



Fostering TANF/WIOA Collaboration Sustainability in Action: The Nevada Story

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Communication is key for a successful TANF/WIOA collaboration.
- An innovative recruitment strategy to recruit high school students from at-needs areas not only addresses Nevada's staffing concerns, but also provides a unique opportunity for students to secure good stable jobs working for the state of Nevada in Workforce Development Unit (WDU) or TANF offices.
- Nevada's use of regional labor market data helps link their customers to in-demand, higher paying fields.
- Nevada began a priority initiative to better assist refugees and other immigrant populations.



OVERVIEW

Since 2014, states have embarked on coordination between Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs and the workforce system to improve service delivery

and reduce duplication. The passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014 served as a catalyst for many state TANF and workforce system leaders to focus efforts to coordinate client services serving low-income or vulnerable populations. In 2018 and 2019, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance (OFA), developed a [series of briefs on TANF/WIOA collaboration](#) designed to highlight innovative coordination strategies between TANF and WIOA programs.

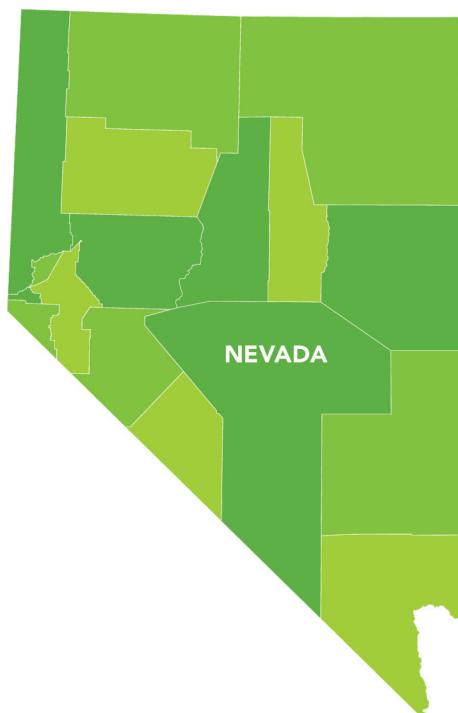
In 2022, OFA conducted an update of five collaborative efforts to communicate best practices and share how the collaboration has sustained through time and evolved as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to include [Nevada](#). This brief provides an update to the successful TANF and WIOA Collaboration in Nevada.



BACKGROUND

Nevada's collaboration has been strong since the implementation of WIOA in 2015. The restructuring initiative was encouraged by the governor, which resulted in workforce, economic, education, and social service stakeholders collaborating regularly as a workforce system to plan a client-focused integration of TANF and WIOA services as outlined in Nevada's [unified state plan](#).

These goals included joint service delivery, resource sharing, and shared learning. Cash assistance and employment supports are offered through Nevada's TANF program to low-income families with dependent children. Work-eligible adults must participate in the New Employees of Nevada (NEON) program, which connects participants to adult education providers, community colleges, or WIOA-funded employment and training services. WIOA services are offered to job seekers statewide and include adult basic education, job search assistance, occupational training, and employment supports.



Nevada has two main comprehensive WIOA regions, each receiving strategic support from a local workforce board: Nevadaworks, based in Reno and serving Nevada's northern counties, and Workforce Connections, based in Las Vegas and serving Nevada's southern counties. Both WIOA programs prioritize serving low-income individuals and those with significant barriers to employment. However, most WIOA-funded services are available to individuals regardless of their income level.

Since the original collaboration, Nevada has continued to improve on its goals in a way that has not only strengthened collaboration, but also benefited its customers. Joint service delivery continues to allow staff to fully assist customers by connecting workforce customers to TANF and other benefit programs, providing job preparation for TANF participants, and matching customers to educational and training opportunities.

Co-location of services and expanding the settings for service delivery to public libraries and other community locations have allowed Nevada to deliver WIOA and TANF resources in more locations. Shared learning has streamlined collaborative practices for Nevada through training opportunities, frequent cross-program interactions, open lines of communication, and data tracking.



COVID-19 MANAGEMENT

Nevada navigated the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic in a manner that enabled it to think more creatively and find innovations to benefit both customers and staff. The state had a strong foundation going into the pandemic, so it was easier for it to keep the collaboration intact when things shut down.

