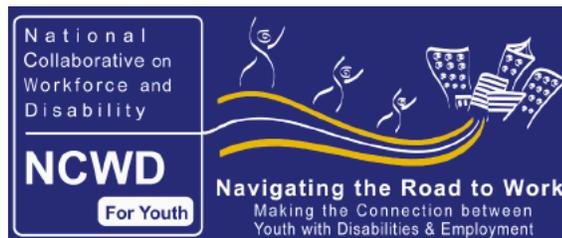


# Toward Universal Access in the Workforce Development System

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The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) is composed of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, and workforce development issues. NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. The Collaborative is charged with assisting state and local workforce development systems to integrate youth with disabilities into their service strategies.

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# Toward Universal Access in the Workforce Development System

## Introduction

The word “universal” has multiple meanings and usages across the workforce development system; these multiple meanings have substantial implications for students, job seekers, employers, and the various institutions providing services. Some people use the terms “universal access” and “universal design” interchangeably, because one has evolved from the other. Others use the term “universal access” when referring to “universal service.”

This paper explores the core concepts of “universal service,” which has a very distinct meaning inside the employment and training arena, and that of “universal design” in the context of disability public policy. In addition, this paper urges the adoption of a comprehensive definition of universal access that would apply across all titles of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to all programs and services in the One-Stop system and incorporate elements of universal access, universal service, architectural accessibility, programmatic accessibility, and universal design, as defined in the disability policy arena.

As the workforce development system strives to meet the diverse needs of all its customers, particularly

youth and adults with disabilities and those for whom English is not the primary language, a clear understanding of both universal service and universal design—and the ways they affect delivery of programs, services, and activities—is imperative. While both are still emerging concepts in terms of how they effect the implementation of the workforce development system in this country, “universal access” is quickly becoming a familiar concept at the local, state, and national levels. The term “universal access” has been introduced into the workforce development system pursuant to the WIA as a means for ensuring that everyone has access to the One-Stop system and to core employment services. The technical definition of “universal access” under WIA is narrow, referring to the obligation on the part of recipients of WIA funds to make reasonable efforts—including through advertisement, recruitment, outreach, and targeting—to include participation of persons with disabilities in their programs and activities (U.S. DOL WIA Section 188 Checklist). However, when this definition is viewed in conjunction with the WIA nondiscrimination, equal opportunity, and effective communication requirements, WIA provides a framework for the broader definition of universal access proposed herein.

It is time to put forth a definition of universal access that applies across the Workforce Investment Act titles and to all programs and services in the workforce development system. Therefore, for the purposes of attempting to create clarity throughout the system, NCWD/Youth proposes the following definition of universal access: *the design of environments, products, and communication as well as the delivery of programs, services, and activities to be useable by all youth and adults, to the greatest extent possible, without adaptation or specialized design.* In essence, this definition offers a common term that contains two parts, the physical and the abstract, the visible and the invisible. It is about both design and service delivery, and it captures the core concepts across the system.

### **Universal Access in the Workforce System**

The concepts of universal access and universal design, from a disability policy perspective are now folded into the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and are applicable to the entire workforce development system.

Access for people with disabilities is driven, in large part, by some very specific standards embedded in multiple laws and implementing regulations, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, and now Section 188 of Title I of the WIA. Section 188, which implements the Act's non-discrimination and equal opportunity provisions, is applicable to programs, services, and activities receiving financial assistance under the Title, and is patterned after, and in fact refers to, similar nondiscrimination statutes. Because of the stringency of Section 188 coupled with Sections 504 and 508 of Title IV, the WIA legislation is arguably one of the strongest civil rights laws on the books.

Through guidance offered with the final WIA programmatic regulations, the concept of universal access indicates that "any individual will have access to the One-Stop system and to core employment-related services" as well as to information, instruction, and interview opportunities (U.S. Department of Labor, 1999). Section 188 regulations require recipients of WIA Title I financial assistance to take appropriate steps to ensure that they are providing universal access to their programs and activities for people with disabilities. As discussed previously, the "universal access"

provisions of WIA require recipients of federal financial assistance to make reasonable efforts (including advertisement, recruitment, outreach, and targeting) to include participation of persons with disabilities in their programs and activities (U.S. Department of Labor, 1999).

Under the Workforce Investment Act, recipients of federal financial assistance also have an obligation to provide reasonable modifications and reasonable accommodations for and effective communications with people with disabilities. In addition, WIA imposes obligations relating to physical and programmatic accessibility, which are discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

WIA's commitment to disability civil rights extends well beyond Title I. Another change that occurred with the passage of WIA was the folding of important disability public policy and programs into the federal workforce statute. Title IV of WIA contains the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, which authorize the entire vocational rehabilitation program as well as the supported employment and independent living programs. It also incorporates by reference Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the precursor to the Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as the full text of Section 508, which requires federal agencies to ensure the accessibility and usability of their electronic and information technology (Workforce Investment Act, 1998).

Thus, there are a number of federal laws and implementing regulations that, taken together, recognize the need to ensure physical and programmatic access to people with disabilities as well as the concepts of universal access, and non-discrimination and equal opportunity. Achieving universal access under the broader definition promoted herein, however, will require substantially different approaches to the design of instruction, services, materials, products, communications, locations, and environments, as well as new forms of professional development for personnel of service providers.

### **A Brief History**

As noted earlier, it is important to make a distinction between "universal design" and "universal access" – two terms that are often used interchangeably. The former is the more long-standing term and enjoys

multiple examples of success in practice. The latter is evolving from the former and has a broader application.

The concept of universal design originated in the field of architecture and initially focused on the built environment and access to a facility by someone with a physical disability. The term has since grown and been applied to other fields including product design, computer technology, electronics, telecommunications, classroom instruction, and workplace design.

The move toward universal design began in the 1950s with a new focus on disability in many societies. In Europe, Japan, and the United States, a concept known as “barrier-free” design developed to remove obstacles in the built environment for people with physical disabilities at the same time that public policy emphasized moving people with disabilities from institutional to community settings. Barrier-free design addressed the special needs of a segregated population

of individuals, those with physical limitations and mobility impairments (Fletcher, 2002).

“Barrier-free” design became “accessible design” by the 1970s as community integration of people with disabilities began to take hold and the disability civil rights movement made design a civil rights issue for the first time in history. Disability civil rights laws and regulations that began to spring up specified the responsibilities of designers, owners, and public agencies to make their facilities accessible, but still focused almost exclusively on the needs of people with mobility impairments and physical disabilities. “Laws governing accessible design had reduced design to a set of minimum requirements,” explains Valerie Fletcher, executive director of the Massachusetts-based nonprofit Adaptive Environments, Inc. “The laws offered invaluable protections but had the unintended consequence of diminishing attention to the creative potential of design to enable users” (Fletcher, 2002).

