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# Opportunities for Increased Partner Participation and Efficiency in Nebraska's One-Stop Delivery System

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## Contents

Table of Contents .....	i
Tables and Figures .....	iii
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS .....	1
2. INTRODUCTION.....	4
Study Purpose .....	5
Methodological Approach .....	7
Review of Existing Reports and Materials .....	7
Interviews of Partner Agency Leaders and Career Center Managers.....	8
Mail Survey.....	8
Summary .....	9
3. REVIEW OF OTHER MATERIALS .....	10
Review of Existing Studies.....	10
Evaluation of Implementation in Other States.....	11
Texas.....	12
Washington .....	13
Illinois .....	14
Summary of Findings for Three States .....	16
Measuring Employer Satisfaction with the One-Stop System.....	17
Review of Memorandum of Agreement .....	20
4. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW RESPONSES .....	22
Level of Integration .....	24
Working with Business.....	24
To What Extent are Services Being Delivered Efficiently and Effectively at One-Stop Career Centers? .....	25
Funding .....	26
Technology .....	27
Resources for Customer Self-Sufficiency.....	28
Duplication of Services.....	29
How Well Interfaced are Employment and Training Partners in Delivering Services?.....	29
Co-location of Services.....	29
Cross-Training of Staff .....	30
Facilities for Business Customers.....	32
Universal Access.....	33
Summary of Findings.....	34
5. SUMMARY OF MAIL SURVEY RESULTS .....	35
To What Extent are Services being Delivered Efficiently and Effectively at One Stop Career Centers? .....	39
Funding .....	39

Technology .....	40
Resources for Customer Self-Sufficiency.....	42
Duplication of Services/Sharing of Resources .....	43
How Well Interfaced are Employment and Training Partners in Delivering Services?.....	46
Co-location of Services.....	46
Cross-Training of Staff.....	49
Facilities for Business Customers.....	54
Universal Access.....	56
Summary of Findings.....	60
Efficient and Effective Delivery of Services .....	60
Seamless Service Delivery.....	61
6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	63
Collaboration among Partners .....	64
Interaction with Employers.....	65
Staff Meetings.....	65
Staffing of the Front Desk .....	66
The Nebraska Workforce Assessment System (NWS).....	67
Training.....	67
Future Considerations.....	68
Appendix 1.....	69
Appendix 2.....	70
Appendix 3.....	72

## Tables and Figures

Table 5.1	Summary of Response Rate.....	35
Table 5.2	Your Overall Understanding of the Program.....	53
Figure 5.1	Services Provided at the Career Center .....	38
Figure 5.2a	Frequency of Use of NWSAS if Full-Time .....	40
Figure 5.2b	Frequency of Use of NWSAS if Not Full-Time .....	40
Figure 5.3a	Ability to Access Data at the Career Center if Full-Time.....	41
Figure 5.3b	Ability to Access Data at the Career Center if Not Full-Time .....	41
Figure 5.4	How Often Does the Career Center have Staff at the Resource Room.....	42
Figure 5.5	Use of Equipment/Space if Full-Time .....	43
Figure 5.6	Greeter at the Front Desk from Your Organization if Full-Time .....	44
Figure 5.7	Staff at the Resource Room from Your Organization if Full-Time.....	45
Figure 5.8	Presence at the Career Center .....	46
Figure 5.9a	Provision of Services Other than at the Career Center if Full-Time.....	47
Figure 5.9b	Provision of Services Other than at the Career Center if Not Full-Time.....	47
Figure 5.10.a	Type of Referrals Received if Full-Time.....	48
Figure 5.10.b	Type of Referrals Received if Not Full-Time .....	48
Figure 5.11a	Training Received on Partners' Programs if Full-Time .....	49
Figure 5.11b	Training Received on Partners' Programs if Not Full-Time.....	49
Figure 5.12	Frequency of Joint Staff Meetings.....	50
Figure 5.13a	Partners Understanding of Your Programs if Full-Time.....	51
Figure 5.13b	Partners Understanding of Your Programs if Full-Time.....	51
Figure 5.14	Availability of Rooms for Interviews .....	54
Figure 5.15a	How Often do Your Clients Meet with Employers at the Career Center if Full-Time?.....	55

Figure 5.15b How Often Do Your Clients Meet with Employers at the Career Center if Not Full-Time?.....	55
Figure 5.16 Coordination with Local Transport.....	56
Figure 5.17 Career Center on a Bus Route.....	56
Figure 5.18 Bilingual Member of Your Staff.....	57
Figure 5.19 Bilingual Person at the Career Center.....	58
Figure 5.20 Use of Assistive Technology at Career Center .....	59
Figure 5.21 Why Don't You Utilize Technology at the Career Center? .....	59

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 mandates that each state add to the Wagner-Peyser core employment services other job training programs to form one seamless service delivery system for participants. Such implementation is an ongoing effort in need of periodic assessment. Recently the Nebraska Workforce Investment Board and Nebraska Workforce Development contracted with the Bureau of Business Research at the University of Nebraska to conduct an analysis of the One-Stop Career Center system in the State of Nebraska. The goals of the study were to assess the efficiency with which services were being provided and the level of seamless service delivery among agencies operating at Career Centers.

This assessment was conducted in three steps. First, existing documents such as completed evaluations of the Career Center system in other states and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between Workforce Investment Boards in Nebraska and partner agencies that participate in the Career Center system were reviewed. Second, the Bureau of Business Research conducted interviews with the leaders of ten mandatory partner agencies and with the managers of three Nebraska Career Centers. The mandatory partner agencies included Workforce Development, Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, the Community College System, Job Corps, as well as five others. (A complete listing is available in Chapter 2.) Third, a mail survey was sent to program area staff for both mandatory partner agencies and other community-based partners who work in one or more Career Centers throughout the state. The combination of interviews with leadership and surveys of staff provided general information about the progress of the Career Center system and specific data on how Career Centers are functioning.

The overall finding was that substantial progress had been made in implementing seamless service delivery. Interviews with Career Center managers and partner agency leaders indicated that Career Centers have been established with local input, that there has been significant cross-training of partner agency programs in many centers, and that selected centers have achieved a significant level of co-location. These discussions also were validated through the mail survey of program area staff. Challenges remain, however, to continue increasing efficiency and foster more collaboration among partner agencies, particularly mandatory partners. This can be accomplished specifically by placing more emphasis on collaboration between mandatory partners and in general by continually raising standards and implementing best practices in additional centers. Several more specific recommendations are described below.

**1) Collaboration among Partners** – Career Center managers should encourage Workforce Development staff and other co-located partners to make more referrals to each other and collaborate more on the management of the cases of individual clients. This is particularly true in the case of mandatory partners. This would help clients but also could help encourage co-location at Career Centers by making partners realize clear gains from co-location.

**2) Interaction with Employers** - To facilitate communications between partner agencies on relations with employers, Workforce Development staff charged with visiting employers should develop a routine plan for inviting local staff from other partner agencies on visits. Partners also should get more notice about employer visits.

**3) Monthly Staff Meetings** - To help partners who are not able to co-locate become more familiar with events at the Career Center, center managers should set a goal of having mandatory partners who are not co-located attend a center staff meeting at least once a quarter. To further aid those who were not able to attend, minutes and/or a summary of these meetings should be taken and distributed to all partners and management.

**4) Staffing the Front Desk** - Co-location at a Career Center should include specific requirements to participate in staffing the center's front desk. A daily record should be maintained indicating the time that each agency spends staffing the front desk.

**5) Nebraska Workforce Assessment System** – Workforce Development should continue to encourage partner agencies to utilize NWAS. Workforce Development also might consider alternative procedures for intake and sharing common data elements for clients, such as a web-based system or a key card system.

**6) Training** – Survey respondents indicated a significant level of participation in cross-training. To further increase training, larger partner agencies might develop training videos that cover the basic services and eligibility requirements of program areas. These could be shown to both new employees of other partners and employees that have not been able to attend training classes.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 mandates the creation of a One-Stop Career Center delivery system in states. The act requires each state to add to the Wagner-Peyser core employment services other job training programs to form one seamless service delivery system for participants. At the state and local levels, the purpose of this effort is to equip participants with the necessary occupational skills to increase their chance to find employment. The WIA mandates the governor of a state to establish a state Workforce Investment Board to help develop the plan of the state. The state Workforce Investment Board also assists the governor in implementing the state plan and in improving the activities funded under the One-Stop system. Within states, local area Workforce Investment Boards also develop a local plan.

States have been engaged in an ongoing effort to implement WIA since its inception. And, as with any major effort to combine and reorganize services, states and localities have differed in the degree to which they have been able to implement the seamless service delivery system. In many areas, there has been substantial progress. But challenges remain, and there is an ongoing effort to make further progress.

With this background, the Nebraska Workforce Investment Board and Nebraska Workforce Development contracted with the Bureau of Business Research at the University of Nebraska to conduct an analysis of the One-Stop Career Center system in the State of Nebraska and in the three sub-state regions. This introductory chapter describes the purpose and approach of the study conducted by the Bureau of Business Research.

## **Study Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to investigate how the State of Nebraska is implementing the seamless service delivery system. Specifically, three issues are analyzed:

1. The extent of integration of employment and training partners in delivering services in Nebraska.
2. The opportunities to promote the systems integration and seamless service delivery between collaborating partners in the One-Stop Centers.
3. The effectiveness and efficiency of the services being delivered.

The study examines the implementation of WIA from a statewide perspective. The implementation of WIA in Nebraska, however, is centered on a series of One-Stop Career Centers located in communities throughout the state. These Career Centers are the sites where program participants go to receive core employment services and where mandatory and community-based partners often co-locate as part of the effort to implement seamless service delivery. Thus, much of our analysis focuses on the functioning of these individual Career Centers located throughout the state, whether in Lincoln, Omaha (there are two Career Centers in Omaha), or Greater Nebraska. The vast majority of the 22 Career Centers in the State of Nebraska are located in the Greater Nebraska region. (See Appendix 1 for a listing.)

The study examines the efficiency of service delivery by examining the extent to which partners at Career Centers share equipment, avoid the duplication of services, and provide customers with a resource room or help desk to allow them to be self-sufficient, when appropriate, in using employment and training services. We examine the level of integration of partners in individual

Career Centers based on whether partners are co-located, the amount of cross-training among partner staff, the use of a common database for intake of common data elements, and joint efforts to provide services to business customers.

Our analysis in the first case focuses on mandatory partner agencies operating throughout the State of Nebraska. These were mentioned in the recent report “Workforce Development Inventory of Employment and Training Programs.”

The mandatory partner agencies are:

- Nebraska Department of Education
- Department of Labor – Nebraska Workforce Development
- Nebraska Community College System
- Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
- Nebraska Department of Economic Development
- Native American Programs
- Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Nebraska Association of Farmworkers
- Job Corps
- Experience Works/Title V.

We also consider other community-based partners that are co-located at individual or multiple Career Centers throughout the state. We consider their level of integration in service delivery and contribution to the operation of the Career Center.

## **Methodological Approach**

Our methodological approach was to review existing information and analysis of the One-Stop Career Center program and then to gather information directly from Career Center managers and partner agencies throughout Nebraska. There were three principal types of analysis:

- 1) Review existing analyses of Career Centers around the nation and the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) for Career Center partners in Nebraska,
- 2) Interviews with leaders of partner agencies, and
- 3) A mail survey of program area specialists and staff of other community-based partners located in Career Centers throughout the state.

Each of these types of analyses is described below.

### *Review of Existing Reports and Materials*

The first step was a review of existing studies from around the country that have assessed the state of seamless service delivery at Career Centers. To begin, we have obtained three analyses of WIA implementation in individual states: Texas, Illinois, and Washington. These studies provide an assessment of how well each state has implemented the WIA program and identify key factors in implementation. Two other studies from the U.S. Government Accounting Office assess how well Career Centers have fared in working with and gaining the trust of local employers throughout the nation.

In addition to this literature review, we also review existing documentation about Career Centers in Nebraska. We document, with the help of staff of Nebraska Workforce Development, the partner agencies that are co-located at the each of Nebraska's Career Centers. We also review a

sample of Memoranda of Understanding between local Workforce Investment Boards and Career Center partners in Lincoln, Omaha, and Grand Island to evaluate what these MOUs require in terms of collaboration between partners.

### *Interviews of Partner Agency Leaders and Career Center Managers*

We conducted interviews with the leaders of the mandatory partner agencies listed above and the managers of Career Centers in Lincoln, Omaha, and Beatrice. These interviews asked a range of questions about general impressions, co-location, use of technology, database coordination, cross-training of staff, and facilities for business customers. Our goal was to ascertain the general opinions of partner agency leadership on the topic of seamless service delivery, their attitudes and concerns about co-location, outreach to employers, and use of the Nebraska Workforce Access System. While agency leaders may not always have detailed information about the day-to-day operations of Career Centers, they do understand the general level of integration of their agency within the Career Center system. Agency leaders provided their view of the extent to which the Career Center system benefits their agency.

### *Mail Survey*

We supplemented the interviews with a mail survey of program area staff. These staff worked in or with Career Centers throughout the state and included both mandatory partners and community-based partners that had chosen to work with their local Career Center. We are indebted to staff at Nebraska Workforce Development for identifying these partner agency staff from throughout the state. In all, 43 staff or program area leaders of mandatory partner agencies were sent a mail survey along with 76 staff from co-located community-based partner agencies.

We received 76 returned surveys, with a similar response rate for mandatory partners and other community-based partners.

Surveys were designed to address the following specific topics:

- The degree of co-location of partner services and program areas
- The amount of cross-training among staff of partner agencies
- The degree of sharing of equipment, common spaces, conference rooms, etc.
- The presence of resources for customer self-sufficiency (such as a resource room or front desk)
- Access to and use of technology and shared databases
- Universal access
- Duplication of services
- The presence of appropriate language skills among Career Center staff
- Facilities for business customers.

## **Summary**

The results from document review, interviews with partner agency leaders, and mail survey responses were used to develop an overall analysis of the current level of seamless service delivery and efficiency among WIA partners and challenges to further improvement. We also provide some recommendations for enhancing seamless service delivery in Nebraska's One-Stop Career Center system.

### **3. REVIEW OF OTHER MATERIALS**

According to the Workforce Investment Act, individual states are encouraged to implement the WIA program using an approach best suited to the conditions in their own state. In some cases, this has involved a very centralized and standardized approach statewide, while in other cases there has been substantial local control of the process. In this chapter, we examine a number of existing studies of the Career Center system in other states. These existing studies make a number of critical points that are described in detail below. One of these is the importance of an effective Memorandum of Understanding between Workforce Investment Boards and the partner agencies. Therefore, in this chapter, we also review current MOUs from the Omaha, Lincoln, and Grand Island Career Centers.

#### **Review of Existing Studies**

We conducted a review of existing studies from around the country that have assessed the state of seamless service delivery at Career Centers. To begin, we have obtained analyses of WIA implementation in the states of Texas, Illinois, and Washington. These studies provide an assessment of how well each state has implemented the WIA program and identify key factors in implementation. Below, we will identify the focus of each of these studies and the conclusions reached about implementation in each state. We also examine two studies from the U.S. Government Accounting Office that look at the specific issue of employers' satisfaction with Career Center services.

## **Evaluation of Implementation in Other States**

The WIA of 1998 mandated the One-Stop Career Center system with a view to forming a “seamless service delivery system for its customers.” The law did allow for substantial flexibility in implementing the One-Stop system to permit individual states and local areas to address issues unique to each area. Due to this allowance for flexibility, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) of the Department of Labor audited three states to determine whether the seamless vision of the WIA has been implemented. The states audited were Texas, Washington, and Illinois. Three One-Stop Centers were audited in Texas, two in Washington, and two in Illinois.

The audits focused on streamlined services, universal access, and state and local flexibility.<sup>1</sup> The investigation of these factors was focused through the following questions:

1. Does the One-Stop organizational structure support the seamless system concept?
2. Has one overall application process been established to support the One-Stop service delivery system?
3. Are agreements established between partners to implement a system that supports the One-Stop concept?

The audit was performed by interviewing key workforce staff at the federal, state, and local level, as well as through interviews with center staff. At the state level, annual WIA plans, strategic plans, organizational charts, policy directives, and MOUs were reviewed. At the centers, strategic plans, policies and procedures, and MOUs were reviewed, in addition to interviewing center partners and MIS staff. It was found that Texas and Washington have

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<sup>1</sup> These three are part of the seven guiding principles of the WIA, namely: streamlined services; empowering individuals; universal access; increased accountability; strong role for local Workforce Investment Boards and the private sector; state and local flexibility; and improved youth programs.

effectively implemented the seamless One-Stop vision, whereas in Illinois there are many issues that prevent implementation of this vision.

### *Texas*

In Texas<sup>2</sup> the coordination and administration of the One-Stop system was centralized at the Texas Workforce Commission<sup>3</sup> (TWC), where statewide policies and procedures provide guidance and create a common framework for all One-Stop centers in the state. Local boards in turn have entered into contracts for day-to-day operations at the centers, thereby enabling the boards to “develop, monitor, and maintain an efficient One-Stop service delivery system,” without being entrenched in the day-to-day activities of running the centers. The organizational structure of the centers falls into either a Functional Line, where clients deal with only one representative, irrespective of the program they enter, or a Program Line, where staff undergoes intensive training in all of the services provided at the center, therefore giving them the ability to properly refer clients to the appropriate services when required.

Texas also has implemented one overall application process for One-Stop system partners called The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST). This has allowed for efficient and effective sharing of a common intake system and data between partners. TWIST also links to, and is updated by, the statewide system for accessing and tracking client core services, called

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<sup>2</sup> OIG Report number: 06-05-007-03-390.

<sup>3</sup> 28 individual workforce programs from ten different agencies were merged into the TWC. The TWC now coordinates: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); Workforce Investment Act (WIA); Food Stamp Employment and Training (FS E&T); Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF); and Welfare-to-Work (WtW).

WorkInTexas<sup>4</sup> (WIT). The audit was able to determine that common intake is occurring at the local level.

The TWC has established MOUs at the state level (even though it is not mandatory at this level) and the local level. At the state level MOUs have facilitated better coordination between the various partner programs by establishing the “terms and mutual responsibilities of TWC and each respective party.” At the local level, MOUs have led to proper coordination of services among One-Stop services, have addressed methods of referral, and have detailed cost allocation and funding.

### *Washington*

In Washington,<sup>5</sup> it was found that the One-Stop organization structure supports the seamless vision through the implementation of a decentralized approach. This approach has supported local flexibility, allowing for the creation of policies and procedures without interference at the state level, as well as ensuring that center operations are subcontracted through a competitive process. Within the decentralized approach, the state still administers and oversees the system through a single entity: the Employment Security Department<sup>6</sup> (ESD). Unlike Texas, there are many oversight agencies in Washington, the respective activities of which are coordinated by the ESD. The other oversight agencies are the Department of Social and Health Services<sup>7</sup> (DSHS) and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.<sup>8</sup> It was found that the existence of

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<sup>4</sup> “WIT is a web-based system to provide information, resume preparation, and job matching.”

