plan to modernize the state's human services technology infrastructure and customer service process. MD THINK's use of a cloud-based platform is expected to deliver significant cost savings, streamline program operations, and increase agency productivity. Most importantly, enhanced data analytics will better enable state agencies to deliver the highest levels of service to Marylanders. The first phase of the nearly $200 million revamping of the current system will focus on helping streamline and enhance service delivery to children and families. Data management and data analytics are key elements that better enable the bundling and delivery of services especially for the TANF/WIOA alignment and Two-Generation approach being piloted in Maryland to combat multi-generational poverty.

5. The Maryland Skilled Immigrants Task Force: The Maryland Skilled Immigrants Task Force (task force) was jointly established by DLLR and DHS in June 2016. The task force is a consortium of public and private workforce development organizations that seek to leverage skills that foreign-trained immigrants bring to the United States to meet local job market demand. "Skilled immigrants" are individuals who have acquired extensive education and/or work experience abroad. While these new Americans come to Maryland ready to work and offer great potential and benefits to the labor market, including new skills, languages, and cultural knowledge, they often face barriers to full employment. Barriers include lack of written and spoken English language proficiency, lack of professional networks, lack of career pathways, undervalued education and credentials, and expensive and difficult licensing evaluation and acquirement processes. The task force aims to foster a win-win environment whereby immigrants secure jobs that match their professional and educational background, and businesses have access to a skilled workforce to meet their needs to successfully compete in the global, regional, and local economies. The task force consists of representatives from Maryland DHS, DLLR, community colleges, refugee resettlement agencies, American Job Centers, the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, and many non-profit organizations that help immigrants achieve integration in their U.S. communities.