**TABLE 1**

**DISABILITY ACCESSIBILITY CONCEPTS AT-A-GLANCE**

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Accessibility Concept</b>	<b>Industry/Field</b>	<b>Application</b>
1950s	Barrier Free Design	Architecture	Built Environments
1970s	Accessible Design	Architecture, Public Policy	Facilities, Community Integration, Disability Civil Rights
1970s	Universal Design	Architecture, Product Development	Remove Environmental Barriers
Late 1980s	Universal Design	Architecture, Public Policy, Product Development	Built Environment, Disability Policy
1990s	Universal Design	Product Development	Personal Use Products, Technology
1990s	Universal Access	Information Technology	Hardware, Software, Internet
2000s	Universal Design for Learning	Schools	Education, Instruction, Learning Environments
Today	Universal Access	Public Policy, Workforce Development System	Programs, Services, Activities, Facilities, Technology, Information, Communication

**Source:** Table based on Bowe, 2000; Fletcher, 2002; Rose & Meyer, 2002.

In the 1970s, an American architect, Michael Bednar, introduced the idea that everyone's functional capacity is enhanced when environmental barriers are removed. He proposed that it was time for a new concept beyond "accessible design" that would address a broader array of issues and be more "universal" (Fletcher, 2002). By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ron Mace, an American architect with a disability and founder of the Center on Universal Design at North Carolina State University, began using the term "universal design" in the context of "accessible design." As Fletcher explains, Mace "made the case that universal design is 'not a new science, a style, or unique in any way. It requires only an awareness of need and market and a commonsense approach to making everything a design and product usable by everyone to the greatest extent possible'" (Fletcher, 2002).

According to Frank Bowe, "the idea was that if usability could be marketed to the general public as convenient, it would sell itself. People who try wide-grip scissors or other kitchen utensils, such as Friendly Fit forks and spoons...often prefer them to conventional implements; they just feel better." He explains that it was Mace's idea that "if he could present universal design so that people would voluntarily adopt it, the world would become a much more livable place for all of us" (Bowe, 2000).

### **Evolving Definitions**

There are many definitions of universal design, as the concept has grown and changed over time. The following definition of universal design—"The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design"—comes from Mace and his colleagues and serves as the foundation upon which others are still building. As Bowe points out, this definition recognizes that universal design, done properly, benefits all kinds of people. It "is a major conceptual break from the traditions of assistive technology" because it recognizes "that people can encounter problems in their environments for reasons related to the circumstances in which they find themselves; those problems are not qualitatively different from similar problems that people with disabilities face because of their impairments" (Bowe, 2000).

Universal design has also been described as "the process of designing products, environments, and systems so that they are usable by people with the widest possible range of abilities and circumstances given current technological and commercial constraints" (Vanderheiden, 1996).

A broader definition of universal design is embedded in the federal Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (PL. 105-394). According to the AT Act, which was recently reauthorized in 2004, "universal design means a concept or philosophy for designing and delivering products and services that are usable by people with the widest possible range of functional capabilities, which include products and services that are directly usable (without requiring assistive technologies) and products and services that are made usable with assistive technologies" (Assistive Technology Act, 2004). This definition takes universal design well beyond the built and industrial product design environments, and begins to apply it to services as well.

Recognizing that current definitions of universal design are somewhat limiting, Adaptive Environments, Inc., one of the world's leading research, training, and education organizations on universal design, has recently begun to articulate a new definition. Adaptive Environments states that "universal design includes [not only] the design of places, things and communication but also policies, programs and services" and should be viewed from a functional ability perspective (<http://www.adaptiveenvironments.org>). This relatively new development extends the concept well beyond the AT Act definition and, more importantly, focuses attention on everyone's abilities rather than on accommodating disabilities.

### **Applying Universal Design**

Adaptive Environments explains that universal design is a way of thinking about design that is based on the following premises:

- Varying ability is not a special condition of the few but a common characteristic of being human and everyone changes physically and intellectually throughout life;

- If a design works well for people with disabilities, it works better for everyone;
- At any point in life, personal self-esteem, identity, and well-being are deeply affected by the ability to function in the physical surroundings with a sense of comfort, independence and control; and,
- Usability and aesthetics are mutually compatible.

Universal design asks from the outset how to make the design work beautifully and seamlessly for as many people as possible. It seeks to consider the breadth of human diversity across the lifespan to create design solutions that work for all users. (*Fletcher, 2002*)

There are seven generally agreed upon principles to universal design developed by the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University (*Center for Universal Design, 1997*):

- 1) **Equitable Use:** The design does not stigmatize or disadvantage users.
- 2) **Flexibility in Use:** A wide range of individual preferences and abilities can be accommodated by the design.
- 3) **Simple, Intuitive Use:** How to use the design is easy to understand regardless of the experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level of the user.
- 4) **Perceptible Information:** Information is effectively communicated to the user, regardless of the user's sensory abilities, or surrounding conditions.
- 5) **Tolerance for Error:** Adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions are minimized by the design.
- 6) **Low Physical Effort:** The design is used efficiently and comfortably with a minimum amount of fatigue.
- 7) **Size and Space for Approach and Use:** Regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility, appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use.

Appendix A to this background paper, labeled "**Key Concepts of Universal Design**," is a helpful table that adds commonly understood definitions and guidelines to each of the above referenced principles. Based on the

work of Frank Bowe and that of the Center on Universal Design, this table was developed to serve as a technical assistance tool in the application of universal access throughout the workforce development system.

The Assistive Technology Act contains a few other definitions relevant to this discussion. It defines "assistive technology" as "technology designed to be utilized in an assistive technology device or assistive technology service." In addition, "assistive technology device" is defined as "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities." These terms are frequently used interchangeably and it is common to use the term assistive technology when referring to both. Similarly, "assistive technology services" is defined as "any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device" and the term includes "purchasing, leasing, choosing, designing, repairing, etc., assistive technology devices" (*Assistive Technology Act, 2004*).

Whereas universal design alters the environment and information, assistive technology allows individuals to adjust to an unaltered environment or information source and provides access to materials and services to people with disabilities that would not otherwise be accessible. Examples of assistive technology include wheelchairs, alternative automobile controls, communication aids, and hearing aids, plus a variety of technologies that increase, maintain, or improve access to electronic and information technology for individuals with disabilities. For example, people with limited hand function may use a keyboard with large keys or a special mouse to operate a computer; people who are blind may use software that reads text on the screen in a computer-generated voice; people with low vision may use software that enlarges screen content; people who are deaf may use a TTY (text telephone); or people with speech impairments may use a device that speaks out loud as they enter text via a keyboard.