<sup>5</sup> OIG report number: 06-05-010-03-390.

<sup>6</sup> ESD oversees employment and training services: WIA Title I; Wagner Peyser (ES); Welfare-to-Work; Trade Act Programs; Veterans Programs; Food Stamp Employment & Training; and Unemployment Insurance.

<sup>7</sup> DSHS oversees Workfirst (State TANF program) and Vocational Rehabilitation.

<sup>8</sup> This State Board oversees employment and training services related to education: WIA Title II – Adult Education; and Carl Perkins Postsecondary Technical Education.

different oversight agencies has not impeded the delivery of integrated services, which has taken the form of an inverted pyramid service delivery model at the centers. In this model customers move from core services (self-service or facilitated self-service), to group services (orientation and workshops), to intensive training (i.e., one-on-one services).

Similar to Texas, the State of Washington has implemented a statewide common intake system: the Services Knowledge Information Exchange System (SKIES). Employment, education, and training resources are connected into a coherent network under SKIES, thereby providing easy sharing of information and data among partners. The review found that the common intake system is in use at the centers that were audited.

In Washington there are no MOUs at the state level; however, MOUs have been used extensively at the local level. The MOUs have led to effective coordination between partners by identifying responsibilities, defining the extent of coordination, and specifying methods of cost sharing. Additionally, the MOUs ensure that a common customer referral system is used, support co-location and integration of services, and detail intensive services (such as screening and assessment and integrated case management).

### *Illinois*

The One-Stop system in Illinois,<sup>9</sup> though clearly not meeting the OIG's requirements with regard to seamlessness in the provision of services, should be considered to be in a state of transition, rather than representative of the state-wide system. The review by the OIG found that the One-

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<sup>9</sup> OIG report number: 06-05-011-03-390.

Stop Centers in Illinois that were audited have not fully implemented the seamless concept, but that there is continuous progress toward this end.

A fundamental concern of the OIG was that there are problems in the organizational structure of the One-Stop Centers that significantly impede seamless service provision. Currently WIA partners are organized under three different state agencies—the Department of Employment Security,<sup>10</sup> the Department of Commerce and Economic Development<sup>11</sup> (DCEO), and the Department of Human Services<sup>12</sup> (DHS)—with little or no collaboration and coordination between the center partners. While the lack of a single oversight agency is not a problem by itself, there are many problems due to poor use of MOUs. These structural barriers have resulted in limited access to services at One-Stop Centers and separate management information systems (MIS) that are incompatible and non-communicative with each other. In terms of institutional barriers, staffing shortages have resulted in “excessive waiting and a lack of direction for program participants,” an example of which has been the lack of center greeters. The State of Illinois has noted these and other shortcomings of their current system in their own review studies. In the light of limited resources, there is a move toward a virtual One-Stop system and a greater emphasis on technology to overcome the shortage of personnel.

The audit found that the lack of a common intake system is significantly reducing the One-Stop system’s efficiency and effectiveness. Currently there is no single MIS for Department of Labor-funded programs, and there are no linkages between the MIS systems that partners operate on

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<sup>10</sup> Responsible for Unemployment Insurance, Employment Service, TRA, NAFTA, Veteran Services, and Labor market information.

<sup>11</sup> Responsible for WIA and TAA programs.

<sup>12</sup> Responsible for TANF, Food Stamp E&T, and Division of Rehabilitation Services.

their own. This has resulted in duplication of effort and the lack of access, for non-Department of Labor partners, to client information from the One-Stop Center. The solution to this has been the implementation (in progress) of the Illinois workNet, which will serve as a more user-friendly web-based interface to provide better access to information. This will result in greater access to information without any changes to the currently existing MIS systems.

MOUs have been established at the local level, but have not facilitated the delivery of services and coordination between partner programs. Referral services and job seeker services have only been mentioned in a broad sense, and there is currently no methodology for referral of individuals between partners. In general the MOUs lack specificity and do not clearly describe roles and responsibilities of partners.

### **Summary of Findings for Three States**

There is much to be learned from the various approaches of the three states that were audited. The most central observation is the need for clearly defined, detailed, and comprehensive MOUs at all levels. Such MOUs have been the source of the success stories in both Texas and Washington and can be seen to be the starting point of the problems in the Illinois system. A common intake system has also been a major deciding factor in the results of the audit. Especially given the problems of incompatibility faced by the various MIS systems in Illinois, a common intake system would undoubtedly bring greater efficiency and effectiveness, as it would reduce duplication of effort.

## **Measuring Employer Satisfaction with the One-Stop System**

Current Department of Labor initiatives focus on increasing the awareness and use of the One-Stop Career Center system. The effectiveness of these initiatives is measured by gathering information regarding the level of satisfaction of employers with the One-Stop Career Center system. This performance appraisal process does not, however, look at the extent to which the system is being used. In February 2005 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued the report “Employers are aware of, using, and satisfied with One-Stop services, but more data could help Labor better address employers’ needs.” The report highlighted the extent to which employers are aware of and using the One-Stop Career Center services, the degree of satisfaction of employers using the services, and the role played by the Department of Labor in helping employers learn about and use the services available to them through the One-Stop system. The GAO surveyed a nationally representative sample of private sector employers,<sup>13</sup> as well as state and local workforce officials.<sup>14</sup> For employers, the survey focused on eliciting information regarding the use of services provided at the Career Centers, such as applicant screening, skills assessment, training, and use of America’s Job Bank and Labor market information, such as current wage rates. Information gathered from state and local workforce officials focused on services provided to employers.

The GAO survey found that more than half of employers, of all sizes, are aware of One-Stops and that the awareness and use of One-Stops increases with employer size. Furthermore, a vast majority of employers that use One-Stops are satisfied with the services and would consider

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<sup>13</sup> 3,232 small, medium, and large private sector employers from a nationwide database of businesses; 54 percent response rate.

<sup>14</sup> 50 states and 568 local workforce investment areas; received responses from all states and 81.5 percent of local areas.

using them in the future. Employers are especially satisfied with the timeliness and responsiveness of the One-Stop system, as well as perceiving it as a means of achieving cost savings. Few employers, of any size, use the training services available at One-Stops, which is consistent with the prevalence of internal training. Additionally, large and medium employers are more likely to use the hiring services provided. Also, large and medium employers are significantly more likely than small employers to use America's Job Bank to find prospective employees and Labor market information to learn about employment trends and wages.

The report observes that the Department of Labor has a number of initiatives designed to spread awareness and use of the One-Stop Centers, but has limited information regarding the use of the system, which in turn limits the extent to which the system can better cater to the needs of employers. The GAO recommends that data on employer use of the One-Stop system should be collected by states and reported to the Department of Labor, in addition to the currently reported data concerning employer satisfaction with the One-Stop system.

The shortcomings and recommendations of this report regarding data collection by the Department of Labor were explored and detailed in another report by the GAO in June 2004: "States and local areas have developed strategies to assess performance, but Labor could do more to help." The report "examined (1) how useful WIA performance data are for gauging program performance, (2) what local areas are doing to manage their WIA performance and assess One-Stop success on a timely basis and how states are assisting these efforts, and (3) to what extent the Department of Labor is trying to improve WIA's performance measurement

system and assess One-Stop success.” The examination of these factors was based on the same data for state and local workforce officials used in the report of February 2005.

The report found that the WIA performance data currently collected provides for long-term national evaluation of programs by providing a fairly consistent national view of WIA performance and allowing for tracking over time, but have a number of shortcomings.<sup>15</sup> Little information regarding current performance is presented; the data represent only a small portion of job seekers that received WIA services; data do not cover job seekers who obtain jobs in other states; nearly 6 percent of workers are completely unrepresented; and there are considerable time lags before data become available.<sup>16</sup> Due to these and other shortcomings, states and local areas attempt to measure the interim performance of the WIA and One-Stop Centers by gathering information about job seekers, employers, the extent of interaction between program partners, and indicators of whether the One-Stop Centers are meeting the needs of the community.

These two reports, though highlighting the shortcomings of the information gathered by the Department of Labor for WIA performance evaluation, clearly point out that employers are satisfied with the One-Stop system. Also, states and local areas collect essential information concerning the One-Stop system, which lends itself to interim evaluations of the WIA system.

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<sup>15</sup> Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records serve as the primary data source for tracking WIA performance, therefore these shortcomings are largely the shortcomings of the UI wage records.

<sup>16</sup> This is sufficiently serious due to the outcome reports reflecting participants who left the program in the previous year thereby negating the full potential for gauging current performance.

## **Review of Memoranda of Agreement**

All partners of each of the One-Stop Career Centers are required to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The purpose of the MOUs is to develop a coordinated effort between the local boards and the One-Stop partners to provide a One-Stop system of comprehensive workforce development activities and services that includes education and training for the local area. The MOUs insure that all the partners have an understanding of their responsibilities, of how costs are to be shared, and of how customers are to be served. We reviewed MOUs from the Lincoln, Omaha, and Grand Island Career Centers.

The MOUs at these One-Stop Career Centers utilize standard language that has been developed at the state level. Such standardization insures that major issues are documented in the MOUs and gives partners an understanding of their responsibilities. These standardized MOUs, however, need specific language to address several other key issues

1. To what extent are partners responsible for staffing the front desk?
2. To what extent are partners responsible for staffing the resource room?
3. Which partners will participate in job fairs and how are these costs to be shared?
4. How often will partners hold cross-training sessions for staff?

Further, MOUs also need to document local issues that have been resolved over time but are not currently mentioned in the standardized MOUs. This will ensure that agreements survive changes in staff or local leadership among partner agencies or local Workforce Investment Boards.

Similarly, MOUs between partner agencies at the state level should be revisited to address issues that have surfaced over the past few years. Key statewide issues include co-location and use of the Nebraska Workforce Investment System. Once these issues have been addressed, they can be included in local MOUs as necessary.

#### **4. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW RESPONSES**

Efficient operation and seamless service delivery in the One-Stop Career Center system depends on the participation and coordination of partner agencies. Leadership of partnership agencies and Career Centers therefore understand the successes of, and barriers to, the implementation of the WIA program. While agency leaders may not always have detailed information about the day-to-day operations of Career Centers, they will understand the general level of integration of their agency within the Career Center system and can provide their vision of how the Career Center system has and can benefit their agency and the clientele they serve.

In this chapter, we describe the results of a set of interviews conducted with the leaders of key partner agencies. Three Career Center managers also were interviewed. In all, we conducted 13 in-person interviews. These mostly occurred in face-to-face meetings, though six were held via telephone. These interviews asked a range of questions including general impressions, co-location, funding, technology, database coordination, cross-training of staff, and facilities for business customers. Our goal was to ascertain the general impressions and opinions of partner agency leadership on the topic of seamless service delivery, their attitudes and concerns about co-location, outreach to employers, and use of the Nebraska Workforce Access System.

In all, we interviewed the leaders of ten partner agencies:

- Nebraska Department of Education,
- Department of Labor Nebraska Workforce Development,
- Nebraska Association of Farm Workers,
- Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired,

- Native American Programs,
- Nebraska Community College System,
- Nebraska Department of Economic Development,
- ExperienceWorks/Title V,
- Job Corps,
- Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

We also interviewed the operators of the Omaha, Lincoln, and Beatrice Career Centers.

We began by asking for general impressions on how the implementation of the WIA program has been progressing in Nebraska. Many interview respondents indicated that there has been substantial effort made in Nebraska to implement the One-Stop program concepts. Multiple partners indicated their belief that Nebraska was “ahead of the game” in implementing WIA compared to most states, although one partner knowledgeable about WIA implementation in multiple states felt that Nebraska was behind. The state has taken a number of innovative steps that have encouraged the success of the centers: each local One-Stop Career Center is designed by its community, is community-owned, and reflects community priorities; the One-Stop Career Center program has been designed with input from business leaders; a single manager has been placed in charge of all labor programs at each Career Center; and Career Centers have encouraged and accepted partners beyond what is required (mandatory) by law.

While many interviewed leaders had a positive impression of the One-Stop Career Center system, many concerns also were raised. Many fell into one of two categories: the level of

integration among partners in delivering services and the need for further improvement in integration with business.

### **Level of Integration**

Several themes emerged regarding the integration of services. First, Workforce Development partners and One-Stop Center managers had concerns about whether other mandatory partners were fully committed to the Career Center project and saw themselves as a member of the center team as much as that of their own agency. For example, partners too often did not participate in group efforts of the center, such as staffing front desks. Some partners did express that the One-Stop Centers were primarily “the Department of Labor’s project.” Second, some partners expressed concern about the level of service integration at Career Centers. Several believed they received few referrals from the Career Centers, and, more generally, that some Career Center managers did not make a great enough effort to inform and coordinate with partner agencies. Significant numbers of mandatory partners also were concerned about whether Career Centers fostered collaboration among partners in managing the cases of clients.

### **Working with Business**

As we document later, One-Stop Career Center managers do make substantial efforts to work with business and convince local business leaders to see their Career Center as a resource. No partners disagreed with this basic point, and several indicated that they interacted with Workforce Development and Career Centers in order to get better access to employers. There were, however, several suggestions. A number of partners asked that they receive more notice about postings from major employers and more notice about job fairs or when employers were

visiting Career Centers to hire. Another suggestion was to get business even more active on local and state WIBs, so that these business leaders could better serve as advocates for use of Career Centers in the business community. A final suggestion was to improve emphasis on the quality of placements, rather than the number of placements, to better convince employers that Career Centers can provide well-qualified employees. It should be noted, however, that according to the Employment Service's federally required 9002 report, Nebraska Workforce Development has found that more than 80 percent of their placements remained employed six months after placement.

Beyond these general impressions, we queried interview participants about a number of key areas such as technology, co-location, cross-training, funding, and outreach to employers, among others. The goal ultimately was to address our two key questions:

1. To what extent are services being delivered efficiently and effectively at the One-Stop Career Centers?
2. How well interfaced are employment and training partners in delivering services in Nebraska?

### **To What Extent are Services Being Delivered Efficiently and Effectively at One-Stop Career Centers?**

Efficient service delivery depends on a variety of factors including the appropriate use of technology, providing resources for customer self-sufficiency, and avoiding the duplication of services. Another key issue has been the ability to provide services in a period of limited funding. Interview responses for each issue are summarized below.

### *Funding*

The ability of Career Centers to continue to provide services despite limited funding indicates an ability to operate efficiently. Through the efforts of Workforce Development staff, the centers have been able to continue to provide many services to clients at the One-Stop Centers, serving thousands of clients at the larger centers with a shrinking staff.

Career Center managers also have been able to acquire the equipment required to operate resource rooms and other common areas such as training laboratories despite funding difficulties. This has been accomplished in some cases through receiving donated equipment. In other cases, centers have used cost-reimbursements from employers for providing assessments in order to generate funds for equipment, or Workforce Development has received cost reimbursements for providing skills assessments for other partner agencies.

While Nebraska Workforce Development has operated efficiently in the face of staff cuts, funding has impacted service delivery. Several Career Center managers indicate that they have had to drop longstanding workshop series due to staff reductions. One other indicated that there are now fewer staffers to help assess clients as they enter the center. At the same time, one partner agency had to drop co-location at one of the Career Centers due to budget cuts, though the agency maintained co-location at other centers.

In addition to budget cuts, state and local agencies have not always received sufficient guidance on funding issues at the federal level. OMB Circular A-87 is the authority of how state and local governments are to account for the receipt of federal funding. On April 15, 2002 the Nebraska

Commissioners of Labor and Education sent a joint letter to the US Secretaries of Labor and Education requesting a clarification on how to correctly allocate cost where the requirements of one program differ from those of another. As of the interviews, they had not received a response to these issues, and these costs are still questionable.

### *Technology*

Technology and shared databases are other potential avenues for efficiency in the One-Stop Career Center system. The Nebraska Workforce Access System (NWAS) was the database developed to provide all partner agencies with a common intake system, so that common data elements did not need to be repeatedly gathered and entered. Many interview participants indicated that NWAS was a useful system, both for intake of common data elements and also for consolidation of data for clients at local offices into a statewide system. NWAS also is helpful with referrals. NWAS is available for use by all partners and is in use by many Workforce Development partners.

But some respondents also indicated they did not use the NWAS system or were not satisfied with it. Some partners mentioned the cost of the service. Two more critical concerns had to do with the functionality of the system:

1. Eligibility requirements differ for many programs, so the standardized intake of data in NWAS may not be sufficient for other partner agencies;
2. Some partners received only a handful of referrals from the system, i.e., it was not being used to provide referral.

Another concern regarding the NWS system is a commitment required on the part of Workforce Development staff. One Career Center manager argued that running the NWS system was very time consuming for Workforce Development staff due to backfiling, particularly from the Unemployment Insurance program. This same source suggested a web-based data entry system. Another respondent noted that the NWS system was not accessible to the visually impaired, meaning that visually impaired employees have difficulty using it.

As for other technology issues, one Career Center manager indicated that new technology, such as a key card system, might be adopted to track how many persons are self-serving in the resource room, so that these clients could be reported to federal agencies.

#### *Resources for Customer Self-Sufficiency*

Customer self-sufficiency is encouraged at One-Stop Career Centers through resource rooms, while front desks are used to refer customers to the resource room or, where needed, to appropriate partners. Resource rooms provide clients with access to information about job opportunities, training, and other resources in a cost-effective manner. Resource rooms are of use to the general public and business. Further, leaders of partner agencies often indicated that resource rooms and job placement services are strengths of the One-Stop Career Center system. Even partners that are not co-located sometimes said they referred their clients to the resource room at the Career Center.

Staffing the resource room and the front desk was not always as cost effective as planned for Workforce Development. In particular, Career Center managers provided a mixed assessment

about the extent to which partners contributed to the resource room. One manager reported that all or most co-located partners took turns manning the front desk and staffing the resource room. But another manager reported that only two other agencies contributed to staffing the front desk rather than all co-located partners and that mandatory partners don't attend training on the resource room.

### *Duplication of Services*

Nebraska Workforce Development has taken a key step to encourage coordination and reduce the duplication of services at Career Centers by appointing one manager of all labor programs at Career Centers.

### **How Well Interfaced are Employment and Training Partners in Delivering Services?**

Seamless service delivery is aided by the co-location of partners within Career Centers and the cross-training of staff in partner agencies. It also depends on the Career Centers building good working relationships with local business. Interview responses on each of these issues are discussed below.