NEON and WDU staff initially struggled with the inability to meet face-to-face, both internally and with customers. Nevada moved to adapt all trainings to online, but there was a learning curve for all involved. To aid in the transition to the online programming, NEON provided participants with laptops to ensure they could still access trainings and complete activities. NEON used its funds to help provide internet installation and access to clients in need.

The COVID-19 pandemic also encouraged policy and practice adaptions for NEON staff and their service delivery. Under the guidance and direction of OFA through [ACF Program Instruction 2020-01](#), the NEON program relaxed and, in some cases, removed some TANF and NEON work requirements.

This improved access for struggling customers during a time when they were unable to access childcare, transportation, and employment and training opportunities. For example, certain pre-eligibility requirements were temporarily removed, such as in-person orientations at

“ COVID allowed us to learn more about our clients and help customers develop new skills.

-VANESSA RODENBERG, NEON MANAGER

NEON offices and a job search assignment. The NEON requirement of an in-person assessment was also adjusted and replaced with a virtual or phone interview option. Personal Responsibility Plan activities were changed, and more flexibility was granted to customers who were participating or attempting to participate in required work activities. Policies that required customers to be actively seeking employment or risk non-compliance measures and sanctions were also temporarily relaxed.

To increase efficiency and ease burdens during lockdowns, Nevada permitted the use of digital signatures and electronic submission of necessary documentation. The COVID pandemic also jumpstarted the use of SARA, a database for electronic communication systems. The system holds documents in a central location and allows communication with customers. The shared information and central communication provided by the SARA system simplified case management for NEON case managers by providing flexibility and allowing them to share responsibility of cases which helped ease workloads. The system also offered a more client-centric approach by allowing customers to be assisted by any case manager.

Customer engagement and connection was also a challenge during the pandemic. However, prior to the shutdown, Nevada was using several strategies to keep its customers engaged, which helped ease the transition when the shutdown occurred. These included calling them monthly and offering distance learning opportunities. After the shutdown, Nevada expanded their customer support by assisting them with the transition to online schooling for their kids and encouraging them to do self-study online for a GED or other educational skills. This helped create a more seamless transition for some customers who were able to begin training in new pathways when in-person vocational training was offered again.



COLLABORATION SUSTAINABILITY

Nevada credits its collaboration success to the longevity of staff as the majority of Nevada leadership started their careers as case managers and have moved up in the system.

Leaders understand the work from all levels which adds a unique perspective. Nevada also offers some tangible recommendations for other sites that have contributed to the strength of their collaboration.

Communication is key. Over the last five years, Nevada has opened the lines of communication between its offices, which has streamlined collaboration. Nevada holds a virtual monthly statewide all-staff meeting where staff at all levels have the chance to interact and connect. Case managers and social workers from all teams have a great relationship and regularly communicate with each other through email, phone calls, and Teams channels. The constant and regular communication has enabled the state to create new business contacts and provide a better experience for its customers.

Co-location of services and staff. Physical proximity is extremely important in terms of both the location of offices and the layout. In addition to Career Hubs (aka one-stop shops) and affiliate sites, both NEON and WDU staff have offices in the same building on different floors at the main southern district location and offices in the mall complex in their main northern district location. Working out of the same general area provides opportunities for warm handovers where staff will walk customers over to the other offices for services.

Cross-training and knowledge of both departments. Nevada believes that a shared understanding of what staff at all levels are responsible for at both the macro and micro levels is key to effective collaboration. This involves detailed knowledge of individual process and practice, not just knowing a job description but really understanding the process for all involved and the aspects of all services provided. Nevada has had the advantage and opportunity to participate in some larger state projects that really brought them together and taught all the pieces of everyone's job roles (such as Project 354 or Work Ready Communities). Nevada has also worked within the WIOA framework to cross-train its system partners, educators, and some employers on social service concepts.

Building relationships with employers and creating strong partnerships. WIOA required relationships with employers and brought them to the table. Building those employer relationships and gaining their support makes a huge difference. According to Nevada's Workforce Development Manager, "you always need to show up to everything you're invited to, no matter how relevant you think it is to your mission and realize that it is an opportunity to network. If your partner is hosting a job fair, a resource fair, or even if there is an event that doesn't seem particularly relevant to you, it is

PARTNERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

"We love our partnership with DWSS. We were optimistic that by having ties between DWSS (the group helping us source the right profile of learner) and the Nevada workforce groups (who ideally would help source employers), that we would have the perfect team to serve learners from start to finish (and change their lives)!"