As described earlier, under the concept of universal design people with disabilities are not expected to have

to alter the programs, services, products, environments, and communication. In contrast, assistive technology is used on an after-the-fact basis when someone with a disability cannot use a given product or service. Policymakers and program administrators should note that the need for after-the-fact, specialized accommodations can be reduced or eliminated entirely depending on the disability, if universal design principles are employed to ensure that programs, services, and activities are, in fact, accessible to and useable by the widest range of citizens.

### Technology Access

A good example of the application of universal design appears in the area of access to technology. The federal law governing electronic and information technology accessibility for people with disabilities was recently broadened, and detailed standards have been established by the responsible federal agency, the Access Board. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998—as a little noticed part of WIA—requires that electronic and information technology developed, procured, maintained, or used by the federal government be accessible to people with disabilities. Federal employees and members of the public who have disabilities must have access to and use of information and services comparable to the access and use available to non-disabled federal employees and members of the public.

The standards established by the Access Board cover the full range of electronic and information

technologies in the federal sector, including those used for communication, duplication, computing, storage, presentation, control, transport, and production. This includes computers, software, networks, peripherals, and other types of electronic office equipment. The standards define electronic and information technology, in part, as “any equipment or interconnected system or subsystem of equipment, that is used in the creation, conversion, or duplication of data or information.” This broad definition covers all telecommunications devices including telephones, voice-mail systems, pagers, facsimile machines, and related technology and any technology used to convey, transmit, or receive any kind of information (*Access Board, 2004*). These standards provide criteria specific to various types of technologies, including software applications and operating systems; web-based information or applications; telecommunication products; video and multimedia products; and self contained, closed products such as information kiosks, calculators, fax machines, and desktop and portable computers. The standards provide technical specifications and performance-based requirements, focusing on the functional capabilities of covered technologies.

Section 508 is “technology-centered” and focuses on whether mainstream electronic and information technology products meet the Section 508 standards, regardless of whether or not an agency has employees with disabilities or serves members of the public with disabilities. The regulations implementing Section 504, the ADA, and Section 188 of WIA are “person-

**TABLE 2**

### **DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN UNIVERSAL DESIGN & ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY**

<b>Universal Design</b>	<b>Assistive Technology</b>
Responsibility of designers and developers	Responsibility of user or user’s agent
Done while service or product is being developed	Done after product is finished, or while service is being delivered
Serves many people at once	Serves one individual user at a time
Renewable accessibility	Consumable accessibility
Allows for serendipity	Seldom is used in innovative ways

*Source: Bove, 2000, p. 30.*

centered” and focus on reasonable accommodation of an individual’s disability in a particular setting.

As the Access Board’s Section 508 standards cannot—and do not pretend to—ensure that all electronic and information technology will be universally accessible to all people with disabilities, reasonable accommodations will always be required in some instances. However, as agencies pay more attention to accessibility when procuring or developing their electronic and information technology, they will find it easier and easier to provide reasonable accommodations when required to do so. In some instances, people with disabilities may not need accommodations at all, as the underlying technology will be fully accessible to them.

Inaccessible technology interferes with a person’s ability to obtain and use information quickly and easily. Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals. While Section 508 applies to the federal government, a number of states have been enacting laws or executive edicts imposing similar standards on state and local agencies. And states are also passing bills that require publishers to provide electronic versions of their textbooks, just as Congress has been considering similar legislation. In fact, there had been so much activity on the electronic textbook front that in 2002 and 2003, the US Department of Education convened a technical panel of accessibility experts and publishers to develop an appropriate set of uniform standards to be used by all publishers. In the spring of 2004, the Department of Education endorsed the panel’s recommendation regarding the use of the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard as the preferred voluntary standardized file format for making textbooks accessible to students with disabilities. The Department funded a technical assistance center, known as the NIMAS Development Center, to facilitate the understanding of the standards, identify relevant new research and technological advances, and explore the potential of free-market distribution models for accessible materials.

### **Program Access**

“Program accessibility” is another key concept for

agencies and programs, one that has important implication for serving people with disabilities. Under several laws, publicly funded entities are prohibited from denying people with disabilities equal access to participate in programs and activities because facilities are not accessible. Programs in the workforce development system, including youth-serving programs, need to operate their programs, services, and activities so they are accessible to and usable by people with disabilities.

Under the hierarchy of obligations created in WIA, reliance on programmatic accessibility is permissible only where a particular facility is not required to comply with the Act’s architectural accessibility requirements (*US Department of Labor, 2003*). The Act’s architectural accessibility requirements relate to construction and design of facilities specifically and, like the provisions relating to programmatic accessibility, apply to the program whether or not that program actually serves or employ someone with a disability. Specific architectural standards are spelled out in state and local building codes as well as in guidance published by the Access Board. In addition, many states have developed their own tools for assisting the workforce development system in assessing compliance with architectural accessibility issues.

The requirement of program accessibility means that when viewed in its entirety, the program or activity provided by the recipient must be readily accessible to qualified individuals with disabilities. The recipient must ensure that participants with various physical and mental disabilities will have access to the program or activity. This obligation to make the program or activity accessible in advance exists independent of a request for a particular accommodation by a specific individual. Therefore, even if an individual with a disability requests an accommodation that would impose an undue hardship on the recipient, the recipient still has an overall obligation to make the program or activity accessible (*US Department of Labor, 2003*).

When attempting to achieve program access, innovation and creativity are essential and can include any or all of the following: redesign of equipment;

reassignment to accessible locations; use of aides; delivery of services at alternative accessible sites; use of accessible vehicles and technologies; alternatives to existing facilities; and construction of new facilities. Effective access must be provided to ensure integration of people with disabilities into the same programs, services, and activities as non-disabled persons (*US Department of Labor, 2003*).

Monitoring and enforcement of these types of issues, generally speaking, are the purview of the US Department of Labor's Civil Rights Center. In 2003, the Department issued a ***WIA Section 188 Disability Checklist***, a compliance assistance tool designed to ensure nondiscrimination toward and equal opportunity for people with disabilities in the workforce development system (*US Department of Labor, 2003*). The Checklist identifies basic requirements under Section 188 of WIA, including portions of the regulations implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. In addition, the Section 188 Checklist includes lists of questions for each element of the Methods of Administration (*US Department of Labor, 2003*). A Methods of Administration is a document that each Governor must put into place which describes the actions that the state will take to ensure that its WIA Title I financially assisted programs, activities, and recipients are complying, and will continue to comply, with the non-discrimination and equal opportunity requirements of WIA and its implementing regulations. The Methods of Administration are a set of formal procedures used as an alternative dispute resolution process before pursuing litigation.