### *Co-location of Services*

Many of the partner agencies we spoke with frequently co-located at Career Centers and were pleased to do so. Several concerns were raised with co-location. Multiple sources indicated that rent costs were a major barrier to co-locating versus rent costs at other locations. This problem has only been exacerbated by the tight budgets faced by partner agencies. But, perhaps a larger

problem for some agency heads was that they did not feel the co-location was yielding enough benefits. Three points were of particular interest:

1. Several partners indicated that they received too few referrals to justify co-locating some of their staff at a One-Stop Career Center.
2. Several other partners noted that they are interested in collaboration among partners on the cases of individual clients and they are less interested in co-locating in Career Centers where this is not common.
3. Several partners indicated space considerations impacted co-location. In some cases Career Centers did not have sufficient space to house an agency. In other cases, a partner agency required features such as on-site training facilities that made co-location impractical.

### *Cross-Training of Staff*

Cross-training can provide partner agencies with an opportunity to learn about the program opportunities and eligibility requirements of other training providers located in the Career Center or offered by partners that are not co-located. Proper training therefore helps partner agency staff make appropriate referrals and allows them to serve as a resource to clients for a variety of programs. While some partners we interviewed did report providing training opportunities, many did not. Further, one local Workforce Development program leader reported that the staff of mandatory partners rarely attend Workforce Development training even when invited and that the partners don't invite Workforce Development staff to their training.

Interview respondents also pointed out, however, that partners can learn about each other's services through less formal means than training. This in turn may facilitate seamless service delivery by improving referrals among partners. Among co-located partners, casual communications from working in the same building helped co-located partners become familiar with each other's services. Beyond this, many Career Centers used frequent joint staff meetings of partners to improve familiarity among partners about programs and eligibility requirements. When held, these were reported to be effective. Many partners reported that they made presentations about their programs at these periodic meetings.

Staff meetings, however, are most effective when there is broad participation. At least one partner indicated that they did not feel they were invited to staff meetings and had not had an opportunity to learn what is happening at their local Career Center. Another partner indicated that the staff meetings don't focus on customer service issues or on new programs being offered. Another concern is gaining more participation of non co-located partners, who often do not feel as if they are kept abreast of the opportunities and events of Career Centers. One Career Center addressed this in part by having occasional partner-wide meetings, where all partners made presentations about what their agency does, and a partner management council, which includes partners that are not co-located, that meets roughly once a quarter.

A final cross-training issue pertains to partners who provide services to targeted audiences based on ethnicity, occupation, or disability. Several such partners were concerned whether Career Center staff understood that their clients were capable of holding a broad range of jobs and informed them about jobs in a wide variety of occupations. In one case, the partner agency head

felt that too many clients were referred to them rather than served along with other customers at the Career Center. This placed a burden on the limited training funds available to that partner. These impressions point to the need for Career Center management to emphasize communication with partner agency leadership.

### *Facilities for Business Customers*

A number of interview participants indicated that facilities for business customers were a strength of Workforce Development and the One-Stop Career Center system. Accordingly, One-Stop Career Centers have placed a greater emphasis on employer services in recent years, including visiting businesses to identify their needs and explain services. One Career Center manager reported that they recently made a major expansion in their outreach and visitation with businesses, that they began holding open houses for employers, and that they provided other services such as assessments. Such progress was far from universal, however. For example, one other Career Center manager suggested limited potential for increased interaction with business. In particular, general reductions in staff have meant a decline in business service representatives, which has limited the number of business clients served. This has created a need for controlled growth in the number of business clients so that business requests don't outstrip the limited availability of business representative staff.

One-Stop partners also made a number of suggestions for improving the interaction between the Career Center, partners, and business:

1. Several respondents suggested partners at the Career Center do a better job sharing information about job openings, make more official referrals to each other, and provide more information about required qualifications.
2. One respondent indicated that more businesses should be active on Workforce Investment Boards. Successful business people are accomplished decision-makers and managers, which would make them a great addition to the WIB. Their presence also would presumably encourage business people to be advocates within the business community for use of Career Centers for placement.
3. One respondent suggested that One-Stops focus more on the needs of businesses rather than focusing on providing social services to clients.
4. There also was a suggestion to partner with private employment agencies and to create more success stories in placement to private employers so that interest in using Career Centers would spread by word of mouth among employers.
5. One respondent suggested that the Career Centers get more engaged with local economic developers, perhaps participating with prospect visits, in order to help prospects see that labor is available locally.

### *Universal Access*

One partner was concerned that One-Stop Career Center staff often did not know how to use software to make the resource room accessible to the visually impaired.

## Summary of Findings

Interviews with leaders of partner agencies provided a mixed picture of the level of efficiency and seamless service delivery at One-Stop Career Centers. Several partners were pleased with opportunities available at Career Centers, while others shared their frustrations. The level of integration also differed greatly among Career Centers. For example, one Career Center manager reported that all co-located partners share the duty of staffing the resource room and service desk, while another reported that few partners participated. To give another example, one key mandatory partner reported that their agency co-located and provided coordinated service with Workforce Development in some Career Centers but was not able to in others. These examples hint at the great successes of the WIA program but at the same time suggest the difficulty of seeing that *all* Career Centers meet their potential. In large part, the interviews simply suggest that Workforce Development and Workforce Investment Boards in Nebraska continue the ongoing management task of making the Career Center system work more effectively by continually raising standards and implementing best practices in additional centers.

## 5. SUMMARY OF MAIL SURVEY RESULTS

A mail survey was undertaken in order to supplement the information collected during the interviews with partner agency leaders. The mail survey was targeted to program area heads and staff working at Career Centers. These personnel were often more likely than partner agency leadership to have specific information on co-location, cross-training, and the day-to-day operations of Career Centers.

The mail survey was sent to program area staff of mandatory partners, both at the central office and at Career Centers, as well as to staff of other community-based partners located at Career Centers. In all, 119 mail surveys were sent, with 43 going to program area staff of mandatory partners and the remainder, 76, going to community-based partners located at Career Centers in Omaha, Lincoln, and Greater Nebraska.

After three mailings, a total of 76 surveys were returned for an overall response rate of 63.87 percent. The response rate was 69.77 percent for mandatory partners and 60.53 percent for other community-based partners. These response rates are large enough in order to generalize our findings across all partners and program areas that were sent the survey. The responses are summarized in Table 5.1 below.

**Table 5.1: Summary of response rate**

Partners	Number of Recipients	Responses Received	
		Total	Percentage
All	119	76	63.87
Mandatory	43	30	69.77
Community Based Partner	76	46	60.53

The following is the summary of our findings based on the questions asked in the survey. In our analysis, we differentiate between full-time and part-time partners. A full-time co-located partner refers to the responses of all those program areas with at least one person from their staff who is present at a Career Center for a period of five days a week, all day. Part-time partners encompass all the program areas who are not co-located or who are co-located at the One-Stop Career Centers but are present on less than a full-time basis. This presence can be limited to part of the day for five days a week, or four days or less a week, or only as needed, or never.

Our analysis of survey responses was organized around the answers to specific questions. The survey included both questions where respondents chose from a group of answers and open-ended questions where respondents simply provided a written response. For the first type of question, we provide a figure or table summarizing responses as well as some discussion. For open-ended questions, we simply include text summarizing responses. We begin with the responses to some general questions about the success of the One-Stop program and on the types of services that respondents provided.

**Question: Of the services that are provided at the Career Center, which do you feel had the most positive impact on clients?**

Responses to this question were significantly varied, but largely fall into two categories: job search help and career assessment and training.

Clients have been aided in their job searches through the availability of computers, the internet, and the resource room. All of which have streamlined the process of searching for jobs by providing the much needed centralized access to such resources, which in many cases were previously unavailable.

Career assessment and training also featured prominently in the responses. It was reported that the WIA and GED programs, as well as other programs related to education and training, have significantly impacted the employment prospects of their clients. Within this, it was noted that the One-Stop approach of the Career Centers have brought together the right services required to best serve their clients.

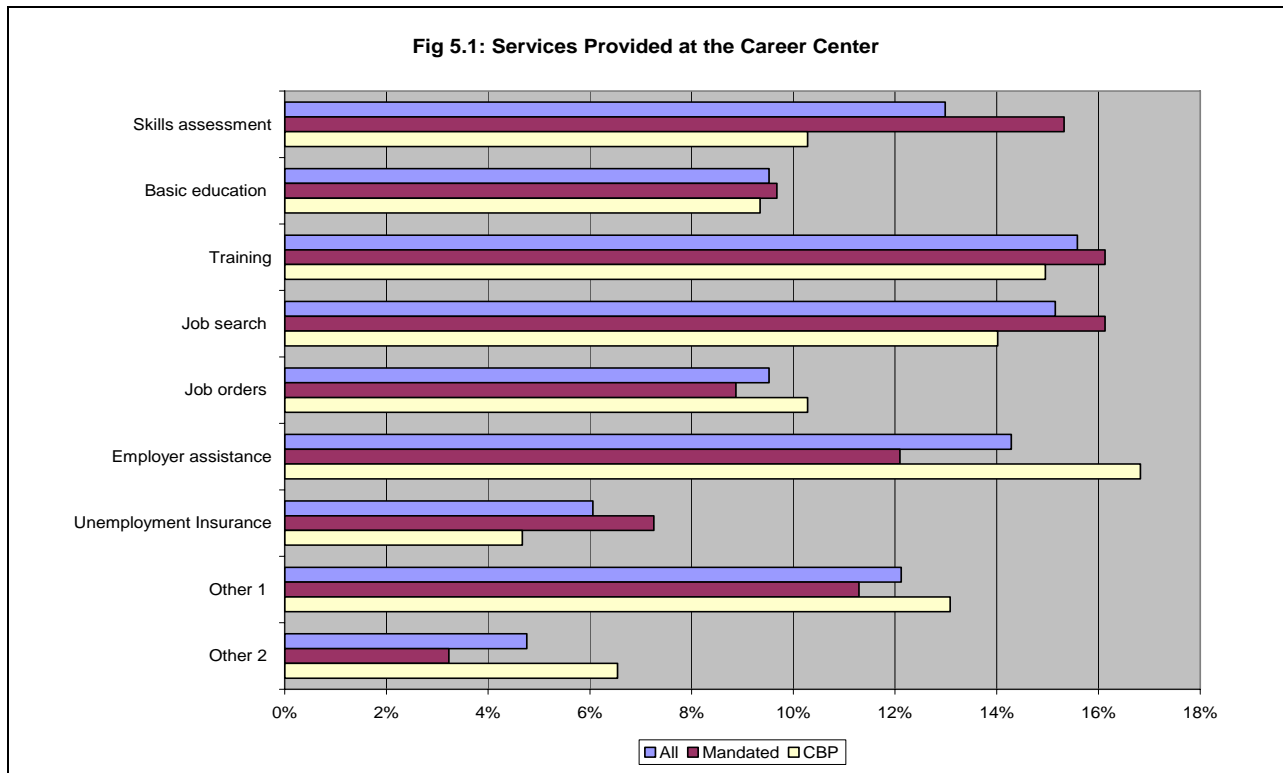
**Question: If you had the authority, what would be the two things you would improve/change about One-Stop Career Centers?**

A central concern of many respondents is related to the interaction between the partner organizations. Better levels of collaboration could be fostered by technological improvements, such as a comprehensive intercom system and use of a common network. Less frequently, it was also mentioned that collaboration would improve with more training on partner programs. Cost sharing of common resources was similarly cited as an area that needs work.

Other issues include the necessity of a common referral system; an advertising program to bring better awareness of the Career Center for both employers and job seekers; co-location of the Vocational Rehabilitation program; and youth development programs. There also seems to be the need for front desk greeters at some Career Centers, the use of flyers and bulletins for clients who are unable to use computers, and a need to make some of the current programs more community oriented.

**Question: Please indicate whether your program area or organization provides the following Workforce Investment Services: Skills Assessment, Basic Education, Training, Job Search, Job Orders, Employer Assistance, Unemployment Insurance, and/or Other Services.**

Figure 5.1 below illustrates the broad array of services provided by the respondents of the survey, with employer assistance, job search, skills assessment, and training accounting for the largest share.



## **To What Extent are Services being Delivered Efficiently and Effectively at One-Stop Career Centers?**

Efficient service delivery depends on a variety of factors including the appropriate use of technology, providing resources for customer self-sufficiency, and avoiding the duplication of services. Interview responses for each issue are summarized below.

### *Funding*

#### **Question: How have changes in your program funding impacted your participation with One-Stop Career Centers?**

Many respondents have not been affected by budget cuts, but of those that have, the major concerns are related to the reduction in staff and affording the rent at the Career Center. The reduction in staff, in particular, has affected the level and quality of services provided. Computer lab staff are hired only when grant funding is available, and education services have been scaled back due to the lower number of staff. In some cases, the reduction in budget has led to the withdrawal of participation at the Career Center due to the need to cover rent costs.

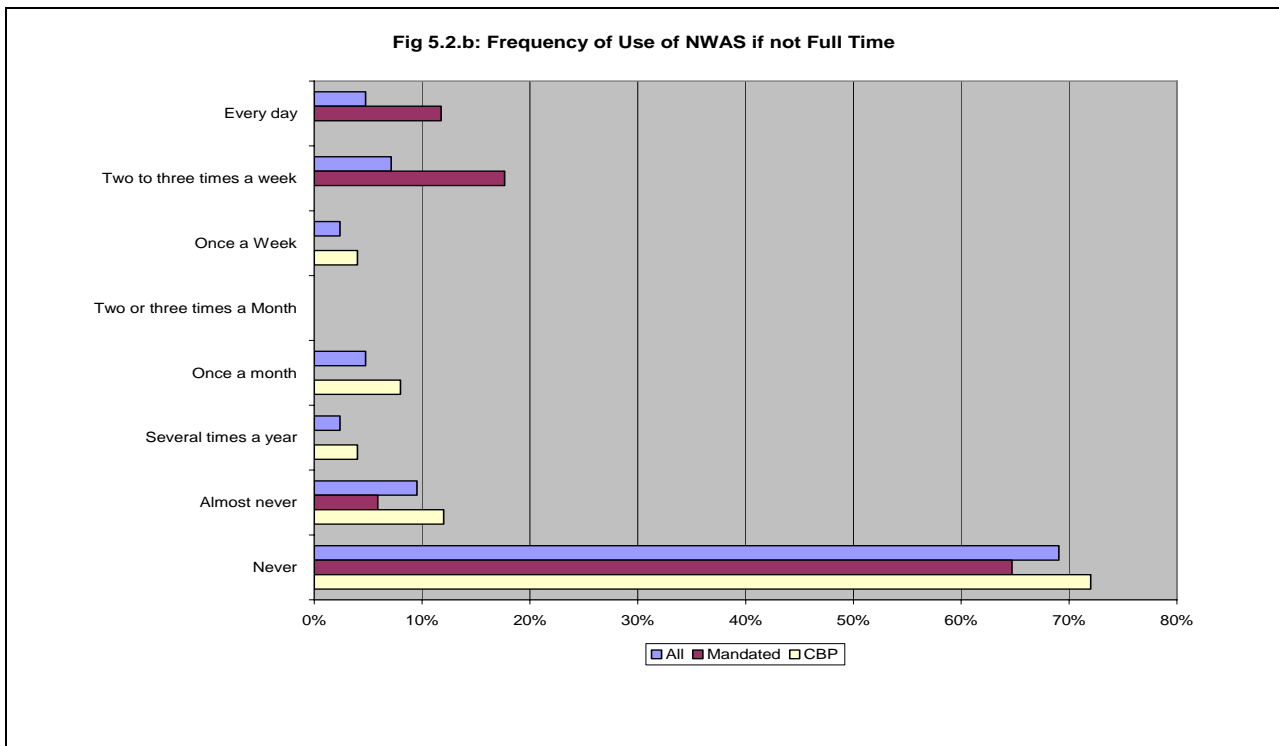
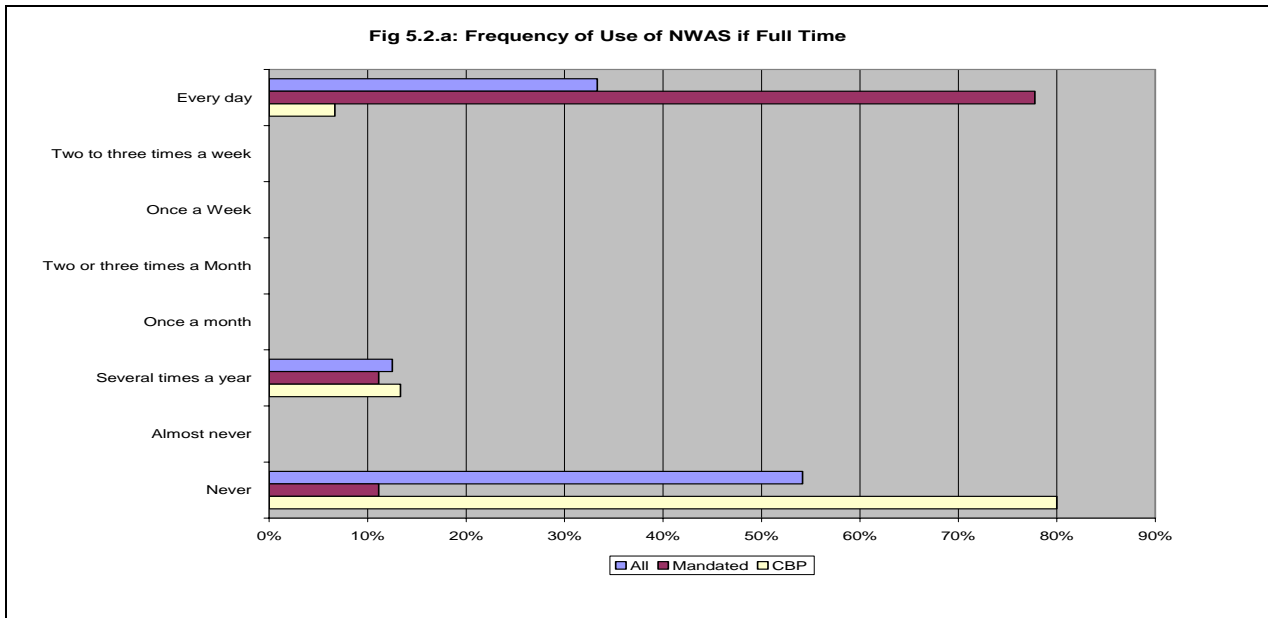
#### **Question: What changes would make it more cost effective for your agency to locate at a Career Center?**

The costs associated with co-locating are considered by many to be too high, especially due to not paying rent at their current location versus having to do so upon co-location. Another recurring concern was the limited availability of space at the Career Center. This was mentioned with regard to conference rooms as well as with regard to shared space. Additionally, a few respondents did say that they will co-locate only if mandatory to do so.