**-ADMISSIONS AND RECRUITMENT,
READYTRACK**

"The TANF/WIOA collaboration has all been very positive. I have deeper empathy for the clientele that we serve. Professionally, I have access to information that most people never even heard about and I'm able to share that with them and help them with their clients. I'm able to prescreen participants more thoroughly and make sure they get the assistance they need or identify barriers that may have otherwise been overlooked."

**-SPECIAL PROJECTS CAREER COACH,
CAREER HUB AMERICAN JOB CENTER**

still an opportunity to form relationships." It was not easy to create strong relationships, but Nevada was able to capture their interest by combining WIOA and TANF funding streams to deliver higher-skilled talent to fill more advanced professional roles. This was accomplished by identifying employer needs, tailoring a training program to their specifications, recruiting, assessing talent, and training them in a high-level environment. Nevada now works with partners and employers that are willing to train and hire a more diverse workforce.

Holistic approach to case management and services. Nevada stresses the importance of a holistic approach to serving customers.

- **Application of joint knowledge.** Through cross-training and information sharing, case managers have knowledge of both workforce and public assistance services that allow them to better meet customer needs.

- **Assessment tools.** Nevada has created better screening tools to assist customers with both TANF and WIOA services. On the NEON side, customer barriers are identified during the Post Approval Assessment. Social workers are consulted, and then supportive services are provided to resolve barriers. To further ensure success, WDU provides customers with a thorough skills assessment and a training process that includes soft and cognitive skill measurement and career exploration in addition to their technical training.
- **Simultaneous career development.** While working with NEON case managers, customers are simultaneously referred to WDU for career exploration. Nevada took guidance from the [Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative](#), as studies have shown that individuals who are in substance abuse recovery show a high success rate when given opportunities to improve their environment and are more successful in their recovery when led to meaningful career opportunities and higher wages. Nevada applied these principles to customers who had other barriers. Using this approach, Nevada seeks to remove customer barriers while working on career development at the same time with the goal of removing or managing all barriers prior to an interview with an employer.
- **Reverse referral process.** Nevada's WDU has set up a network of partner agencies, nonprofits, and small businesses who can identify potential trainees of vocational tracks who have not interacted with the Welfare division. These reverse referral partners are able to perform a light screening before referring the individual to WDU for inclusion in training cohorts. This allows WDU to cast a wider net for service provision to the public and gives smaller entities the ability to deliver more opportunities to their clients than would have otherwise been possible for them.
- **Services and benefits.** Nevada stresses delivering material services as opposed to just subsequent services such as resume help or access to job boards. By offering more tangible ways to assist its customers, Nevada can be proactive and address barriers prior to a workforce referral. Examples of these services include transportation, gas reimbursement, DMV vouchers for IDs, car repairs, registration, insurance, laptops, internet access, childcare, clothing vouchers, health cards, alcohol awareness cards, CPR certifications, and other licensing and certifications. Additionally, WDU continues to mentor customers in the areas of soft skills, life skills, crisis/barrier management while they



are going through training classes, and up to one year of job retention case management. Lastly, Nevada credits [business process redesign \(BPR\)](#) efficiencies as a component for achieving its work participation rate.

Engagement at all levels, top-down and bottom-up. Collaboration is a top-down process and requires engagement at all levels. Creating communication networks for all staff levels is beneficial for everyone. For example, the Nevada field staff has their own Teams channel that does not include management. To build its train-to-hire pipeline, Nevada had a lot of support and buy-in from the director of the state. Additionally, listening to staff feedback can improve processes. At the beginning of its collaboration, Nevada implemented a quarterly newsletter that highlighted areas from both departments. However, that was not really working for staff. Nevada now holds a monthly statewide all-staff meeting, where they meet virtually over Teams to share new ideas, and discuss issues and best practices.