Yet, there are still large gaps in guidance and useful instruments for assisting One-Stops and other employment-related service providers in their struggle to understand how to make program access work for people with disabilities, particularly those with hidden disabilities.

When considering accessibility for people with disabilities, it is important to review the entire program, service, and activity as well as the specific policies, procedures, facility, materials, equipment, and technology. Policymakers and program administrators can employ the concept of universal design to ensure that their programs, services, and activities are, in fact,

accessible to and useable by the widest range of citizens.

### **Universal Service**

The term "universal service" within what we now know as the workforce development system was used originally in the 1930s to describe the free labor market exchange activities – that is, making job matches between job seekers and employers – provided by only one institution, the state Employment Service. The sources of the funds for this free service are from a dedicated portion of the federal and state unemployment insurance tax. With passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 1998, the universal service concept was expanded and linked to federal general revenue job training programs based on the desire to establish a more user-friendly, streamlined employment and training system.

WIA created a dual set of tasks for the states. The first requires states to establish a state and local governance structure charged with overseeing a large portion of the federal workforce development investment within the state, while the second requires states to develop the building blocks of a new workforce development service delivery system. WIA categorizes certain employment and training services to be provided through One-Stop Centers as "core services," "intensive services," and "training services." One-Stop Centers blend funds from a set of mandated partners, and those services that are free to all can be culled from multiple funding streams. However, the Employment Service continues to be the primary resource tapped to provide the universal services. If insufficient funds exist through the One-Stop Center, the latter two types of services (intensive and training) are to be made available first to people on public assistance programs and other low income individuals (*Workforce Investment Act, 1998*).

Core services, which are to be made available on a universal basis to everyone at no cost, are usually self-directed, although staff assistance is available, and the consumer decides which services to use and how to use them. Core services include the following, in addition to others: basic outreach, intake, and interest assessment; job search and placement assistance; access to a wide variety of labor market, training, and support

service information; and assistance in establishing eligibility for public assistance programs. Any job seeker, or anyone seeking to advance his or her career, can access information on job vacancies, career options, student financial aid, employment trends, job search, resume writing, and employer interviewing (*Workforce Investment Act, 1998*). Yet the concept of universal service is continuing to evolve, and one can anticipate that even more changes will emerge in the years to come.

America's workforce development system is now designed to increase employment, retention, and earnings of people participating in employment-related activities with a reliance on a seamless service delivery system through One-Stop Centers. The workforce development system is comprised of a broad array of entities at the national, state, and local levels that exist with diverse responsibilities for planning, funding, administering, and operating programs to assist youth and adults with and without disabilities to obtain education, training, job placement, and support services. States are charged with the task of developing a comprehensive workforce development system within their boundaries. An overarching strategy embedded in WIA is that a state's workforce development system should organize information, products, and services based on the presumption that individuals are best positioned to make their own choices about their career goals. Thus, one of the first levels of responsibility of government is to provide information to the general public in appropriate ways so individuals are positioned to make informed choices for themselves. Before individuals can make decisions, however, access to the information and myriad of choices must be universally available. This is not an easy charge that has been placed upon the states.

### **Universal Work Support Services**

In 2003, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) conducted a study centered on issues related to the identification of what quality universal work support services should include. The goal of the CLASP survey of 33 One-Stop directors was to examine the level of access to seven work support programs: Earned Income Tax Credit, subsidized child care, food stamps, publicly funded health insurance, cash assistance, child support, and transportation assistance). Essentially, the

study found that access to work supports varied by program, depending on the relationship to other programs, staff expertise, and leadership attitudes (*Richer, Kubo, & Frank, 2003*). More than its findings, the CLASP analysis offers valuable insight into how to define levels of acceptable access to workforce development system programs and services.

CLASP defined access to the seven work support programs in a number of different ways—the provision of information about programs, referral to other agencies for assistance, and the acceptance of program applications on-site. Methods of providing information ranged from producing comprehensive handouts, which caseworkers then discussed with customers, to posting flyers or brochures in waiting areas or resource rooms to group orientations where programs are introduced and discussed. Referrals ranged from “active,” in which a One-Stop staff member actually made an appointment at the appropriate agency for the consumer, to “passive,” in which the consumer might have been given an address and phone number, if that, and was expected to follow up on his or her own. On-site application assistance allowed customers to complete and submit an application for a given work support while at the One-Stop, with the help of either a One-Stop employee or a worker from the appropriate agency that handles the work support programs (*Richer, Kubo, & Frank, 2003*).

CLASP divided the One-Stops surveyed into three categories—high, medium, and low—to describe the level of access to work supports offered. A One-Stop was classified based on the provision of information about work supports, the type of referrals made, the availability of on-site applications, and the inaccessibility of work supports. Work supports were found to be inaccessible via the One-Stop when only written information or a passive referral was available to those customers who asked. In other words, a work support was determined to be inaccessible if nothing was done to facilitate a customer accessing the program.

In its assessment, CLASP suggests that making work supports accessible through One-Stops has to go beyond simply supplying information about the programs; it must rise to the level of providing assistance with applying for the work supports.

Under this view, the highest level of access was on-site completion and submission of an application, accomplished with staff assistance. Another level of access was the provision of an active referral: a referral for the consumer to a specific agency that can help the consumer apply for the desired work support, including specific instructions on applying, caseworker assistance in making the appointment, and caseworker follow-up subsequent to the application.

Less vigorous methods of providing access included having an application physically available on-site but requiring the consumer to go elsewhere to apply, and providing a passive referral, in which a consumer was given information about which agency to go to in order to pursue an application. Work supports were considered inaccessible when there was no application, no assistance in completing an application, and no referral, or when the referral was so passive it was meaningless (Richer, Kubo, & Frank, 2003).