*Technology*

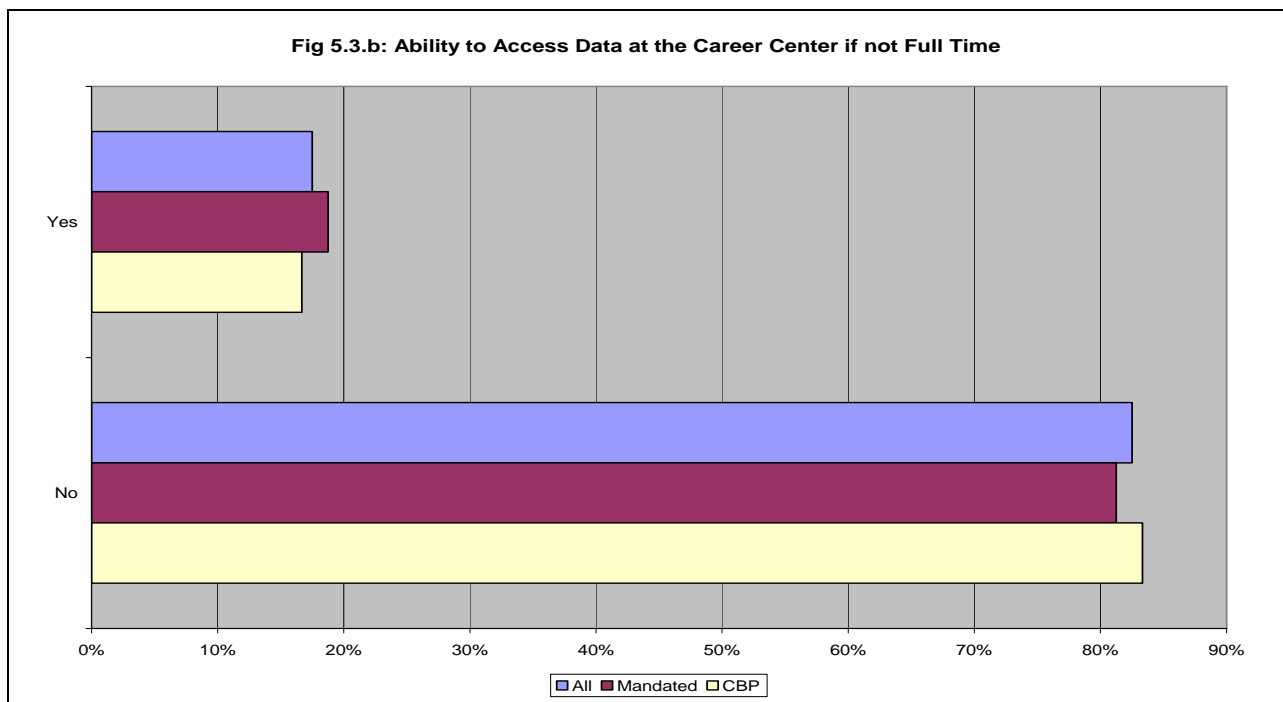
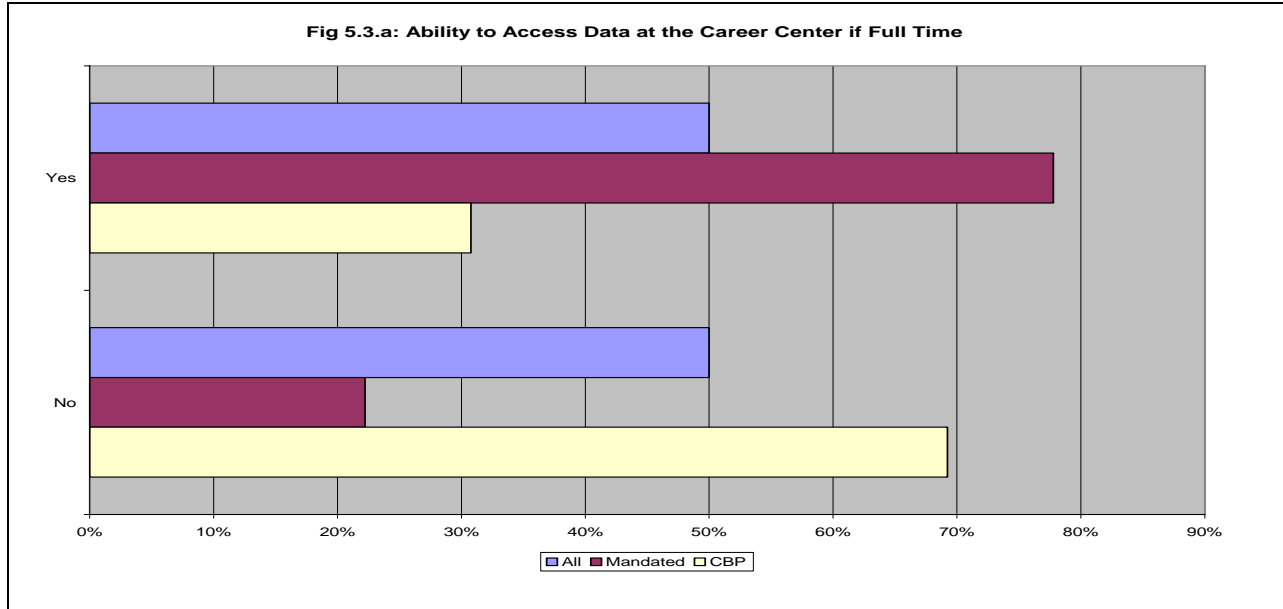
**Question: On average, how often do you or your staff utilize the Nebraska Workforce Access System (NWAS) data management system?**

The staff of most full-time mandatory partners uses the NWAS system every day. Other community-based partners, however, only use NWAS occasionally, if ever. Most part-time partners, both mandatory and other community-based, do not use NWAS.



**Question: Are you and your staff able to electronically access your program area’s or organization’s case files (or management information system) at a One-Stop Career Center?**

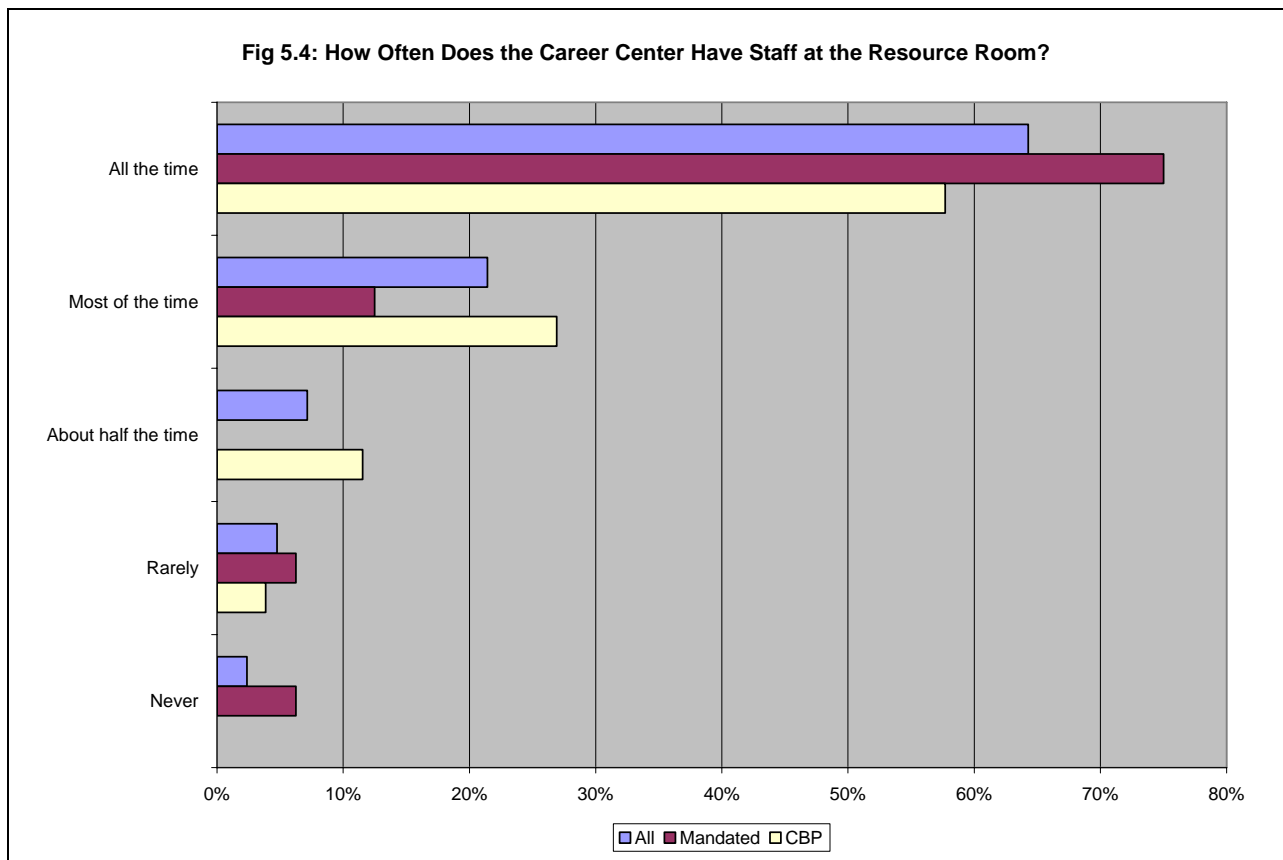
Figure 5.3 (panels a & b) below reveals that a large percentage of full-time other community-based partners have indicated that it is a major problem for them to access their own agency’s case files from the Career Center. Further, almost no part-time respondents are able to access their data.



*Resources for Customer Self-Sufficiency*

**Question: On average, how often does the Career Center have staff available to help clients utilize the resource room?**

Approximately 80 percent of partners, both mandatory and voluntary, indicate that the Career Centers have staff ready to help clients use the resource room either all the time or most of the time.



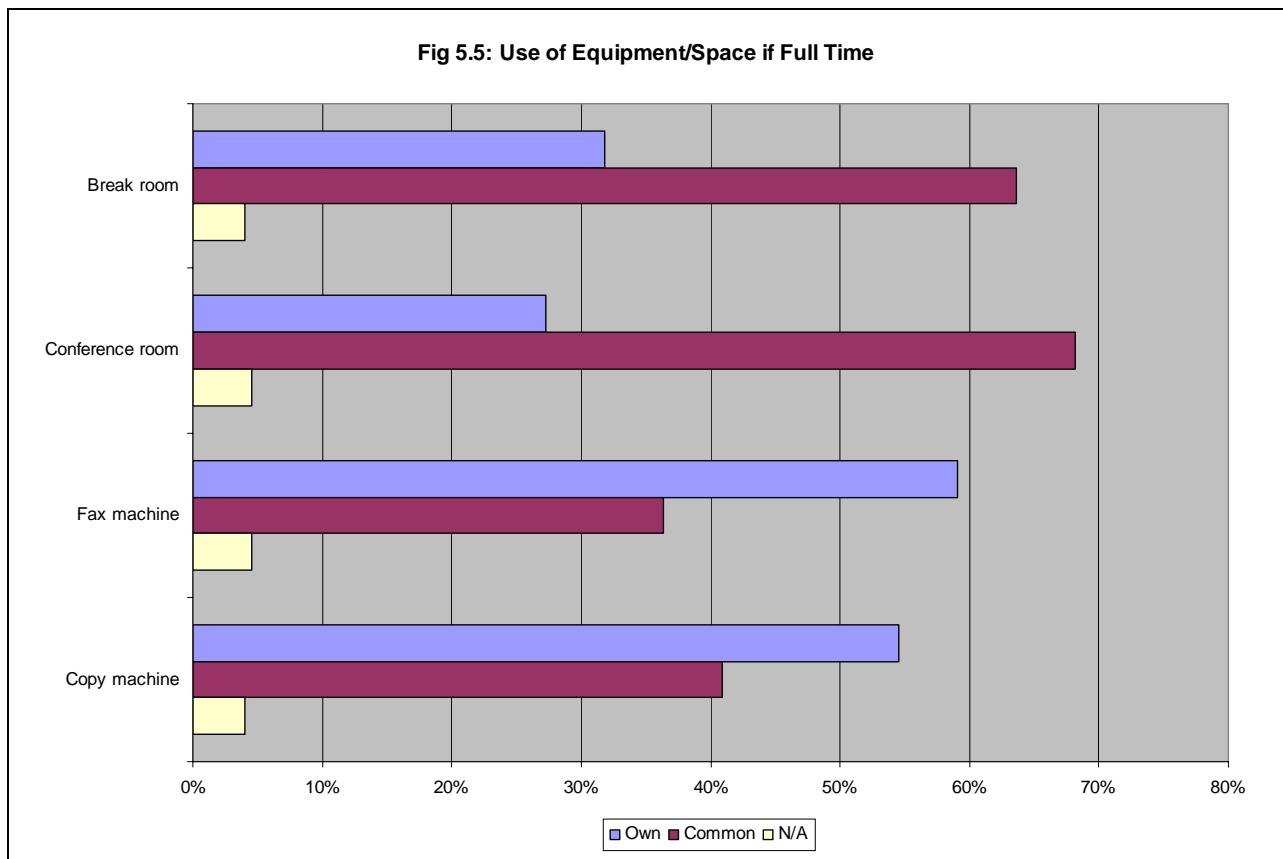
**Question: Describe the process by which clients are referred to service providers by the front desk (or greeters).**

As would be expected, many greeters simply inquire about services required and then direct the client to the appropriate partner organization. Greeters obtain information from the clients, through either a few basic questions or completing more detailed forms, prior to directing the client to the appropriate service provider. At some Career Centers service providers are called to the front desk to meet the client, at which time the programs are discussed and appointments are set.

*Duplication of Services/Sharing of Resources*

**Question: Do you have your own break room, work room, fax machine, copy machine, or do you use them in a common area at the Career Center?**

Co-location has resulted in the common use of the break and conference rooms. A clear majority of respondents reported using a common break room or conference room. Most respondents indicate using their own fax and copy machines.

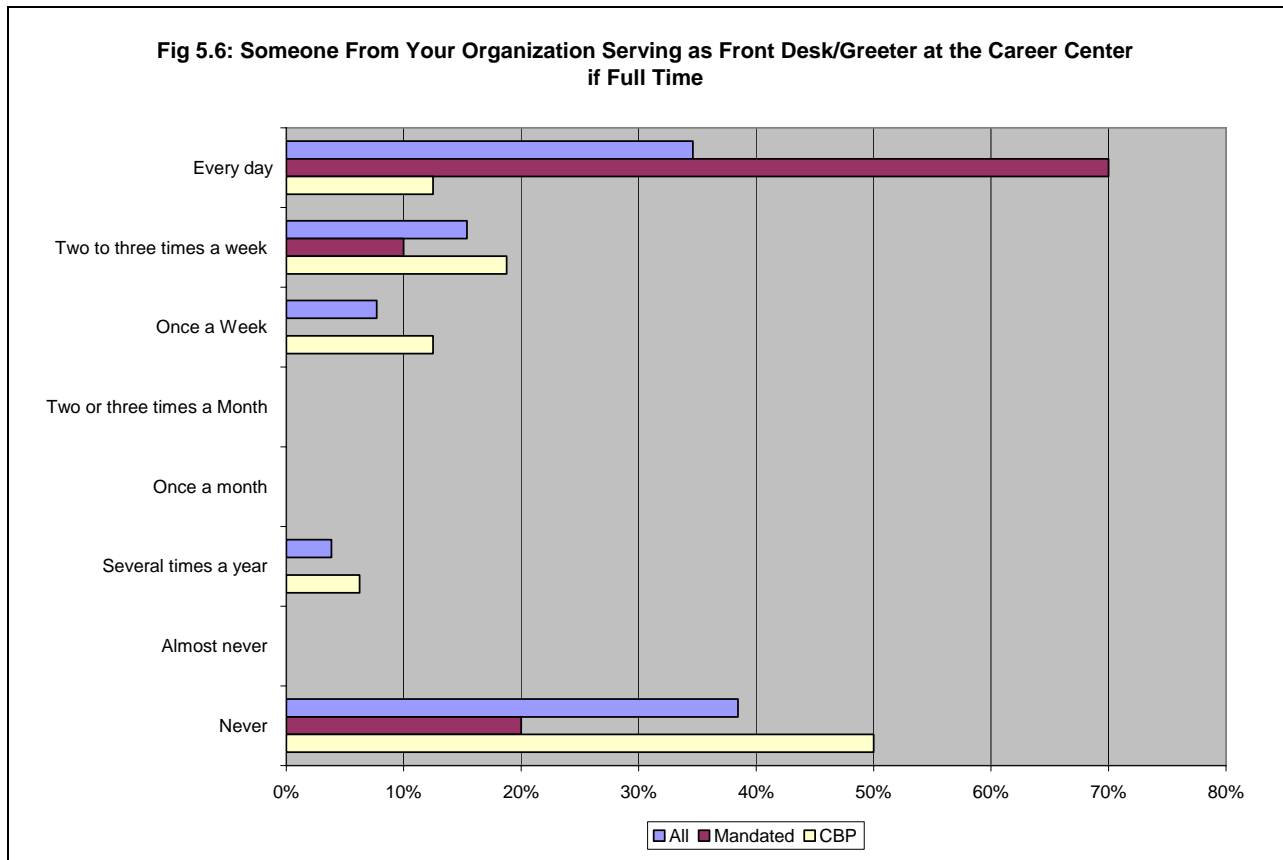


**Question: What changes would increase your willingness to share space and equipment?**

Partners willingness to share is currently limited by the size of their staff, where ability to share resources seems to diminish with a large staff. Sharing of resources among partners would increase with the availability of larger conference rooms and better assurance that the confidentiality of their clients will be protected.