Data sharing. A comprehensive data sharing component is not yet in place for Nevada but is a priority for the collaboration. For NEON, one of the main barriers to creating and implementing a shared data program is staffing shortages at sites across Nevada; there are not enough human resources currently to do the work. The federal reporting requirements for NEON also present a challenge. The SNAP-E&T annual performance measures keep WIOA in mind so some comparisons can be made, and the focuses are similar, so sharing data and comparisons is important. The SNAP-E&T data elements are less complex than those required for TANF cases due to a larger household. And since the difference in data

elements does not functionally affect their recruitment projects, the present goal is to take the NEON data gathered for TANF federal reporting and apply the principles and measures of the SNAP data process.

The Workforce Board also continues to promote adoption of a common data-sharing program. The most common barriers and cited issues on the workforce side include cost and conflicting confidentiality policies regarding PII and HIPAA concerns between the agencies. For now, NEON and Workforce case managers rely on their strong communication. In addition to case managers making a quick call to one another, NEON and workforce staff will hold periodic data sharing meetings to ensure customer information and updates are shared between the two entities. There are customer narrations in the NEON system that WDU can access, and narration templates are used to facilitate complete and uniform customer notes. If anyone at WDU has questions, they reach out to NEON supervisors. There is also a tracking system in place so that customer plans can be updated based on the work that they do with NEON or Workforce.



COLLABORATIVE IMPACT

As a direct result of its collaboration, Nevada has not only seen individual customer success, but it has also created a large network of career pathways that have provided customers with new opportunities for high-paying and stable employment that will transition them out of poverty permanently.

Train-to-hire pipelines. Nevada has created extensive train-to-hire pipelines in various industries (IT, Mining, Transportation, Manufacturing, and Healthcare), because they are focused on providing customers with career opportunities as opposed to simple job placement. Customers were tired of working low-paying hospitality jobs and wanted something more, so Nevada made it a priority and used collaboration to provide new opportunities.

Nevada first identified industries in need of growth that also had entry-level professional positions using labor market data published by state agencies such as GOWINN, LVGEA, DETR, GOED, etc. The findings are then further discussed in a partnered setting at workforce system and consortium meetings, where current trends, statistics, and expressed employer needs for in-demand occupations are shared. Once the industries were known, Nevada collaborated with educational institutions to create corresponding curriculum. Employers were approached as possible hiring partners and invited to provide feedback on the curriculum content. Once employer relationships were established, Nevada negotiated pay increases and raised starting wages for its graduating customers. Employers were incentivized with state employer



"We wanted to encourage and support our customers as much as possible so that they really succeeded and were able to create something long term and stable. We took everything we were hearing from our clients and turned that into assisting them the best way possible even if it was not the simplest or most obvious solution. We wanted to provide them with more than a job."

– MICHAEL YODER, WDU MANAGER

resources to ensure graduates would be hired in a full-time role and at a living wage. Businesses were also identified that could partner with the workforce system to provide internships (the state covered wages through WIOA funds) as an avenue for reducing the risk of new partnership and placing customers into higher-wage employment.

Nevada also provided employers with a background and context for their social services-style case management and support, with the goal of helping employers identify issues so they can refer the client back to WDU for resolution and barrier removal. These efforts supported customers and encouraged them to stay in these new careers. Nevada made it a priority not to work with organizations characterized as certificate mills with a goal of pushing people through just to turn a profit from state training funds. The state wanted to see tangible results with customers landing good jobs and creating lasting careers.

Nontraditional pathways. Nevada's WDU makes it a point to speak to industries to discover nontraditional pathways and offer customers more options for stable and sustainable careers. For example, the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) approached WDU about the huge demand for Collision Repair Techs. WDU inquired about the industry's willingness to hire a diverse workforce, including WDU's single mother TANF population. CSN shared that the industry in Las Vegas has been very vocal about hiring women and has even taken steps to create a safe and professional environment within the workspace for onboarding.

Many female TANF participants have completed training and obtained employment in CDL Truck Driving, Cyber Security, and Software Developing. WDU has also

collaborated with Nevada's first Certified Female Plumber/Pipe Fitter, Evelyn Pacheco, Founder of Nevada Women in Trades.

WDU reaches out to every TANF customer using email, text, and social media to offer all train-to-hire employment pipeline opportunities to as many TANF participants as it can reach. When customers respond, WDU makes sure they are taking them in a career direction that is right for them.