### **Universal Design for Learning**

Universal design for learning is an emerging concept for teaching, learning, assessment, and curriculum development that draws upon and extends the principles of universal design used in architecture and product design. Use of the concept of universal design has begun recently in education and other service delivery contexts, which is of particular interest to the workforce development system and particularly to youth-serving organizations. Universal design for learning (UDL), a relatively new theory already embedded in the federal law governing special education programs and services, extends key concepts of universal design into the education environment. "The key to helping all students achieve is identifying and removing barriers from our teaching methods and curriculum materials," explain key staff members at the Center for Accessing Special Technologies, the leading research and technical assistance center on universal design for learning. "The UDL framework proposes that educators strive for three kinds of flexibility: to represent information in multiple formats and media; to provide multiple pathways for students' action and expression; and, to provide multiple ways to engage students' interest and motivation" (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

Essentially, this emerging educational theory extends

the basic universal design concept of built-in flexibility to educational curriculum and teaching methods with the notion that it can help teachers meet standards while addressing the unique needs of every student by improving learning. It encompasses Universally Designed Instruction (UDI) as well as the concept of Universally Designed Curriculum (UDC) and Universal Design in Assessment (UDA). Each of these concepts deals with the idea that education, in general, should be designed up front for access by all students, whether in terms of the curriculum, the instructional strategies, or the assessment. "Developing powerful technologies to overcome barriers must be balanced by designing environments with fewer barriers. The lesson of ADA is that small affordances built in everywhere, like curb cuts and ramps, are as critical for access as are assistive technologies like motorized wheelchairs," CAST Executive Director David Rose told Congress in 2001. "We need to use the new technologies not only to overcome existing learning barriers, but also to design learning environments with fewer barriers right from the start" (*Assistive Technology Act projects, 2004*).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 required that all students, regardless of their abilities, be given the opportunity to become involved with and progress in the general curriculum. All students should have access to what is being taught; however, providing access involves more than giving every student a book or a computer. Teachers have to ensure that their students are challenged by the subject matter, regardless of their developmental level. The recently enacted Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 addresses universal design for learning in five key areas: standards, student assessment, technology, curricula, and instructional materials (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004*).

The **Council for Exceptional Children** has put forth the following definition for universal design of instruction:

- In terms of learning, universal design means the design of instructional materials and activities that make the learning goals achievable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, hear,

speak, move, read, write, understand English, attend, organize, engage, and remember. Universal design for learning is achieved by means of flexible curricular materials and activities that provide alternatives for students with differing abilities. These alternatives are built into the instructional design and operating systems of educational materials – they are not added on after-the fact. (*Center for Exceptional Children, n.d.*)

According to the **Center for Accessing Special Technology (CAST)**, universal design for learning shifts long-held assumptions about teaching and learning in four fundamental ways:

- Students with disabilities are on a continuum of learner differences rather than constituting a separate category.
- Teachers should adjust for learner differences in all students, not just those with disabilities.
- Curriculum materials should not be dependent on a single textbook; rather they should be varied and diverse, including digital and online resources.
- Curricula should be made flexible instead of remediating students to learn from an inflexible curriculum (*Center for Accessing Special Technology, n.d.*).

In education, the traditional teaching approach has been one in which instruction is delivered to suit the comfort of the teacher without much understanding of how to accommodate individual learning needs. Universal design for learning challenges this approach and calls on all participants to reconsider who should be responsible for ensuring accessibility. It asks educators to look at courses, textbooks, schedules, delivery styles, and other aspects of education to consider the many possible methods of instruction for a diverse set of learning approaches. Accounting for different learning needs by planning in advance can make instruction available for more students, at lower cost, and reduces the need for after-the-fact steps such as interpreting and Brailing or tape-recording of printed material.

Clearly, no two students learn exactly the same way. Rather, the range of performance and ability of students varies greatly in terms of their ability to see,

hear, move, read, write, attend, organize, focus, engage, and remember. For example, text in standard print format presents a barrier for students who are dyslexic and for students with English as a second language, and is inaccessible for blind students. The same text when delivered in a digital format offers many options. It can be read aloud by a computer or screen reader, printed on a Braille printer, and presented in spoken or written translation or with highlighted main points and organizational supports.

Educators have traditionally adapted books and tests to accommodate students' diverse learning needs to give them an opportunity to progress in content areas. The usual accommodations are Braille and recorded texts for the visually impaired student, captioned materials for the hearing-impaired, and customized supplementary materials to address cognitive disabilities. These accommodations are usually added to the standard curriculum much like adding a wheelchair ramp to a building to provide access. Architectural accommodations added later are sometimes awkward and expensive; likewise, curriculum adaptations can be time consuming to design and difficult to implement in a classroom of diverse learners. It is much more efficient to incorporate student access by considering the range of user abilities in the beginning stage of curriculum design. Designing with accessibility of all possible users in mind is the underlying principle of universal design.

**CAST** has developed three principles of universal design for learning formed to minimize barriers and maximize learning through flexibility. The overarching principles are the following:

- To support recognition learning, provide multiple, flexible methods of presentation;
- To support strategic learning, provide multiple, flexible methods of expression and apprenticeship; and,
- To support affective learning, provide multiple, flexible options for engagement (*Rose & Meyer, 2002*).

Universal design principles for learning can be applied to lectures, classroom discussions, group work, handouts, web-based instruction, labs, field work, and other academic activities and materials. As CAST

explains, these principles give “each student meaningful access to the curriculum by assuring access to the environment as well as multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement” (*Center for Accessing Special Technology, n.d.*). Youth-serving organizations in the workforce development system can learn from, and help expand the practices of universal design for learning.

### **Current Practices**

At this time, there have been no comprehensive evaluations of how the workforce development system is or is not implementing the various meanings of universal access, whether in the context of employment services generically or from a disability perspective. Congress does, however, continue to hear anecdotal evidence from disability community advocates that people with disabilities are not being served in One-Stop centers because they are not accessible in one way or another.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently published a report noting that “little is known, and questions have been raised, about how well this system (workforce development system) is working for persons with disabilities.” The GAO recommended that the US Department of Labor develop and implement a “long-term plan for ensuring that the One-Stops comply with the comprehensive access requirements” of WIA (*Government Accountability Office, 2005*).

There are, however, a few recent studies and surveys of accessibility issues in the workforce development system that shed some light on current policies and practices around universal access, one by the Center on the Study and Advancement of Disability Policy (CSADP) and another by an association representing state Assistive Technology projects. Additional perspectives can be garnered from the first year’s case study work completed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth). These viewpoints highlight the challenges the workforce development system faces in trying to achieve the comprehensive definition of universal access proposed herein.

The work of CSADP examined activities of six selected

states against the back drop of the US Department of Labor’s *WIA Section 188 Disability Checklist*.

Originally, CSADP planned to develop a baseline for assessing the nature and extent of changes over time to the policies and procedures described and/or attached to WIA Methods of Administration developed by six “leading edge” states regarding the implementation of Section 188 for people with disabilities. The six states examined were Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Texas, and Washington. However, as CSADP’s research evolved, it also identified state-based examples of policies, procedures, and other recommended steps included in state Methods of Administration that Local Workforce Investment Area grant recipients can take to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to WIA Title I financially assisted programs and activities.

While CSADP’s examined nondiscrimination and equal opportunity for people with disabilities, the specific state practices identified in the Methods of Administration are helpful for understanding what types of policies and practices exist and what work is yet to be done, including development of useful tools and products for the workforce development system.