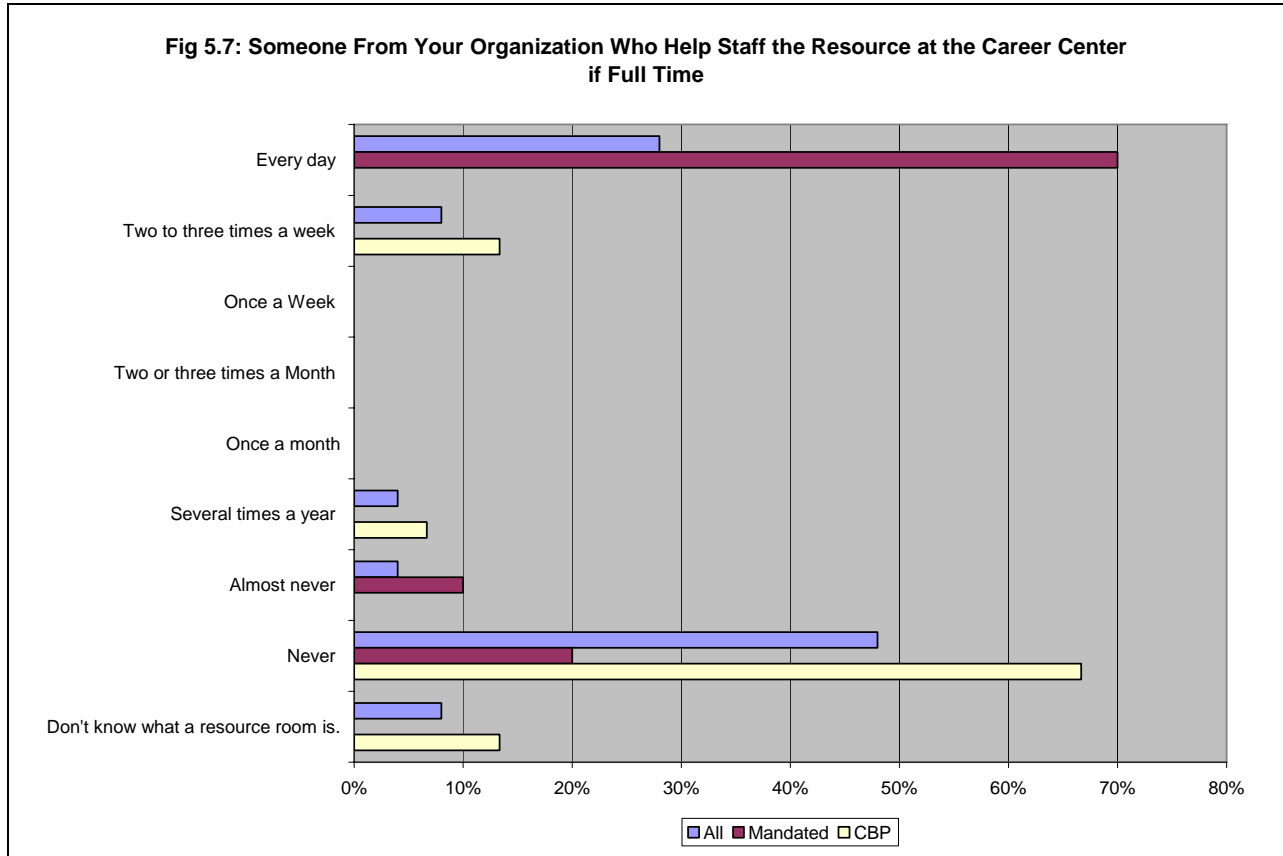
**Question: On average, how often does someone from your program area or organization help staff the front desk or serve as a greeter for the One-Stop Center?**

In general, there is a split among organizations on whether their employees staff the front desk or act as a greeter for the One-Stop Career Center. Among those organizations that are co-located full-time, there is a distinct disparity in fulfilling this task. For example, about 70 percent of the mandatory partners provide a greeter for the front desk on a daily basis, while this is the case for only a few of the other community-based partners.



**Question: On average, how often does someone from your program area or organization help staff the resource room?**

There is an even more pronounced disparity in how the staffing of the resource room is shared by full-time co-located organizations. For instance, 70 percent of mandatory partner organizations staff the resource room every day, while about 65 percent of other community-based partners never do so.



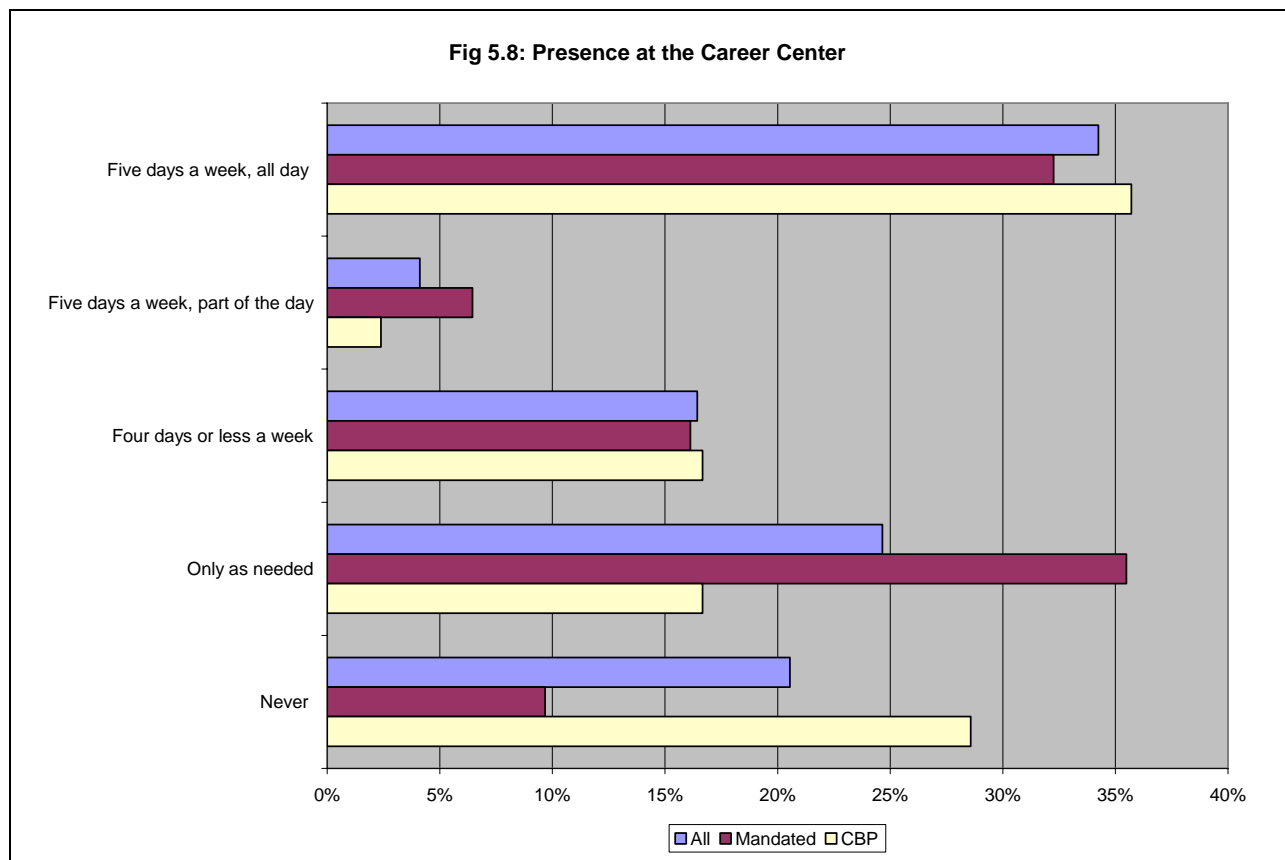
## How Well Interfaced are Employment and Training Partners in Delivering Services?

Seamless service delivery is aided by the co-location of partners within Career Centers and the cross-training of staff in partner agencies. It also depends on the Career Centers building good working relationships with local business. Interview responses on each of these issues are discussed below.

### *Co-location of Services*

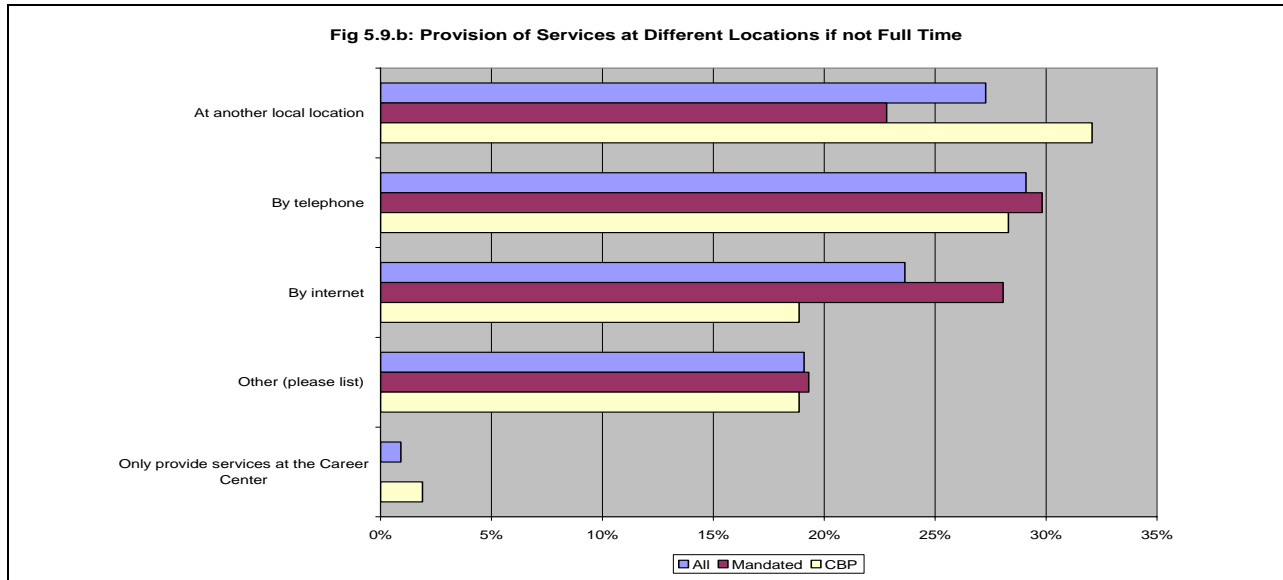
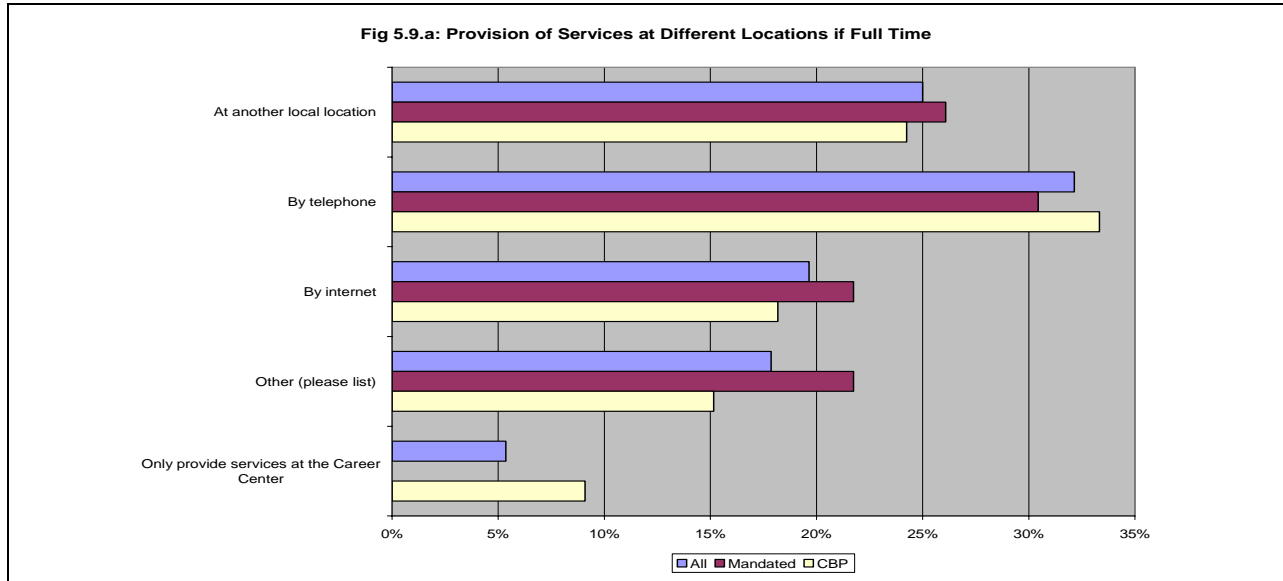
**Question: On average, how often is someone from your program area present at the One-Stop Career Centers?**

Overall, it is most common for organizations to have their employees at the Career Center all five days of the week. There is also some occurrence of employees being at the Career Center only as needed, with mandatory partners making the most use of this option.



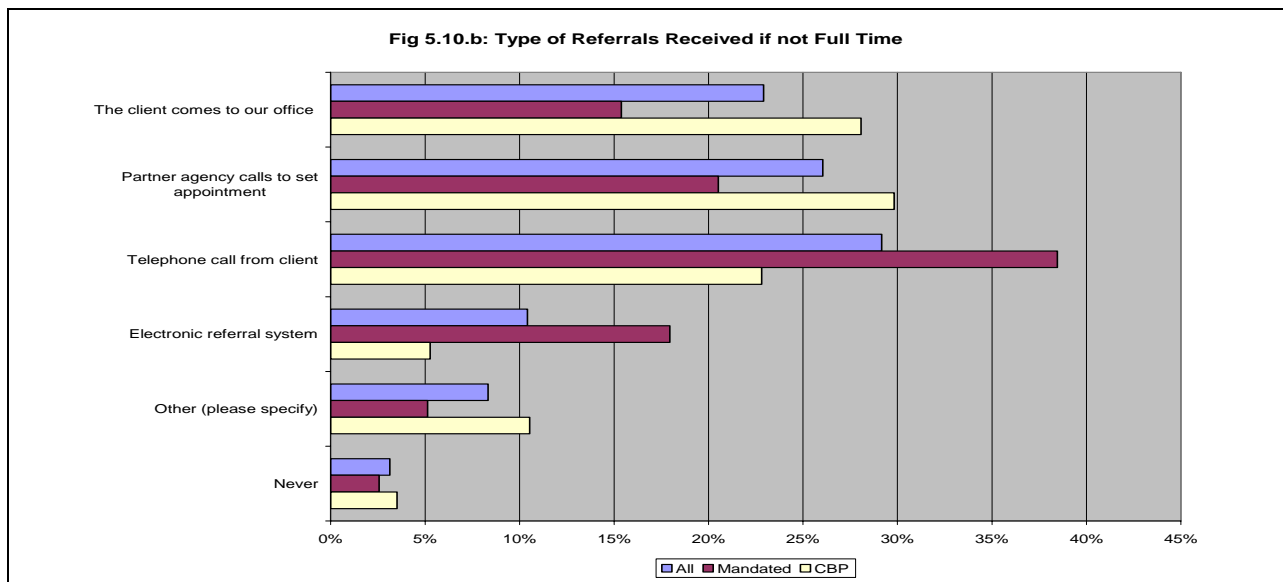
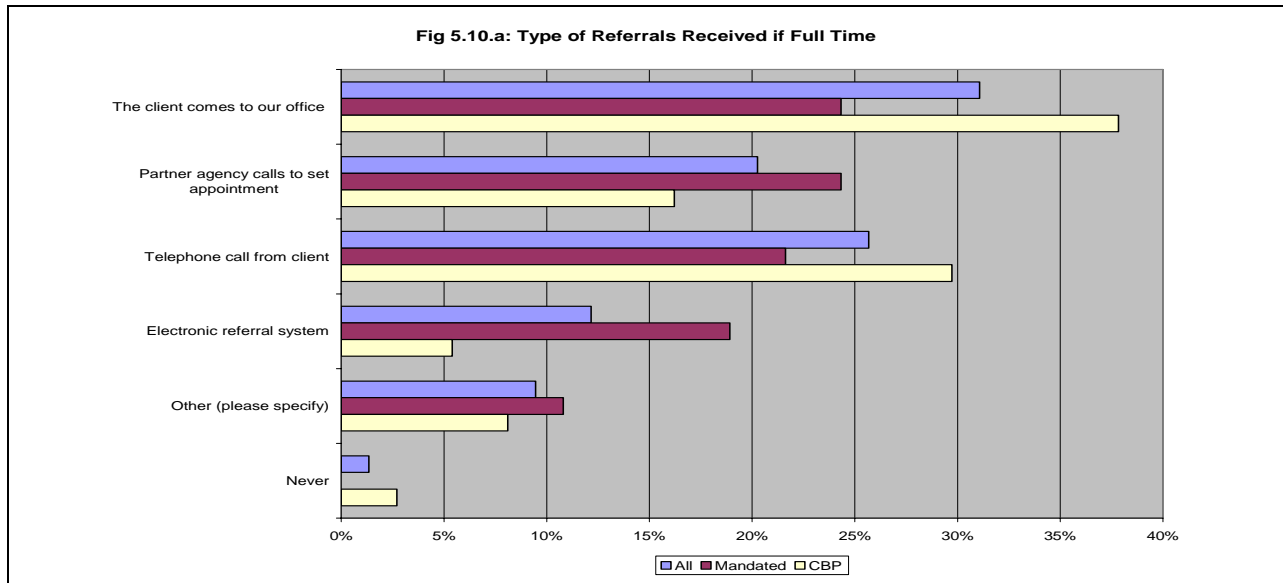
**Question: Besides at the Career Center, how do you and your staff provide services?**

For full-time as well as part-time partners, the provision of services away from the Career Center is almost equally distributed across all other methods, including at another local location, by telephone, via the internet, and other such as in-home services, other community agencies, and business locations.



