MISSOURI APPLICATION FOR
NASWA’s
2018 WILLIAM J. HARRIS
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AWARD
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Executive Summary

The State of Missouri’s Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners including each of the fourteen Workforce Development Boards throughout the State are ensuring Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination in our programs, products and services. Led by Mardy L. Leathers, Director of the Missouri Division of Workforce Development (DWD), workforce leadership and staff are participating in new system-wide training and engagement with their supervisors and staff. We have seen tremendous growth and energy invested into outreach to various protected populations around the state. Much of the success that the Missouri Division of Workforce Development has realized is a direct result of the support for equal opportunity and nondiscrimination demonstrated by our leadership in the workforce system and the collaborative partnerships of the Workforce Development Boards in our state that share our commitment to Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination.
Mardy L. Leathers, Director of the Missouri Division of Workforce Development (DWD)

Mardy Leathers was appointed to serve as the Director of the Missouri Division of Workforce Development in October 2017. Prior to becoming the Director of Workforce Development, he most recently served as Executive Director of the Center for Workforce Development at East Central College in Union, Missouri. There, he played a key role in developing the statewide Community College Workforce Development Network and oversaw the college’s business and industry training efforts, community education, healthcare career certification and WIOA programs. Mardy Leathers is a former County Clerk of Crawford County Missouri, holds a BS from Southeast Missouri State University, a MBA from William Woods University, and is a Doctor of Management candidate with Webster University.

Danielle Smith, State of Missouri WIOA Equal Opportunity Officer

Danielle Smith is the State of Missouri WIOA Equal Opportunity Officer. Danielle has worked for the Department of Economic Development/Division of Workforce Development since 2006. Prior to becoming the State WIOA Equal Opportunity Officer, Danielle was Regional Coordinator for the Division of Workforce Development where she managed and administered Missouri Job Center programs. Danielle received her B.A. from University of Arkansas-Little Rock and her M.A. from the University of Phoenix. Danielle began her career in Kansas City, MO as a teacher. She later entered the Human Resource field in Tulsa, Oklahoma which led her back to Kansas City, MO where she has worked for private and government organizations in workforce services for over 15 years.
Missouri’s DWD has worked to improve services to people with disabilities by training all staff including leadership and frontline service providers. Missouri DWD utilized the Section 188 Promising Practices in Achieving Universal Access and Equal Opportunity training developed in cooperation with the LEAD Center and Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation, to ensure universal access to programs and services. This training initiative includes a management track and a front-line staff track providing scenario-based examples. Ongoing training is being provided to Equal Opportunity Officers from each WDB and they in turn are providing this training material to the Missouri Job Center staff in their regions.

Missouri’s DWD utilized the WIOA Core Partners and several members of Local WDBs to develop its One-Stop Certification process and requirements to ensure equal opportunity and nondiscriminatory practices were fully integrated to determine how well each Center is complying with WIOA Section 188 (Attachment 1). Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation and Missouri Rehabilitation Services for the Blind staff provided significant input to the requirements in addition to DWD’s Equal Opportunity Unit.

The DWD is actively engaged with the Missouri Department of Mental Health (DMH) as a part of the ODEP’s Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program (EFSLMP) through the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) in the US Department of Labor. This collaborative seeks to align and improve policies and
service delivery practices in order to improve outcomes for those with significant disabilities who are seeking employment. As a part of this initiative, DWD and DMH sought to improve staffs’ knowledge of our mutual services in order to provide better outcomes for our customers. DWD participated in a pilot training in the Southeast region during 2017 with DMH, members of the SE WDB and Missouri Job Center staff in Cape Girardeau as well as regional mental health providers. These partners created a referral process and a Toolkit that can be replicated and used statewide. This project was in response to the need voiced by Workforce staff for more resources to assist customers with mental health challenges and to improve mental health providers’ knowledge of Missouri Job Center services to job seekers, regardless of disability. The toolkit located at https://dmh.mo.gov/mentalillness/docs/employment-toolkit.pdf was a joint effort of staff participating in Missouri’s EFSLMP collaborative.