**1) Universal Access:** The Department of Labor’s Section 188 regulations specify that states must take appropriate steps to ensure that they are providing universal access to WIA Title I financially assisted programs and activities. These steps must involve reasonable efforts – including advertisement, recruitment, outreach, and targeting – to include participation of people with disabilities in the programs and activities.

One of the major findings of CSADP’s analysis concluded that because most of the provisions in the regulations spell out general responsibilities relating to people with disabilities, there were “significant variations among the States in the nature and extent, i.e., degree of comprehensiveness of State policies.” For example, with respect to policies concerning universal access, there was “significant variation in what steps were considered ‘appropriate’ and what efforts were ‘reasonable’ to ensure that universal access includes access for persons with disabilities. Some States included specific steps such as making contact with the

Governor’s Committee/Office on individuals with disabilities, State vocational rehabilitation and other disability specific agencies such as Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities (MR/DD) and mental health, and contacting special education teachers. Additional steps included designation of one person to serve as a liaison with disability groups. Other States included generic examples but did not include specific examples applicable to persons with disabilities” (*Silverstein, 2003*).

**2) Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability:** The Section 188 regulations also require recipients of WIA funds to prohibit discrimination in the registration for and the provision of aid, benefits, services, or training, including core, intensive, training, and support services, on the basis of disability. The Section 188 Checklist summarizes the legal requirements of Section 188 and provides examples of what is considered discrimination on the basis of a disability, based in part on long-standing interpretations of the ADA and related disability rights legislation. By way of example, here are a few of those specifications, highlighted because they are directly relevant to a discussion around universal access in the workforce development system:

- All activities are to be offered to people with disabilities in the most integrated setting appropriate, and different, segregated, or separate aid, benefits, services, or training may not be provided to people with disabilities unless necessary to assure that the aid, benefit, service, or training is as effective as that provided to others;
- In determining the site or location of a facility, the recipient must not make selections that have a discriminatory effect;
- A recipient must not administer a licensing or certification program in a discriminatory manner;
- The recipient must not impose or apply eligibility criteria that screen out or tend to screen out an individual with a disability or class of individuals with disabilities unless such criteria can be shown to be necessary for the provision of the aid, benefit, service, training, program, or activity being offered;
- An individual with a disability is not required to

accept an accommodation, aid, benefit, service, training, or opportunity that such individual chooses not to accept.

CSADP found that the states “vary significantly in how they restate the general prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of disability.” While some states “simply prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability, others incorporate by reference the federal regulations, and others restate some but not all of the specific forms of discrimination listed in the federal regulations.” In addressing the issue of site selection, for example, Minnesota identifies the availability of public transportation as one of the key criteria for locating One-Stop Centers. Both Minnesota and Washington have issued policies regarding testing, and the need to make modifications and accommodations (*Silverstein, 2003*).

**3) Reasonable Accommodation and Modifications:** The Section 188 regulations require that the recipients of WIA funds must provide reasonable accommodations regarding registration for and the provision of aid, benefits, services, or training, including core, intensive, training, and support services, to qualified individuals with disabilities unless providing the accommodation would cause undue hardship. In addition, the regulations require that reasonable modifications be made to policies, practices, and procedures unless doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity.

CSADP found that all the states were committed to providing reasonable accommodations to customers and employees with disabilities. Some states included comprehensive policies and procedures implementing the requirements, including overall policy, definitions, responsibilities of clients, responsibilities of program administrators, confidentiality, complaint resolution, and resources. Other states simply restated the general obligation without any details. Maryland has “adopted the ‘Never Say No’ philosophy whereby ‘no’ is an answer of last resort—after all reasonable options have been explored by the individuals making and receiving the request” for reasonable accommodations. Maryland offers related training on a regular basis. Washington stated its commitment and gave concrete examples of reasonable accommodations offered, including

qualified sign language interpreters, readers, auxiliary aids, and alternate formats.

Some states have issued specific policy directives instructing local workforce investment boards to include in their local plan a description of their plan to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities, while other states simply include policies in their monitoring instruments.

However, CSADP found that “most of the States with specific policies regarding reasonable accommodation/modifications did not have specific policies applicable to the One-Stop service delivery system; rather they included in the MOAs policies generally applicable to all of the customers of the State agency’s programs and activities” (*Silverstein, 2003*).

**4) Most Integrated Setting:** The Section 188 regulations also specify that the recipients of WIA funds must administer their programs and activities in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of qualified individuals with disabilities. In addition, the recipients may not provide different, segregated, or separate aid, benefits, services, or training to people with disabilities unless necessary to assure that the aid, benefit, service, or training is as effective as those provided to others. There are two additional related requirements: 1) the separate aid, benefits, services, or training must be *in fact as effective* as that provided to persons without disabilities; and 2) the choice as to whether a particular person with a disability will participate in the segregated or the “regular” program must be in the hands of the person with a disability.

Several states simply restate the general obligation to ensure that people with disabilities participate in the most integrated setting appropriate, while other states supplement this general statement with specifics. For example, New Jersey states that “It is clear that automatic referral to a program/agency that is designed solely for individuals with disabilities may be discriminatory and will not suffice as a reasonable accommodation if the customer desires to participate in ‘mainstream’ services, activities, training, benefits, or aids” (*Silverstein, 2003*).

**5) Obligation to Communicate Effectively:** The Section 188 regulations also require that recipients of WIA

funds take steps to ensure that communications with people with disabilities are as effective as communications with others. The obligation to communicate effectively with people with disabilities requires both generalized action in advance and specific steps to meet the individual needs of a particular person with a disability. Recipients must furnish appropriate auxiliary aids and services where necessary to afford people with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, the WIA Title I financially assisted program or activity. It is suggested that recipients give primary consideration to the requests of the person with a disability when determining what type of auxiliary aid or service is appropriate. Where a recipient communicates by telephone with beneficiaries and others, the recipient must use telecommunication devices for individuals with hearing impairments (TDDs or TTYs) or equally effective communication systems, such as telephone relay services. And, recipients must ensure that interested individuals, including individuals with visual and hearing impairments, can obtain information as to the existence or location of accessible services, activities, and facilities, including the provision of appropriate signage at the primary entrances to its inaccessible facilities.