**Question: How does your program area(s) obtain referrals from partner agencies or community organizations located at a Career Center?**

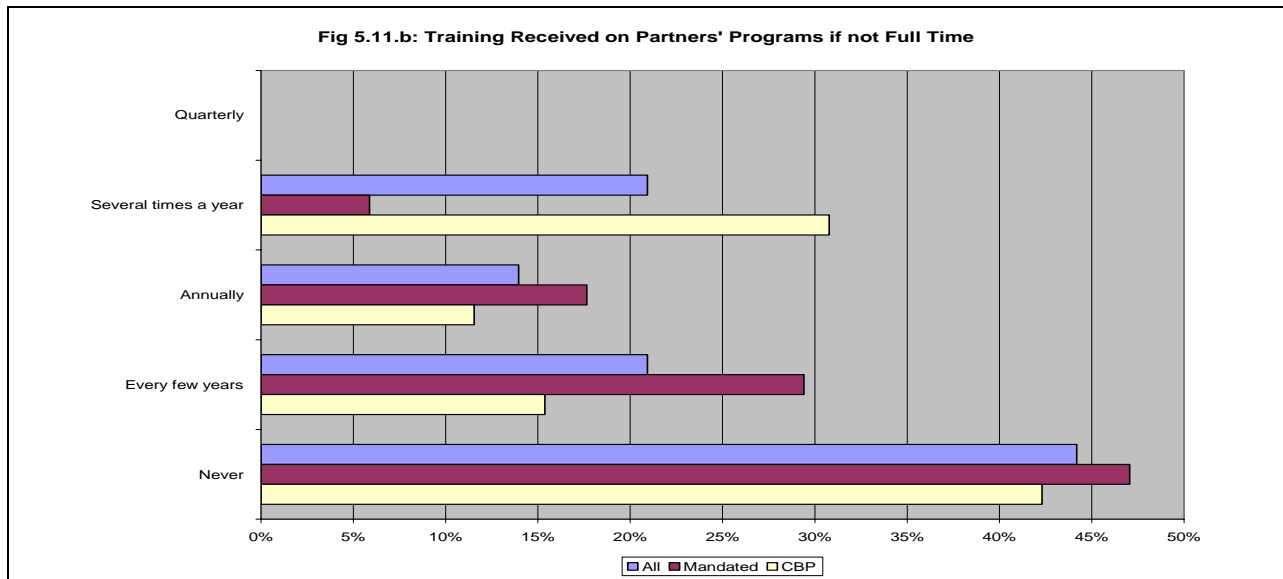
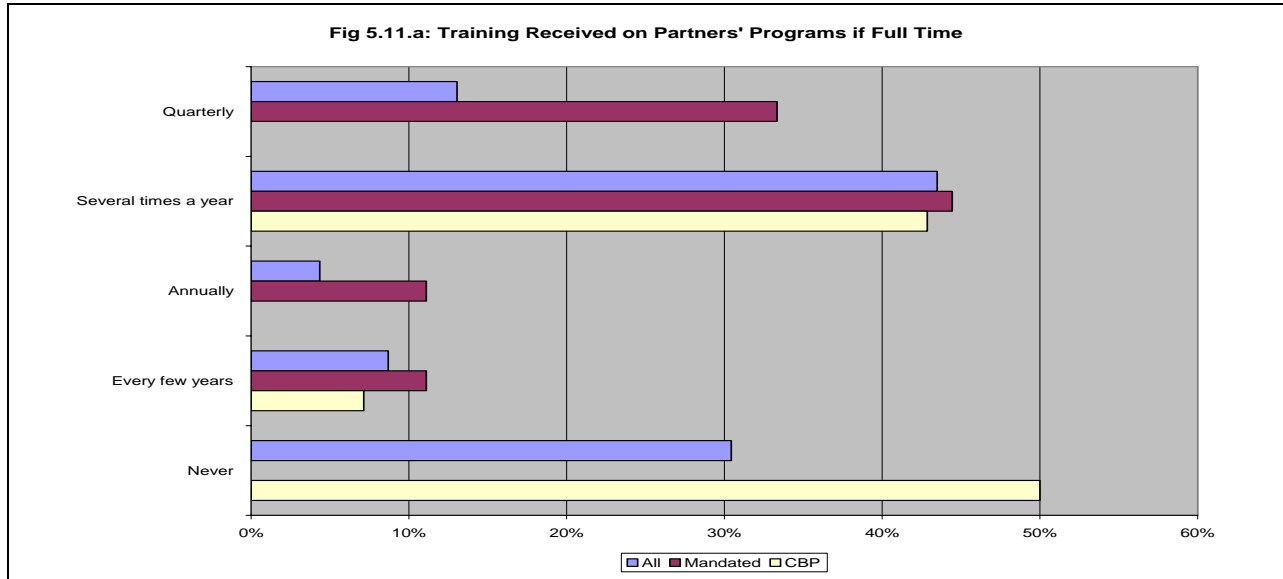
The method of referral of clients varies from meeting clients at the Career Center, calls from partner organizations, and telephone calls from the client. There is, however, relatively little use made of electronic referral systems, especially by other community-based partners.



*Cross-Training of Staff*

**Question: How often have you or your staff received in-service partner training on other programs offered at the Career Center?**

Training on partner organization programs is more prevalent among full-time partners, with a higher tendency toward training being conducted several times a year. There do seem to be some instances where training has not taken place for full-time other community-based partners. In general, training for non-full-time partners occurs, but is less frequent.

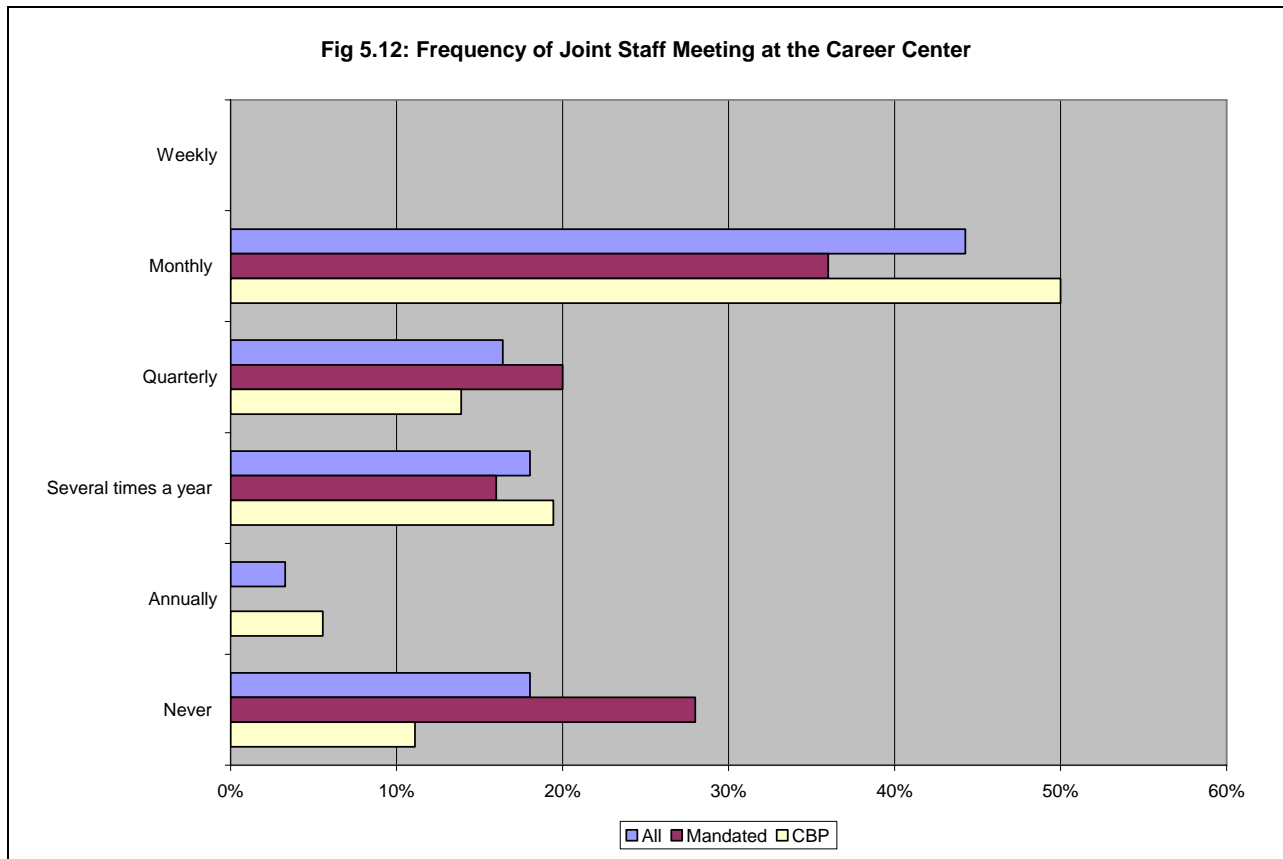


**Question: What would increase your willingness to participate in training on other programs offered at Career Centers?**

Responses to this question ranged from issues concerning more information, better scheduling, and relevance to one’s own program. Respondents have expressed a keen interest in learning more about partner programs, but cite the lack of broad participation in the training programs, as well as no invitations to participate as common factors for limited training on other programs. A few respondents indicated that federal requirements for cross training on other programs would be required prior to their participation in such training.

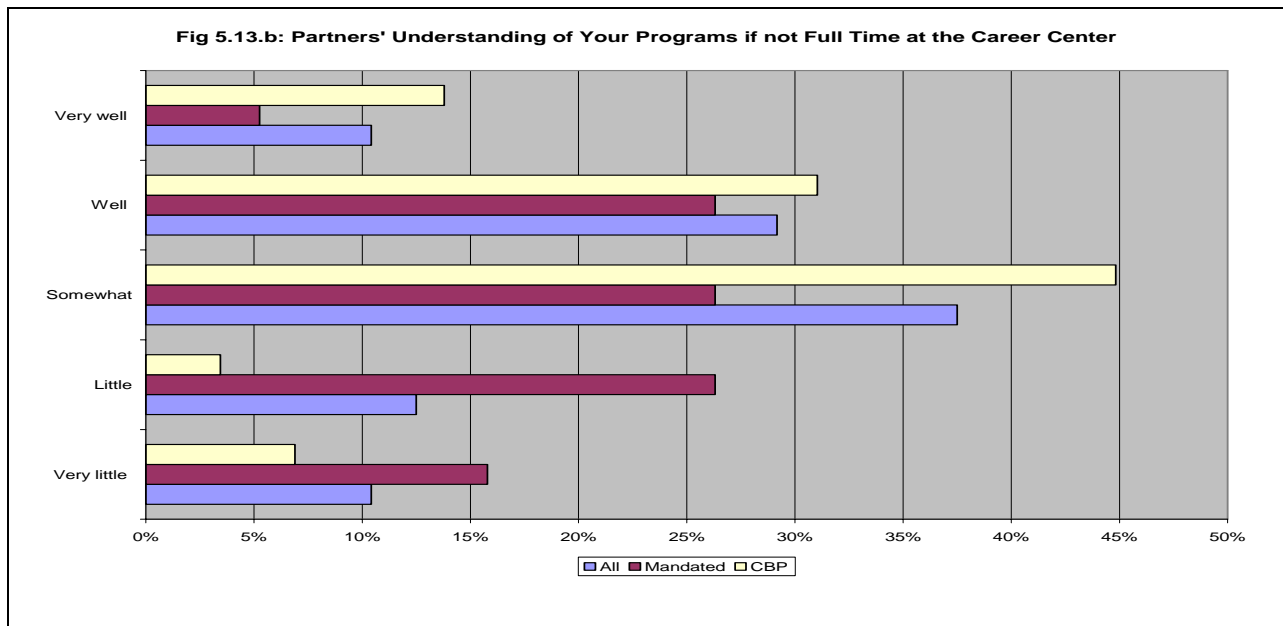
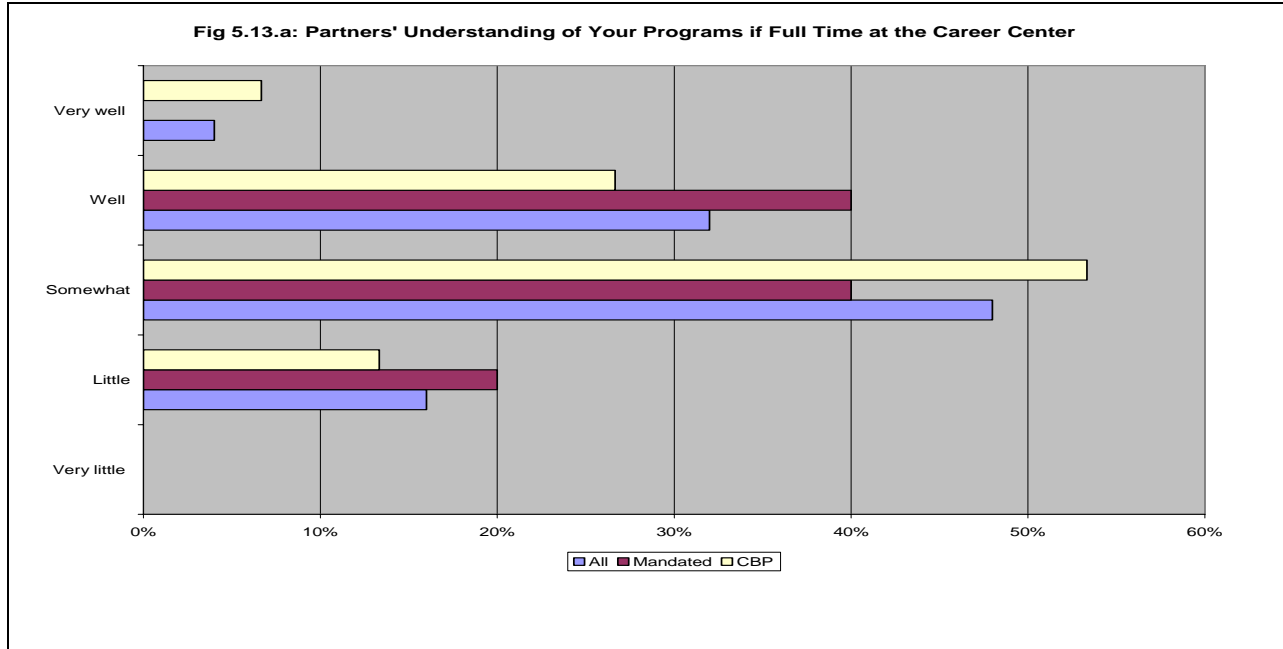
**Question: On average, how often are there joint staff meetings of the service providers at the Career Center?**

Joint staff meetings are frequently held on a monthly or quarterly basis. A few respondents report never attending joint staff meetings.



**Question: How well do you believe that other partner agencies understand the program and services that your agency delivers: Very Little, Little, Somewhat, Well, and Very Well?**

Figure 5.13 below shows that the majority of respondents believe other partner agencies understand their programs either well or at least somewhat well.



**Question: How well do you and your staff understand the programs and services delivered by the following partner program areas: Very Little, Little, Somewhat, Well, and Very Well?**

Similar to the findings of Figure 5.13, the reactions of the respondents to the survey with regard to the programs and services delivered by other partners' areas present some disparities. Based on Table 5.2:

- Adult Basic Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, Community College Job Training, and Career & Technical Vocational Education are the programs that respondents most often reported to understand very well or well.<sup>17</sup>
- About one-third of respondents reported understanding Employment First Program, Job Corps, and Workforce Investment Act Title 1 Program either well or very well.
- Relatively few respondents reported understanding other programs well or very well, including Trade Adjustment Assistance Program, Foreign Labor Certification, NE Department of Economic Development Training, Senior Community Service Employment Program, Local Veterans Employment, Experience Works/Title V, Food Stamp Employment & Training, and Food Stamp Workforce Program. The respondents said they have very little or little understanding of these programs.

Mandatory partners have a better understanding of almost all programs when compared to other community-based partners.

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<sup>17</sup> Table 5.2 above only details the responses for each program area with respect to Very Well and Well responses. For the complete response to this question please refer to the appendix.

**Table 5.2: Your overall understanding of the program**

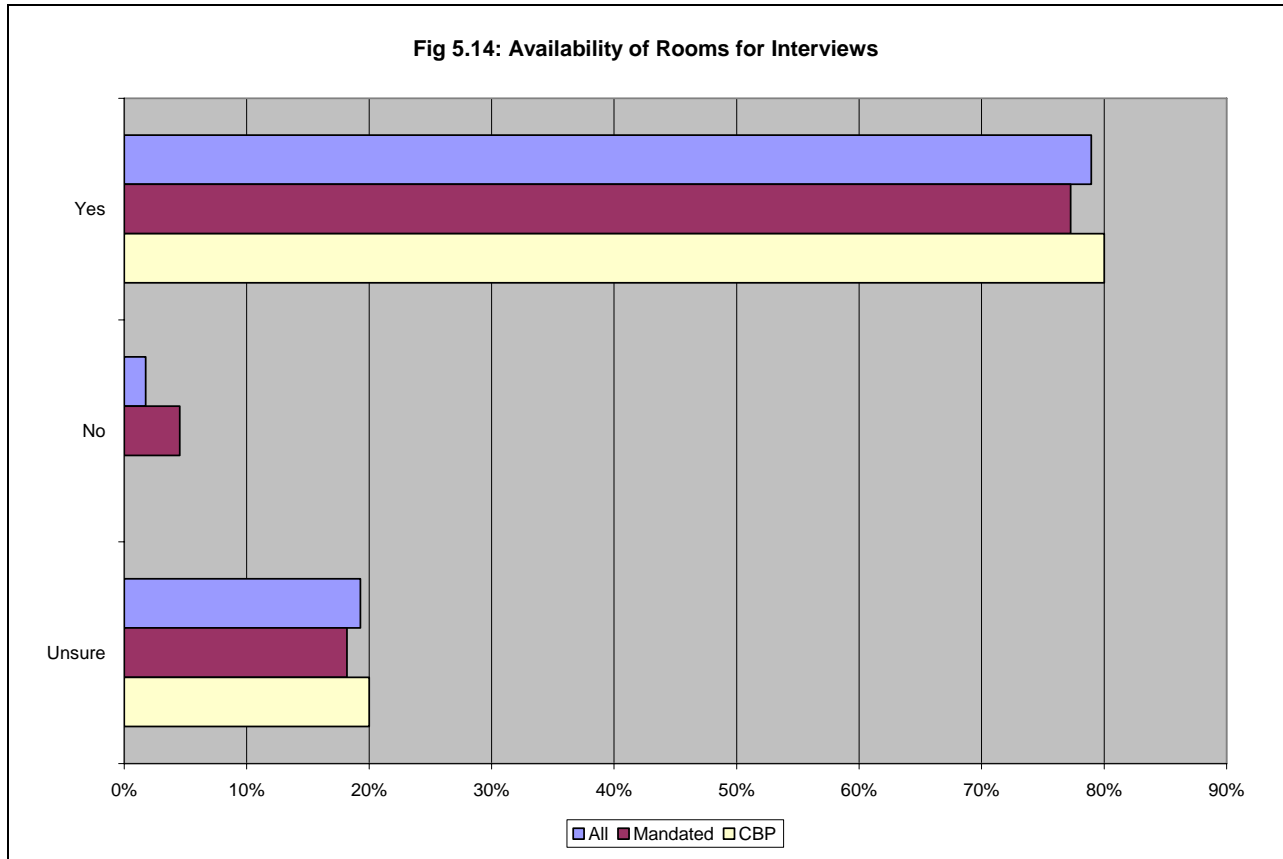
	<b>All</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>	<b>CBP*</b>
	<b>Very Well &amp; Well</b>	<b>Very Well &amp; Well</b>	<b>Very Well &amp; Well</b>
<b>Adult Basic Education</b>	63%	68%	60%
<b>Career &amp; Technical Vocational Education</b>	46%	61%	35%
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation</b>	54%	57%	53%
<b>Employment Services/Wagner-Peyser</b>	41%	54%	33%
<b>Foreign Labor Certification Program</b>	4%	11%	0%
<b>Local Veterans Employment</b>	15%	21%	10%
<b>Trade Adjustment Assistance Program</b>	15%	32%	3%
<b>Welfare-to-Work Tax Credit</b>	22%	26%	20%
<b>Workforce Investment Act Title 1 Program</b>	35%	54%	23%
<b>Community College Job Training</b>	48%	59%	40%
<b>NE Dept. Economic Development Training</b>	21%	21%	20%
<b>Employment First Program</b>	35%	36%	35%
<b>Food Stamp Employment &amp; Training</b>	28%	32%	25%
<b>Food Stamp Workforce Program</b>	26%	36%	20%
<b>Senior Community Service Employment Prog.</b>	18%	25%	13%
<b>Experience Works/Title V</b>	21%	25%	18%
<b>Job Corps</b>	35%	36%	35%