The Great Plains ADA Center has assisted DWD efforts to ensure equal access to programs and services by providing several trainings for our Local Equal Opportunity Officers at our 2017 MAWD EO Pre-conference when Julie Brinkhoff, Associate Director of the Great Plains ADA Center, provided training on Equal and Effective Services for Customers with Disabilities based on the Americans with Disabilities Act as amended. Ms. Brinkhoff also presented multiple sessions on disability topics at 2017’s MAWD Conference including Service Animals and Disability Accommodations and Awareness. Ms. Brinkhoff has provided training to our Local EO Officers on Best Practices in Customer Service: Serving People with Disabilities Effectively as well as customized disability training for staff throughout the state. Ms. Brinkhoff also participated in our Section 188 training for our DWD and WDB leadership.

The DWD EO Unit presented a 2018 MAWD conference session: New Equal Opportunity Obligations Under WIOA Section 188. The EO Unit also held an EO Pre-conference session at MAWD for all Local EO Officers where EO Officers shared their best practices and in-depth training was provided on the Local Complaint System (including hearings and appeals procedures). Multiple sessions of the
MAWD Conference focused on serving member of protected groups or individuals with multiple barriers. Both Jim Brinkmann and Ian Shadrick with Rehabilitation Services for the Blind presented on services that are provided to Missouri Job Center customers who are blind or who have vision loss.

Missouri’s DWD in cooperation with the State WIOA Steering Committee created a sub-committee focused on improving assistive technology in the Missouri Job Centers through a collaboration with the state’s assistive technology consortium, MO Assistive Technology. Planning is underway to create and provide a training curriculum for front-line staff that will better prepare them to serve each customer with varying accommodation and technology needs.

Many of the Local EO Officers are working to improve access to not only the Job Centers with more universally accessible areas available for job seekers within their Centers, but also through outreach and added services. In addition to focusing outreach toward job seekers who are members of protected classes and the organizations and agencies that serve them, Missouri’s Job Centers are focusing on outreach to businesses and HR professionals who are seeking qualified candidates. One great example of outreach to both the business and disability communities is in the St Louis metro area where four WDBs came together to plan Accommodation for Success, a one-day training for HR Professionals that has grown to include one of the nation’s largest Reverse Job Fair events in just three years (Attachments 2, 3). Today, Accommodation for Success is planned by a committee representing six WDBs and leaders from multiple employers and service agencies throughout the St Louis metro area. Awards are presented to high achieving businesses during this major training event that offers diverse workshops for SHRM credits to HR professionals as well as a unique opportunity to participate in the largest reverse job fair in the State. Participating job seekers and businesses have reported positive feedback and the event continues to grow each year—in 2017 the event grew to 223 attendees representing businesses and organizations and 75 job seekers with disabilities participating in the first Reverse Job Fair. Over 60 staff from the metro area volunteered at the event to make it a success.
Some of the outcomes from this large event include spin-off events that have occurred throughout the state and St Louis region. One such event was a Reverse Job Fair held by Mercy Hospital in St Louis following their 2017 participation in Accommodation for Success. One Mercy Hospital staff wrote, “I was blessed to [participate in] the Reverse Job Fair [at Mercy Hospital]. I hired a gentleman and he is an amazing asset to our team. Thank you [Mercy staff] for the innovative idea and organizing the impressive event.”

The WDBs in Missouri who have organized Accommodation for Success include the SLATE WDB, St Louis County WDB, St Charles County WDB, and Jefferson/Franklin (Counties) WDB. Many other workforce partners have worked as members of the Disability Steering Committees of these WDBs and have helped to organize the event. Several St Louis area employers have also taken an active role in the planning and sponsorship of the event. As one committee member wrote, “...I believe this event changes the future for generations to come in diversity and inclusion, economic development and finding unity and awareness across many communities. The best way to predict the future is to create it, and we are doing that together, and together we are better.”

There have been a number of disability awareness events held by WDBs throughout the state. Many of the Local EO Officers and their WDBs are working to improve access to their services for all job seekers and protected classes through outreach to both the job seekers and the organizations and agencies serving them, but also businesses and HR professionals who are seeking qualified candidates. In 2018, the Southwest Region WDB and its WIOA partners developed a pre-apprenticeship program in construction targeting a large population of limited English proficient individuals in a small city where over 27% of the residents speak Spanish as their only or primary language. The SW WDB and its partners, including Catholic Charities and several construction unions, joined forces to train and employ
individuals in multiple specialties within the construction industry (Attachment 4). Preparation for the apprenticeship program included translation of special enrollment forms and documents into Spanish, including applications and flyers. A professional translator was hired to translate verbal information presented at informational meetings for potential participants. A bi-lingual staff member was hired to work directly with the participants of the program. This staff member was instrumental in helping bridge the communication gap among staff, trainers and participants. Hispanic cultural diversity training was provided to staff prior to the five-week classroom training and hands-on instruction where a community center was renovated by participants. Many barriers were addressed through the SW partnership and many sector-specific skills were gained. Most of the project materials were donated by local businesses. The community center, called the Plaza, is a source of pride for the community and has become an access point for community members (many of whom are Hispanic and Spanish speaking) to receive job-search and training services. It also provides classroom space for future training programs. The SW WDB hosts an annual Inclusion Forum to promote the recruitment, hiring and retaining of persons from potentially disadvantaged and protected groups.