CSADP found that all six states have issued general policy guides pertaining to effective communication for all categories of people with disabilities, “although the degree of specificity included in the policy directives varies from a simple restatement of the requirements specified in the Federal regulations to in depth explanations of how to provide effective communication” with people with disabilities, including specific lists of auxiliary aids and services and assistive technology devices available at One-Stop centers. Minnesota has developed extensive policy directives, guides, and monitoring instruments addressing effective communication. For example, a guide has been distributed describing how to communicate with people with all types of disabilities. Minnesota requires its One-Stop Centers to have assistive technology available and has purchased several items such as VCRs and TV monitors with closed-captioning capability, screen enlargers, and document readers. New York lists examples of

auxiliary aids and services in their monitoring instrument that include qualified interpreters, assistive listening headsets, closed and open captioning on videos, telecommunication devices for the deaf, computers that allow voice input and output, readers, taped texts, Braille materials, videotext displays, and transcription services. Through its monitoring instrument, New York goes so far as to ask whether One-Stop staff are familiar with communication procedures to assist blind and visually impaired individuals, such as the importance of verbalizing directions, the need to initiate introductions to customers who are visually impaired, the need for verbally communicating important information that is not readily apparent to a person who is visually impaired, awareness of alternatives to normal-size print materials available in their center, and an understanding of how to use signature guides (Silverstein, 2003).

#### **6) Programmatic and Architectural Accessibility:**

With the incorporation of regulations implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Section 188 regulations specify that recipients of WIA funds must operate each program or activity so that the program or activity, when viewed in its entirety, is readily accessible to qualified individuals with disabilities. They are required to comply with this obligation through such means as redesign of equipment, reassignment of classes or other services to accessible buildings, assignment of aides to beneficiaries, home visits, delivery of services at alternative accessible sites, alteration of existing facilities and construction of new facilities in conformance with standards for new construction, or any other method that results in making the program or activity accessible to people with disabilities. In choosing among available methods to ensure access, recipients must give priority to those methods that offer programs and activities to people with disabilities in the most integrated setting appropriate. As discussed previously, however, recipients may comply with the programmatic accessibility requirements only where their facilities are not required to comply with architectural accessibility requirements, discussed below.

Under the architectural accessibility requirements, each new facility or part of a facility constructed by, on

behalf of, or for the use of a recipient must be designed and constructed in such a manner that the facility or part of the facility is readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities. Each facility or part of a facility that is altered by, on behalf of, or for the use of a recipient in a manner that affects or could affect the usability of the facility or part of the facility must be altered in such a manner that the altered portion of the facility is readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities. The design, construction, or alteration of facilities must meet the most current Uniform Facility Accessibility Standards (UFAS) for physical accessibility prescribed by the General Services Administration under the Architectural Barriers Act or the recipient may adopt alternative standards when it is clearly evident that equivalent or greater access to the facility or part of the facility is thereby provided. Acceptable alternative standards include both ADAAG and the new ADA-ABA Accessibility Guidelines published by the Access Board in July 2004.

CSADP found that all six states have developed a checklist or distributed checklists developed by federal agencies to ensure physical access to services provided in existing facilities and new construction and alterations. Also, states have adopted policies asserting and directing programmatic access for WIA funding recipients (Silverstein, 2003).

Another instructive, albeit limited, study, which sheds light on access-related activities in One-Stops, comes from the first year report of the NCWD/Youth case study research (Academy for Educational Development, 2003). In an attempt to have practice inform policy, the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy funded NCWD/Youth to conduct a four-year field study to document the actual challenges faced and strategies employed by states and local communities in serving youth with disabilities within the workforce development system. A comparable study is being conducted to look at services being provided to adults with disabilities under WIA by the Collaborative's sister technical assistance center, the National Center on Workforce and Disability/Adults (NCWD/Adult). The six local sites selected for the youth case study work were Tucson, Pima County, Arizona; Albany, Dougherty County, Georgia; Waterloo, Black Hawk County, Iowa; Syracuse, Onondaga County, New York; Providence,

Providence County, Rhode Island; and, Bellingham, Whatcom County, Washington.

“Most sites have made a concerted effort to guarantee physical access to persons with disabilities and to ensure there are assistive technology devices available for their use,” the NCWD/Youth reports. “In most instances they have also trained some staff on how to use the equipment” (*Academy for Educational Development, 2003*). Many states and localities have taken advantage of funding from the Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration, under the Work Incentive Grants, as well as used some of their own WIA discretionary funds to make access modifications to facilities and purchase adaptive and accessible technologies.

The following two local sites stood out in terms of the NCWD/Youth’s assessment of accessibility from a disability perspective:

*When the site in Albany, GA was dedicated as a One-Stop, there was a “career conversion” to make the building and programs accessible. Accessibility features put into place included: work stations at accessible height, large monitor, voice sound/tones for hearing impaired, a flatbed scanner, a trackball, a visual machine to make forms larger, a foreign language machine (translates to French, Spanish, and German), and a TTD relay machine. Visible signage (words and pictures) lists the assistive technology in the One-Stop. Private rooms are available for confidential discussions or as a quiet work space. Customers are routinely offered accommodations and assistance, staff is available to assist in completing applications or offer materials in alternative formats. There is also dedicated staff available in the resource center and a VR assistant is on site 20 hours a week.*

*The Syracuse One-Stop facility is “user-friendly” for individuals with disabilities. “The One-Stop staff doesn’t send youth with disabilities directly to VESID (Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities). Frontline workers are very aware of how to work with people with disabilities who come in the door.” From the first time a customer with a disability comes through the One-Stop’s doors, all staff are comfortable and competent to work with that person, without automatically referring them to “specialists.” Electronic*

*access to the One-Stop and its services makes the site and information more accessible to customers with disabilities who are computer savvy. This new system, especially through Internet technology, brings access and information into the center city neighborhoods of Syracuse as well as to the county boundaries (Academy for Educational Development, 2003).*

The NCWD/Youth report notes that “simply making sites accessible and providing the correct assistive technology isn’t enough to ensure that persons with disabilities are being adequately served” (*Academy for Educational Development, 2003*). The report recommends the establishment of accessibility teams and intensive staff training around access and assistive technology issues. As one site put it, “universal access is imbedded in the way we do business here. The One-Stop does an excellent job of ensuring that appropriate supports and accommodations are provided. If staff encounters a new situation that they do not feel they can handle adequately, they will go immediately to one of our partners to get assistance. When youth require additional services, a youth counselor sits down with that individual and his/her advocate and together they map out a strategy for accessing those services” (*Academy for Educational Development, 2003*).