\*CBP = Community-Based Partner

*Facilities for Business Customers*

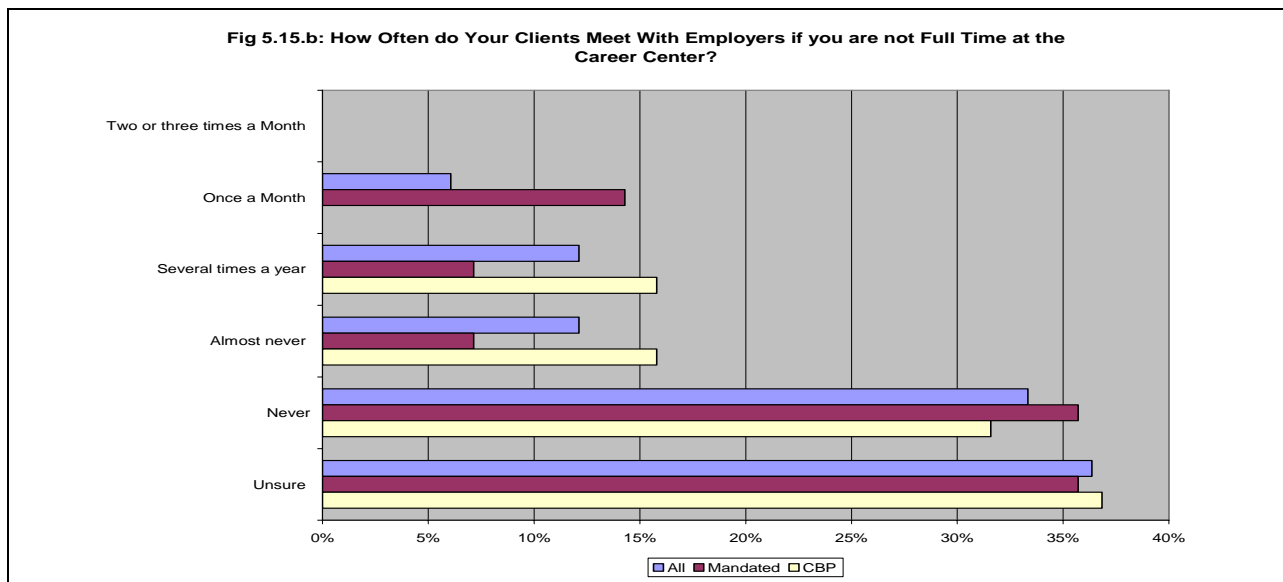
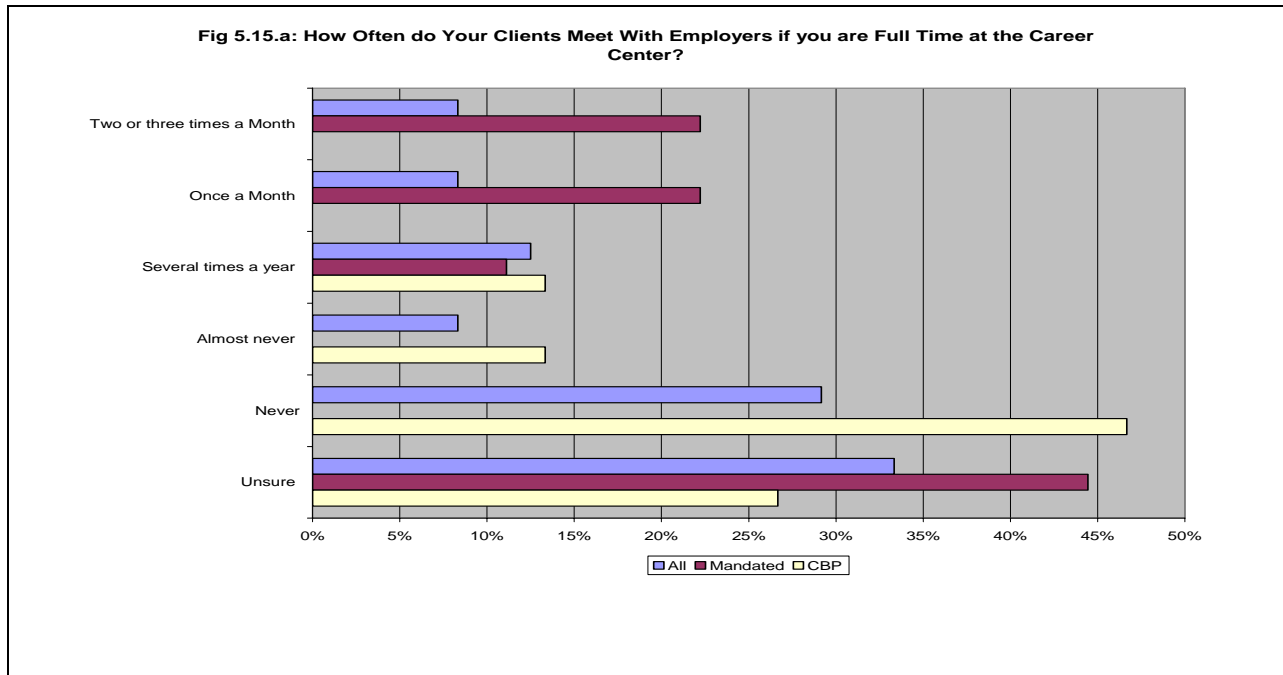
**Question: Does the Career Center have adequate facilities for employers to conduct interviews on site?**

Figure 5.14 shows that a vast majority of respondents, mandatory and CBPs alike, indicate that rooms are available for businesses to interview job seekers.



**Question: On average, how often do your clients meet with employers who have come to the Career Center to conduct interviews?**

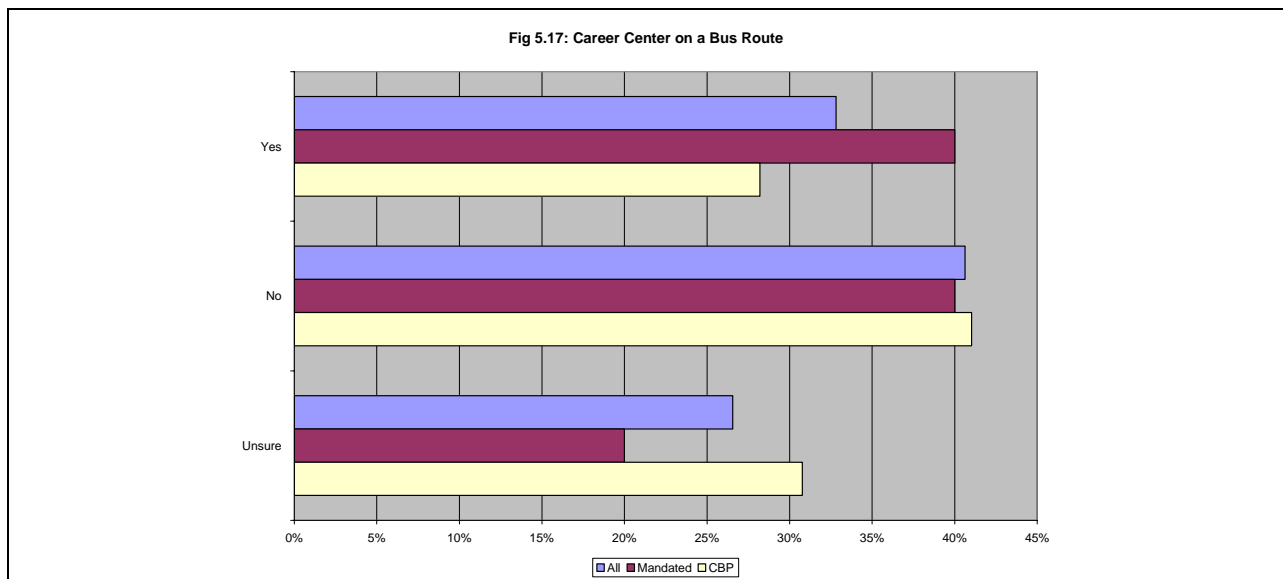
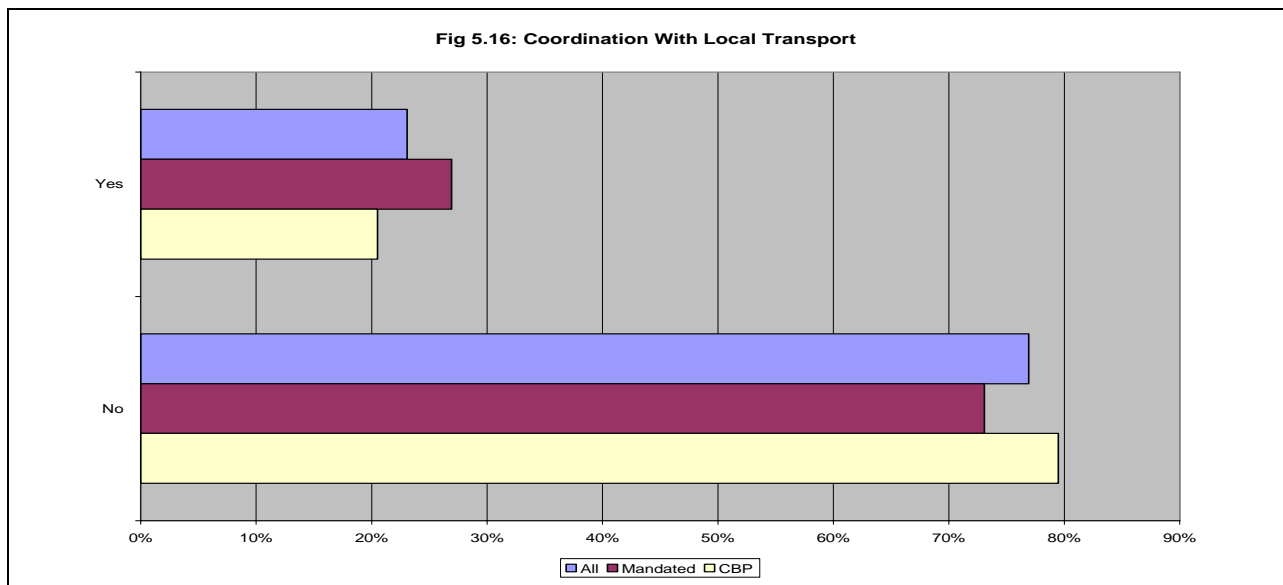
About 45 percent of full-time, mandatory partners report that their clients regularly meet with employers at the Career Center. Such meetings are rare for part-time mandatory partners and community-based partners.



*Universal Access*

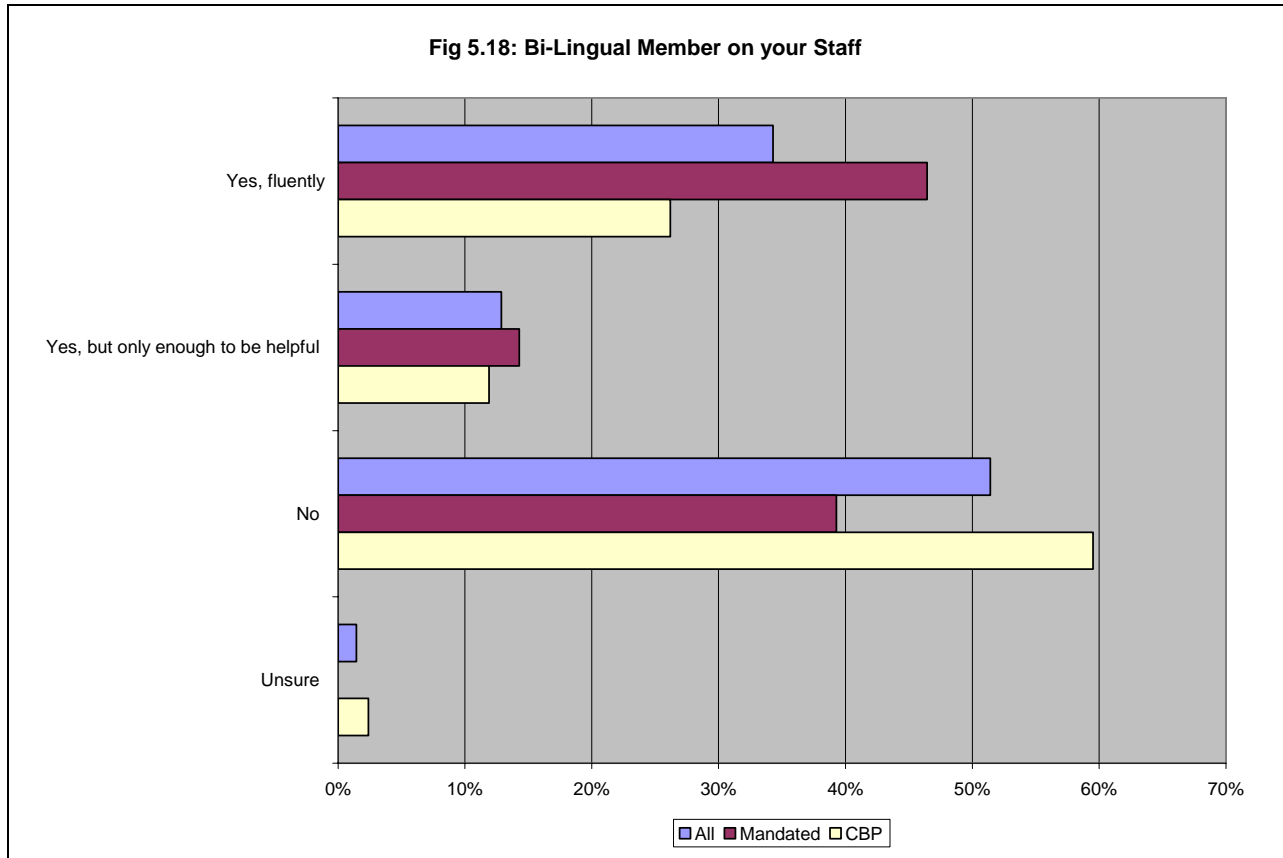
**Question: Do you coordinate with local transportation providers to get clients to the One-Stop Career Center? Question: Is the Career Center located on a bus route?**

It appears that, based on Figure 5.16 and 5.17, even though about a third of the respondents indicate that the Career Center is located on a bus route, a vast majority of partners do not coordinate with local transportation providers to get clients to the One-Stop Career Center. It should be noted that many Career Centers are located in smaller communities that do not have bus service.



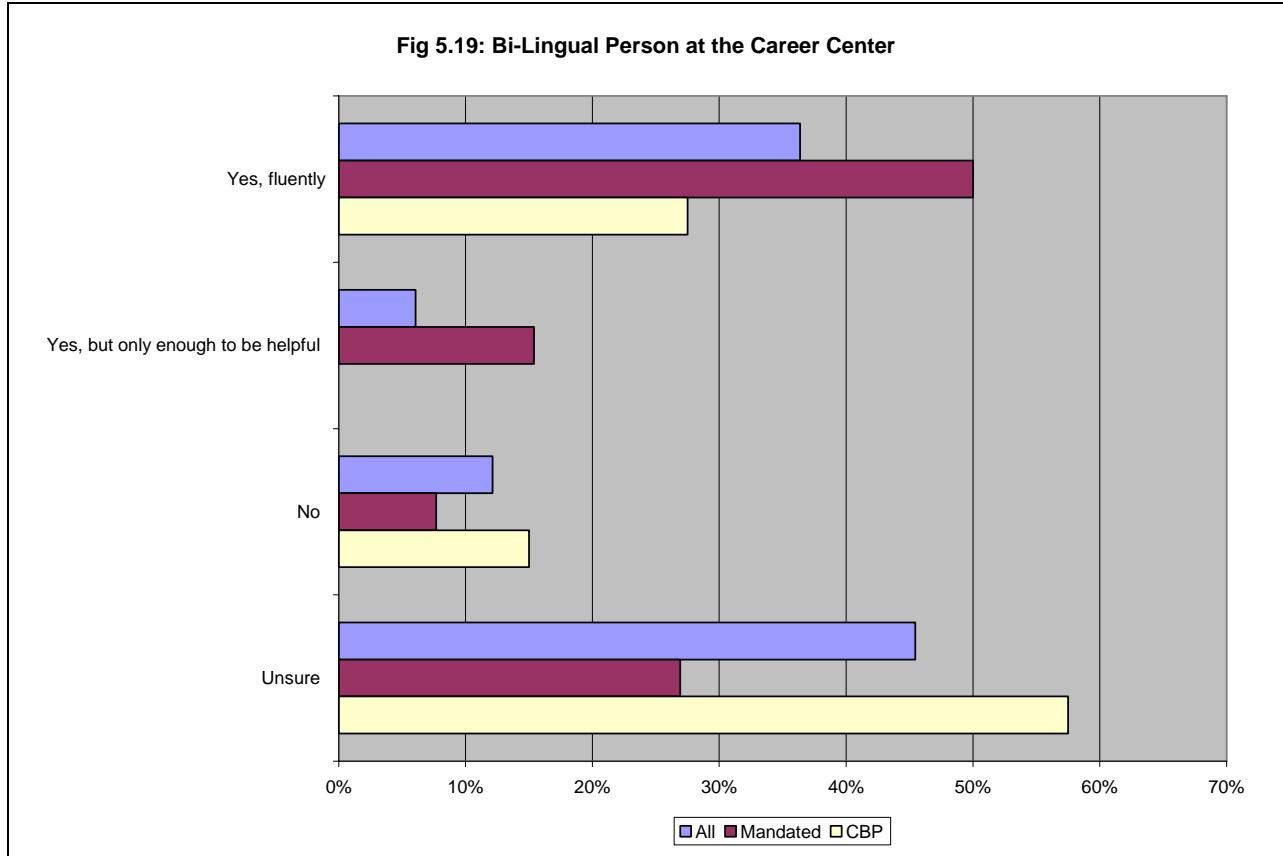
**Question: Is there anyone on your staff who is bilingual?**

Figure 5.18 shows that about half of the organizations at the Career Center have bilingual staff members.