The West Central WDB recently helped to organize a new Youth Task Force Partnership bringing professionals together who serve youth and young adults including: offenders, homeless or runaway, foster child/aged out of foster system, pregnant and parenting youth, youth with a disability, basic skills deficient, school dropout, compulsory attendance, youth with English as a Second Language, and low income youth. In addition to identifying resources among partners, a second goal for this group will be partnering to provide outreach to these individuals. This should allow agencies to support their common initiatives and be able to affect a larger population of youth and young adults.

In 2017 the South Central and Southeast regions’ WDBs each collaborated with their regional partners to hold an Inclusion Summit and Networking Luncheon in the South Central region and an EmployAbility Summit for Human Resources and other
business professionals to learn more about hiring individuals with barriers in the Southeast region (Attachment 5). The *EmployAbility Summit* in Cape Girardeau feature two panel presentations including the employer, employee with a disability, and the VR Counselor. The second annual Inclusion Summit held in both West Plains and Poplar Bluff, entitled *Empower, Employ: Work Without Limits Inclusion Summit* featured a collaboration of federal, state, and regional agencies as well as nonprofits presenting to a variety of regional employers.

The Northeast WDB has actively participated in several outreach events for job seekers with disabilities. The Northeast WDB and its Missouri Job Center in Kirksville presented at the Annual DisAbility Awareness Conference held in 2017 at Truman State University as an outreach to people with disabilities and the public at large, including students at the University. Kori Cameron and Brandy Allen with the Missouri Job Center in Kirksville presented a session on Missouri Job Center services and how job seekers with disabilities can benefit from these services. Staff from this Job Center have also actively participated in their Community Transition Team that includes the special education department of the Kirksville High School and the Kirksville Department of Mental Health, Division of Developmental Disabilities, VR and several local service providers during 2017. Missouri Job Center staff also participated in an outreach to students with disabilities during the “Futures Fair” for students with disabilities who are preparing for graduation.

The Central WDB and its Central MO AccessAbility Collaborative recently held it second annual 2018 AccessAbility Business Summit with a member of the Governor’s Council on Disability presenting as well as a panel of employers and employees with disabilities (Attachment 6). This event included a Disability Awareness presentation and provided SHRM credits to those in attendance.

In the Ozark Region, the Missouri Job Center and several partner agencies hosted a series of Lunch & Learns to educate businesses on employing people on the autism spectrum. The Lunch & Learns were planned in response to the expressed need for IT job candidates during a Roundtable of IT professionals in the Ozark region. The
Lunch & Learns covered the basics of understanding autism, myths, as well as a discussion on tools for hiring that included WOTC and accommodation options. Following the three Lunch & Learns, business participants were invited to attend “Career Connections,” an event that included nineteen individuals on the autism spectrum who presented their skills and knowledge to these employers during this event that was similar to a reverse job fair. Following a PSA, one parent contacted staff to ask if her daughter could participate in Career Connections—she participated and was really excited about the opportunity to engage with these employers. The Ozark Region plans to build on the success of this event in the future!

The City of St. Louis WDB is promoting workforce diversity at construction sites throughout the Metropolitan area, and is partnering with SLATE to help introduce minorities and women to nearly a dozen of the building trades as pre-apprentices through its Building Union Diversity (BUD) program. Those participants who successfully graduate from the program are guaranteed an interview with one of eight participating unions for a full-time job. BUD is achieving its goal of encouraging diversity and inclusivity in the building trades. The first BUD class started in fall 2014, and to date, more than 100 people have graduated the program, now working on many construction sites throughout the City.

The state’s DWD has been actively promoting and providing equal access and equal opportunities for the job seekers and businesses that we serve!