Creating higher paying career opportunities for customers. Nevada consistently uses regional labor market data to link customers to in-demand higher paying fields. The state's goal is to always keep up-to-date with the workforce market. There are several partners that

frequently supply Nevada with current data, including the Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance, the Governor's Office of Economic Development, CSN, and the Department of Employment Training and Rehabilitation.

Over the past three years, Nevada has targeted recruitment to the top five most in-demand occupations in the state. Prior to agreeing to a recruitment process, WDU uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Occupational Information Network (O*NET) to discover the median starting wage by zip code. This allows Nevada to advocate on behalf of its customers for the highest possible starting wage, and in many cases has had success in getting employers to increase their wages.



SPECIAL FOCUS

FOSTERING INNOVATION

Background	Innovation
Lack of career pathways and variety in local jobs.	To address the lack of variety, the state created relationships with employers and schools to build new career pathways in growing industries while also discovering nontraditional pathways.
Staffing concerns.	Nevada came up with a strategy to target and recruit high school students for positions in its WDU and TANF offices. This process not only addresses the state's staffing concerns, but also provides a unique opportunity for students to secure good stable jobs working for the state of Nevada.
Desire to build a stronger holistic approach to case management.	Nevada staff has learned from WDU, TANF, and other social service staff to build more client-centered relationships. WIOA has allowed Nevada to prioritize mentorships for customers and provide more soft skills training, even while they are in school. The state has also created a personality assessment to better serve customers and more clearly identify paths appropriate for everyone.
Changing the narrative surrounding social services support.	TANF philosophy has always been that everyone can do something, even if an individual has a disability or illness. To embrace this thinking, Nevada has modified its form language (for example, ETQ form) to be more inclusive and positive. For example, not asking can you lift, but how much can you lift. This simple rephrase allows the state to identify ways the customer can still engage and participate. Nevada also changed the language of its NEON program from Welfare Assistance to the Employment Opportunity Program.
Limited ability/difficulty helping refugee and immigrant populations.	Nevada began a historic effort to permanently establish aggressive workforce development pathways for its diverse immigrant population. As the requirements, challenges, strengths, and overall experience of this population are very different from those of native-born customers, special care is given to construct an employment and training track that accounts for these differences but still provides equally transformative outcomes.

TANF SNAPSHOT



Administered

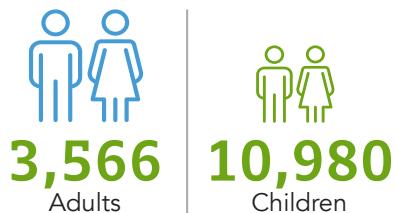


Management
Information
System Name:

*Application for interface with customers: Access Nevada
Intake and Eligibility: Nevada Operations of Multi-Automated Data Systems (NOMADS)
Case Management: Information Systems (OASIS)*

TANF Cash Assistance:
TANF New Employees of Nevada (NEON)

AVERAGE NUMBER OF RECIPIENTS PER MONTH FY2021



STATE DEPARTMENT

*Nevada Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
Division of Welfare and Supportive Services (DWSS)*

\$1,358 Max Monthly Earnings for Single Parent/2 Kids



\$386 Max Monthly TANF Cash Benefit for Single Parent/2 Kids

\$34,196,916 Federal TANF Expenditures FY 2020

WIOA SNAPSHOT



Administration



Management
Information
System:

EmployNV

American Job Center is called:
American Job Centers of Nevada

STATE DEPARTMENTS

*Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Worker (Title I); Employment Service/Wagner-Peyser (Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by Title III); Vocational Rehabilitation (as amended by Title IV)
Nevada Department of Education
Adult Education and Family Literacy (Title II)*

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE (WAGNER-PEYSER) FEDERAL APPROPRIATION



\$6,837,890
Program Year (PY) 2022



WIOA ADULT FEDERAL APPROPRIATION



\$11,527,452
Program Year (PY) 2022



WIOA YOUTH FEDERAL APPROPRIATION



\$11,823,134
Program Year (PY) 2022



WIOA DISLOCATED WORKER FEDERAL APPROPRIATION



\$14,994,671
Program Year (PY) 2022