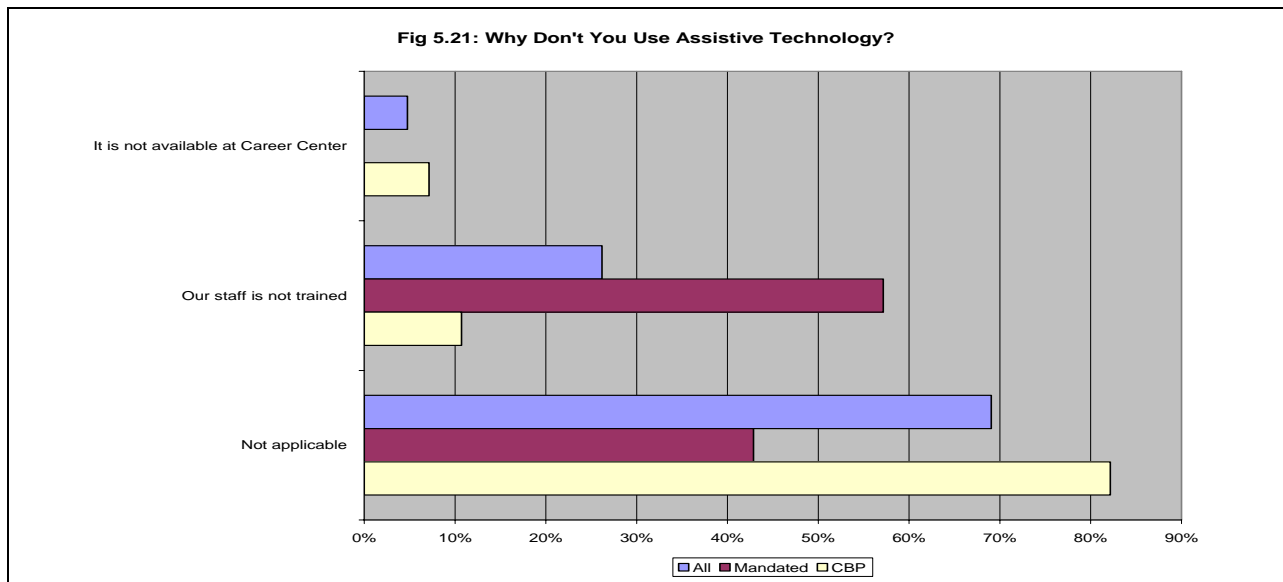
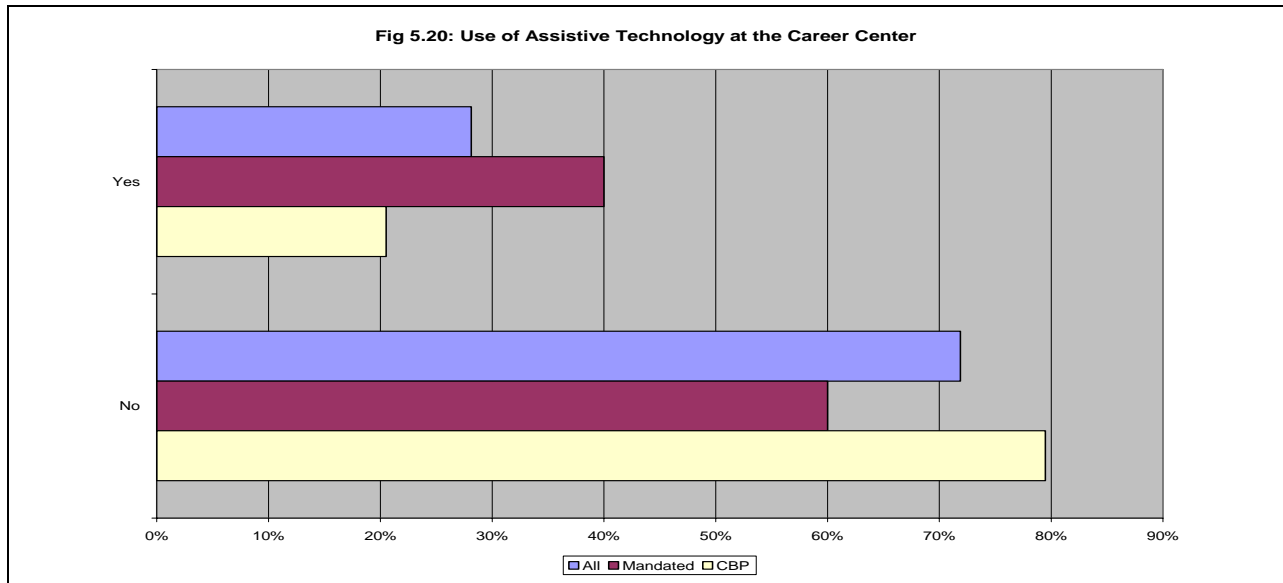
**Question: Is there anyone else working at the Career Center who is bilingual?**

Based on Figure 5.19, most Career Centers do have bilingual personnel. But many respondents simply indicate that they don't know if there are bilingual staff at their Career Center. Very few answered that there were not.



**Question: Does your program area or organization utilize assistive technology devices at the Career Center? Question: Why don't you utilize assistive technology devices at the Career Center?**

Figure 5.20 and 5.21 show that partners are distinct in their use of assistive technology at the Career Center. Most of partners do not use assistive technology because either their staff is not trained to use it or it is not applicable to their programs. Some mandatory partners, however, indicate using assistive technology regularly.



**Question: Please describe any other issues regarding universal access at the Career Center that you believe are important.**

Use of assistive technology and overall accessibility are not a problem at most Career Centers, though there is a need at some centers. In particular, some respondents indicated the need for more bilingual staff, the lack of which is currently deterring many potential clients from using the services offered. The lack of computer-use training has also been cited as a problem, but not only for clients, as there are staff members who need training in the use of specialized software. General accessibility of the center is also compromised at some locations as there is limited or no collaboration with local transportation providers. Overall, better access to the services would be improved if more staff had broader training on all services offered.

**Summary of Findings**

*Efficient and Effective Delivery of Services*

The One-Stop Career Center system encourages the efficient delivery of services by providing partners with the opportunity to share common space and equipment, a common reception and resource room, and common data information systems. Survey responses indicated a significant level of sharing of these resources, but also opportunities for improvement.

Full-time co-located partners did share common space. Just over 60 percent reported sharing conference and break rooms at the Career Center. Full-time co-located partners were somewhat likely to share common equipment, with only about 40 percent sharing copy machines and FAX machines. Responses did not differ between mandatory and other community-based partners.

Mandatory partners were much more likely to participate in other shared services, however. 70 percent of mandatory partner agencies that are co-located full time report staffing the front desk and the resource room on a daily basis. Only very few of other community-based partners

regularly staffed the front desk, and these partners almost never regularly staffed the resource room.

A majority of full-time co-located mandatory partners reported using the NWAS system regularly. Use was not common among mandatory partners that did not co-locate full time and among other community-based partners. Further, a clear majority of partners indicated that they did have access to their agencies database when located at the Career Center.

### *Seamless Service Delivery*

Seamless service delivery occurs as partner agencies work together to meet the needs of clients, whether these are workers or employers. This requires a substantial level of familiarity, communication, and coordination among partners. Survey responses indicate that roughly half of partners, whether mandatory or other community-based partners, understand each other's programs well or very well. Partners reported being less aware of opportunities to interact with employers.

Survey responses revealed that many partner agency staff received formal training and informal communications about the programs of other partners. As a result, many partners appeared to understand each other's programs either well or very well. At least one-third of respondents indicated that they understood partners' programs such as Employment Services, Title 1 programs, Employment First, Community College training, and other programs from the Nebraska Department of Education either well or very well. Similarly, about half respondents felt that their programs were well or somewhat understood by other partners.

Survey responses indicated significant levels of both formal training and informal learning about other programs. Nearly two-thirds of full-time co-located mandatory partners reported being trained several times a year, with most of the remainder being trained every few years. Even mandatory partners that were co-located less than full-time often reported receiving training every few years. Half of other community-based partners that were co-located reported receiving training at least once a year. Partners that were unsatisfied with training opportunities typically noted that they did not receive enough advanced notice about training. In addition to training, nearly all co-located partners reported participating in periodic meetings of partners serving a local area. Nearly half attended monthly meetings, while another 35 percent attended meetings quarterly or annually. As noted earlier, these joint meetings provide an opportunity to discuss changes and new opportunities in the programs of participating partners.

There may be less communications to partners regarding employer visits, however, according to survey responses. About 45 percent of full-time, mandatory partners indicated that their clients met with employers at the Career Centers regularly (at least once a month), but regular meetings were uncommon for part-time mandatory partners and for all other community-based partners. Many partners reported that they were simply unsure whether their clients met with employers visiting the Career Center.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Interviews with leaders of partner agencies and mail survey responses from program area staff provided a mixed picture of the level of efficiency and seamless service delivery at One-Stop Career Centers. Some partner agency leaders expressed enthusiasm about the opportunities available at Career Centers, and some mandatory partners and many other community-based partners did co-locate at Career Centers. Further, there was a significant level of training occurring as well as other efforts to keep partners knowledgeable about and engaged with each other and the Career Center. The level of integration and co-location also differed greatly among Career Centers. In part, this occurs because key mandatory partners in Nebraska generally leave decisions about co-location and collaboration at the local level rather than providing a state mandate. To give a key example, one key mandatory partner reported that their agency co-located and provided coordinated service with Workforce Development in some Career Centers, but not in others.

These findings suggest that continued progress in the One-Stop system is an ongoing management task of making the Career Center system work more effectively by continually raising standards and implementing best practices in additional centers. Recommendations are provided below to work with specific challenges identified during the research project. Whether or not these particular recommendations are accepted, each should be seen as an example of an approach that could be used to address a key challenge facing the One-Stop Career Center system.

## **Collaboration among Partners**

During their interviews, about half of mandatory partner agencies expressed a desire for more referrals and for more collaboration between agencies in Career Centers on the cases of individual clients. Taken as a whole, the general suggestion was that Career Centers, in addition to being a place where clients were efficiently referred between program areas, also could provide a venue in which partner agencies could meet together on the cases of individual clients and jointly manage the cases of clients. Collaboration might range from simply closely coordinating on assessment and assignment of clients to particular services to efforts such as sharing the costs of training. Such efforts naturally could be of help to individual clients. Another benefit might be to increase the attachment of partner agencies to the Career Center. In particular, several agency leaders indicated that their agency had pulled out of selected Career Centers due to a lack of referrals or because there did not seem to be an important purpose to be there. More efforts at collaboration on the cases of individual clients could address this concern

**Recommendation 1:** *Co-located partners already do collaborate on the cases of clients.*

*While we don't recommend specific goals or targets, we do recommend that Career Center managers informally make efforts to raise the numbers of referrals and the level of collaboration, when appropriate, for the benefit of clients but also to enhance the seamless delivery of services.*

## **Interaction with Employers**

Workforce Development staff and Career Center managers work with employers in a variety of ways: 1) visiting with employers; 2) hosting events at the center; 3) referring potential employees; and 4) making Career Centers available for employer interviews. These contacts with employers provide potential opportunities for all partner agencies to place employees and build their connections with local employers. Several partner agency heads that we interviewed suggested that their local staff often are not given enough information or warning about employer visits or other opportunities for job placements. At the same time, mail survey responses suggest that only 15 percent to 45 percent of partner agencies were confident that their clients interviewed with employers at a Career Center on a regular basis (defined as at least a few times per year).

**Recommendation 2:** *To facilitate communications between partner agencies on relations with employers, Workforce Development staff charged with visiting employers should develop a routine plan for inviting local staff from other partner agencies on visits. There should also be a notification to all partners when there are going to be employer seminars, job fairs, etc.*

## **Staff Meetings**

Mail survey responses indicated that most mandatory and other community-based partners were regularly attending staff meetings at One-Stop Career Centers. Many attended monthly staff meetings. These meetings provide an opportunity for partners to discuss new initiatives in their program areas or to discuss other issues. More generally, they provide a way for partners to learn

about developments at the Career Center. Staff meetings, however, are primarily attended by co-located partners.

**Recommendation 3:** *To help partners who are not able to co-locate become more familiar with events at the Career Center, center managers should set a goal of having mandatory partners who are not co-located attend a center staff meeting at least once a quarter. To further aid those who were not able to attend, minutes and/or a summary of these meetings should be taken and distributed to all partners and management.*

### **Staffing of the Front Desk**

Several types of benefits are generated when partner agencies share in the effort of staffing the front desk of One-Stop Career Centers. First, the cost of staffing the front desk is shared among partners, reducing the cost for Workforce Development. Second, it encourages familiarity with other partner programs and the sense of joint responsibility for success of the Career Centers. Interviews with Workforce Development leaders and Career Center managers revealed that Workforce Development in many cases bore most of the responsibility of staffing the front desk at One-Stop Career Centers. This finding also is consistent with results of our mail survey of partner agency staff located at Career Centers.

**Recommendation 4:** *Co-location at a Career Center should include specific requirements to participate in staffing the front desk. This could mean required participation or reimbursement. In particular, for reimbursement a time code function could be established for those performing this task and those charges could be prorated*

*to all partner agencies. This would conform to acceptable accounting practices and provide fairness to all agencies that are benefiting from this function.*

### **The Nebraska Workforce Assessment System (NWAS)**

During interviews, several partner agency leaders indicated that their agency had stopped using the NWAS database. While many mandatory partners that returned the mail survey indicated that they regularly used NWAS, a significant portion did not and very few other community-based partners used the system. Thus, there was significant use of NWAS, but also room for expanded use. A number of respondents indicated that cost was a factor in NWAS use, but functionality also was an issue. Many partner agencies leaders indicated that their agency and Workforce Development had tried to design NWAS so that it could intake relevant data elements and interface effectively with their own database systems. This is often difficult, in part because eligibility requirements differ so much between program areas. Key data elements also differ.

**Recommendation 5:** *Like any database, NWAS is also expensive to maintain. Workforce Develop should continue to encourage partner agencies to utilize NWAS, including reopening efforts to add data elements essential for partner agencies. If the number of partners that utilize NWAS cannot be raised, however, Workforce Development might consider other procedures for intaking and sharing common data elements for clients, such as a web-based system or a key card system.*

### **Training**

More than half of mail survey respondents reported that they received cross-training on partner programs over the last year. This finding suggests that there is substantial progress with training.

The need for cross-training is ongoing, and there also was a substantial minority of mail survey respondents who indicated that they do not receive training regularly. This suggests making an effort to encourage further training in addition to what is already being accomplished.

**Recommendation 6:** *Partners might develop training videos that cover the basic services of and eligibility requirements of program areas. These could be shown to both new employees and employees that have not been able to attend training classes. This option naturally would be most feasible for larger partner organizations that have sufficient resources to produce such a video.*

### **Future Considerations**

The Career Center system in Nebraska has made a significant effort in recent years to further increase its level of service to the business community. Further, as was noted earlier in this report, the United States Department of Labor conducted a nationwide survey to gauge employer satisfaction with Career Center services. Nebraska Workforce Development and the State Workforce Investment Board should consider implementing a detailed survey to gauge the satisfaction of the employer community in Nebraska.

**Appendix 1**  
**List of Career Centers in Nebraska**

**Omaha (2)**

Cedar  
Blue Lion

**Lincoln (1)**

**Greater Nebraska (19)**

Alliance  
Beatrice  
Chadron  
Columbus  
Falls City  
Fremont  
Grand Island  
Hastings  
Holdrege  
Kearney  
Lexington  
McCook  
Nebraska City  
Norfolk  
North Platte  
Scottsbluff  
Sidney  
West Point  
York

## Appendix 2

Table A2.1  
Co-located Mandated Partners

Centers	Department of Education	Workforce Development	Health and Human Services	NE Association of Farmworkers	Native American Programs	NE Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired	Department of Economic Development	Community College System	DESI/Job Corps	ExperienceWorks /Title 5
Alliance		X						X		
Beatrice	X	X	X							X
Chadron		X	X					X		
Columbus	X	X		X						
Falls City		X								
Fremont		X						X		
Grand Island	X	X	X	X					X	
Hastings		X								X
Holdrege		X								
Kearney		X								
Lexington		X								
Lincoln	X	X		X						
McCook		X								
NE City		X	X							
Norfolk		X								
North Platte		X	X	X						
Omaha - Cedar	X	X								
Omaha - Blue Lion	X	X								
Scottsbluff		X	X				X			X
Sidney		X								
West Point		X								
York		X								

Note: Co-location information for based on interviews, mail survey results, and Career Center websites as of June 30, 2006.

Table A2.2  
Co-located Other Community-Based Partners

	Chamber of Commerce	Goodwill	Public School System	United Way	Local Community Organizations for People with Disabilities	Local Community Organizations for Low Income Families	Family & Youth Resource Centers	Temporary Employment Agencies
Alliance	X		X			X		
Beatrice							X	
Chadron	X						X	
Columbus				X	X	X	X	
Falls City								
Fremont	X				X	X		
Grand Island		X					X	
Hastings		X			X			
Holdrege								
Kearney	X	X						
Lexington								
Lincoln		X				X		
McCook								
NE City	X				X	X	X	
Norfolk	X						X	X
North Platte								
Omaha - Cedar		X	X			X		
Omaha - Blue Lion								
Scottsbluff	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Sidney	X							
West Point							X	X
York								

Note: Co-location information provided by Nebraska Workforce Development as of June 30, 2006

**Appendix 3**  
**Detailed Presentation of Table 5.2**

**Question: How well do you and your staff understand the programs and services delivered by the following partner program areas: Very Little, Little, Somewhat, Well, and Very Well?**

	<b>Very Little</b>	<b>Little</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Well</b>	<b>Very Well</b>
Adult Basic Education	1%	6%	29%	31%	32%
Career & Technical Vocational Education	3%	12%	40%	29%	16%
Vocational Rehabilitation	3%	9%	34%	38%	16%
Employment Services/Wagner-Peyser	13%	21%	25%	28%	13%
Foreign Labor Certification Program	48%	28%	19%	3%	1%
Local Veterans Employment	26%	22%	37%	6%	9%
Trade Adjustment Assistance Program	51%	22%	12%	10%	4%
Welfare-to-Work Tax Credit	24%	21%	33%	13%	9%
Workforce Investment Act Title 1 Program	25%	22%	18%	24%	12%
Community College Job Training	4%	19%	28%	31%	16%
NE Dept. Economic Development Training	18%	31%	31%	13%	7%
Employment First Program	19%	10%	35%	21%	15%
Food Stamp Employment & Training	18%	19%	35%	16%	12%
Food Stamp Workforce Program	16%	22%	35%	13%	13%
Senior Community Service Employment Prog.	22%	30%	30%	6%	12%
Experience Works/Title V	19%	31%	28%	10%	10%
Job Corps	12%	16%	37%	19%	16%