A third collection of disability-related accessibility information comes from a survey conducted by a loosely knit consortium of state Assistive Technology Act projects. In response to a request from Congress, in the spring of 2004 19 state projects answered a survey about disability-related accessibility issues in One-Stops. The following list includes a few of the highlights:

*[In Arizona, the One-Stops reviewed] had basic knowledge of ADAAG (Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines) and Section 508 requirements. Out of the three that were audited only one appeared to be reasonably accessible.*

*In Illinois, with the assistance of WIG funds, 44 comprehensive One-Stops were provided a set of assistive technology devices. Unfortunately, the audits revealed that many of the One-Stops keep their devices boxed and not set up in the resource room. A few of the One-Stops that did have their assistive technology devices set up*

placed a sign on it that read “Disabled Use Only.” Only a few One-Stops has purchased assistive technology devices on their own and certainly none of the One-Stops had anywhere near a complete array of access devices that would address computer input/output, telephony, print access and aural communication needs of individuals with physical and sensory disabilities.

In *Louisiana*, ADAAG architectural access standards were used and about half the centers were in substantive compliance and the remaining facilities were significantly out of compliance. (The status of the One-Stop Career Centers in the southern portion of the state is unknown but assumed to be a similar ratio to those audited.) ADA general program access guidelines were used during the audit. None of the facilities had anywhere near a complete array of access devices that would address computer input/output, telephony, print access, and aural communication needs of individuals with physical and sensory disabilities.

In *Missouri*, of 38 full service One-Stop Career Centers, 23 were audited for architectural and programmatic accessibility...ADAAG architectural access standards were used and 19 centers were in substantive compliance and the remaining 4 facilities were significantly out of compliance. (The status of the 15 not audited is unknown but assumed to be a similar ratio to those audited.)...ADA general program access guidelines were used during the audit and what became apparent was the need for specific access standards for computers and telephony which were developed later. None of the facilities had anywhere near a complete array of access devices that would address computer input/output, telephony, print access and aural communication needs of individuals with physical and sensory disabilities. One of the 23 centers had a screen magnification program, one had a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) and 5 had TTY's. The status of the 15 not audited is unknown but assumed to be similar to those audited with limited to non-existent assistive technology available.

In *Nebraska*, the Assistive Technology Project (ATP) utilized the Facilities Checklist and Service Accessibility Checklist developed by the U.S. Department of Labor's One-Stop Disability Initiative as published in the Access for All: A Resource Manual for Meeting the Needs of One-Stop Customers with Disabilities. ATP's

audits/reviews resulted in a finding that 5 of 14 locations were substantially in compliance with the checklists with only minor fine-tuning needed; 8 locations had significant design barriers, and 1 location had very significant architectural barriers. These barriers varied from simple, easily corrected issues such as placement of resource room furniture, use of swing clear hinges, and best location for designated parking. More costly solutions included need for automatic door opener systems and restroom modifications. In 4 locations, the One-Stop either needs to remodel their space or are in the planning stages to find a new location (AT Project Audits, 2004).

There are many important issues raised in this examination of current practices in the workforce development system. Additionally, technical assistance tools are needed to assess programmatic access, universal access, and universal services in One-Stop centers. Many states beyond the six examined by CSADP have created excellent architectural design checklists for assuring architectural accessibility to facilities, such as Georgia, California, and Colorado. Colorado has even developed a checklist to survey One-Stop staff competencies around accessibility requirements. However, there appears to be a significant void of useful tools to assist WIA program operators in conducting self-assessments of their programs in their entirety – not to mention materials to assist them in achieving the definition of universal access promoted herein.

## **Conclusion**

A strategy for moving the workforce development system toward a more comprehensive definition of universal access is in order. This paper advocates the adoption of a definition of universal access that builds upon the elements of universal service and universal access currently used in the employment and training arena, while incorporating the concepts of architectural accessibility, program accessibility, and universal design from the disability policy arena. Specifically, in this paper NCWD/Youth proposes defining universal access as **“the design of environments, products and communication as well as the delivery of programs, services and activities to be useable by all youth and adults, to the greatest extent possible without adaptation or specialized design.”**

Such a monumental change in definition will have enormous implications for policymakers and practitioners alike. Accordingly, implementing this definition will require thoughtful deliberation. Even Ron Mace recognized that the term “universal” is not ideal because it could be interpreted to promise an impossible standard.

Federal policymakers will need to come to agreement on common terminology, standards, and measurements. Useful tools and instruments will need to be developed to assist youth and adult workforce program practitioners to conduct self-assessments, and operationalize, implement, and measure their success in achieving universal access. Program administrators will need clear mechanisms for measuring active versus passive application of this definition of universal access. Staff competencies will need to be established and a training agenda will be necessary.

Although it will require substantial work to achieve, at the end of the day if the proposed definition is adopted, the workforce development system will be in a much better position to meet the needs of all of its customers, both with and without disabilities.

NCWD/Youth, in partnership with its sponsoring agency the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the US Department of Labor, is committed to facilitating agreements around, and a better understanding of, universal access throughout the workforce development system through materials development and dissemination as well as ongoing training and technical assistance activities. To that end, NCWD/Youth intends to convene a panel of experts across disciplines to address these findings and conclusions as well as to assist in the development and validation of materials on these subjects.

## KEY CONCEPTS OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN

### *Principles, Definitions, and Guidelines*

1

**EQUITABLE USE:** *Design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.*

**Guidelines:**

- a) Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible and equivalent when not;
- b) Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users;
- c) Make provisions for privacy, security, and safety equally available to all users;
- d) Make design appealing to all users.

2

**FLEXIBILITY IN USE:** *Design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.*

**Guidelines:**

- a) Provide choices in methods of use;
- b) Accommodate right-or left-handed access and use;
- c) Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision;
- d) Provide adaptability to the user's pace.

3

**SIMPLE & INTUITIVE USE:** *Use of design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.*

**Guidelines:**

- a) Eliminate unnecessary complexity;
- b) Be consistent with user expectations and intuition;
- c) Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills;
- d) Arrange information consistent with its importance;
- e) Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.

4

**PERCEPTIBLE INFORMATION:** *Design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.*

**Guidelines:**

- a) Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information;
- b) Maximize "legibility" of essential information;
- c) Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions);
- d) Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.

5

**TOLERANCE FOR ERROR:** *Design minimizes hazards and adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.*

**Guidelines:**

- a) Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors: most-used elements most accessible; hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded;
- b) Provide warnings of hazards and errors;
- c) Provide fail-safe features;
- d) Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.

6

**LOW PHYSICAL EFFORT:** *Design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.*

**Guidelines:**

- a) Allow user to maintain a neutral body position;
- b) Use reasonable operating forces;
- c) Minimize repetitive actions;
- d) Minimize sustained physical effort.

**SIZE AND SPACE FOR APPROACH AND USE:** *Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.*

**Guidelines:**

- a) Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user;
- b) Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user;
- c) Accommodate variations in hand and grip size;
- d) Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.

**Source:** Center for Universal Design, n.d.

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