

The Connection

Welcome to the Employment Connections (EC) division's newsletter - The Connection! This newsletter focuses on sharing information to support, connect, engage, and excel.

These newsletters hold regular updates on topics such as projects and programs, useful information, and messages from our director, Jairus Rice. Please share comments or ideas you have with [Jordyn Johnsen](#) or [Anne Goranson](#), or submit your feedback via [survey](#).

Message from the Director



Greetings, Employment Connections,

This month represents a milestone for our division. After a year of focusing our time and effort to support our UI colleagues, by the end of March we expect all Employment Connections staff to have returned to supporting reemployment services! I know this hasn't been easy and it was a lot to ask of you. I can't tell you how appreciative I am of your willingness to stay the course and how profound the impact has been to Washingtonians across the state. I want to also thank all those who covered and helped keep the lights on in EC, often covering additional duties while others were supporting UICS. Your efforts did not go unnoticed.

I also had conversations with Commissioner Feek prior to this current transition of everyone back to EC. While none of us has that magic COVID crystal ball, she and I are both committed to keeping EC staff in your primary roles delivering reemployment services. We agreed that EC staff would only be asked to return to supporting UICS as a last resort in a significant emergency-type situation.

All that we've been working through in response to this pandemic, both at work and in our personal lives, can be emotionally exhausting. I am feeling it and I'm sure many of you are as well. I'm finding that I have to be very intentional about carving out time for myself and my family to recharge--completely away from work.

It's important to me as your director that you all know that supporting your need to recharge is one of our division's top priorities. Supporting our Staff is the first of the four focus areas in the EC Recovery Plan that I mentioned last month. In addition to promoting your health and safety, we are also committing to providing tools to support virtual services and investing in continued training. Our other goals to Focus on Equity, Boost Customer Service, and Innovate and Adapt will ensure that we meet the needs of our customers. But we can't do that well if we don't take care of ourselves first.

I'm really looking forward to rolling this plan out and having meaningful discussions with you about the work of our division. Next week the division leadership team will be finalizing that roll-out plan which will include opportunities to receive your thoughts and questions. More to come on that. Your experience serving our customers is invaluable

and I want to understand those experiences better—the good and the bad. There really isn't any better way for us to build trust, and that is very important to me.

The labor market doesn't look the same as it did a year ago, which makes it so important that we keep learning together about how we can provide the best service possible to our customers. I can't think of any other team I'd rather be working with! I'm honored to be part of Employment Connections.

Thank you,

Jairus Rice

Project updates

Statewide scheduler

A team of WorkSource partners led by project manager Sarafine Appadolo, has been busy reviewing vendor bids and observing demos. Unfortunately, in the words of one of our panel members who works directly with customers, "We prefer to move back to the Request for Qualifications and Quotation (RFQQ) process rather than accepting a 'good enough' solution that does not meet the needs of the end users. (Rebidding the contract) is a positive step in my opinion." This new development will extend the project timeline. Our new target date to award a contract is April 28, 2021.

Remote Work Opportunity Job Fair

Mark your calendars for a statewide WorkSource "Remote Work Opportunity Job Fair" to be held on April 22nd from 10-2! Planning is underway, and since this is the first statewide event being planned by virtual job fair administrators, we are treating it as a project. We will use materials and procedures to support future statewide virtual job fairs. Special thanks to Alyssa Joyner, Mike Robinson and Jordyn Johnsen for your leadership!

Department of Labor (DOL) Technical Assistance Training Grant

Donna Mack and Department of Labor (DOL) consultants are leading a statewide task team to explore the question, "How might we create a more integrated, customer-focused 'one workforce' system in Washington?"

How would you answer this question? We'd love to hear from you and share your ideas with DOL! [Click here](#) to provide your feedback.

Employment services

Washington Service Corps AmeriCorps

Many of you in Employment Connections know that WorkSource hosts AmeriCorps members to help our customers through both the Technology and Resource Navigator, and Rural Digital Literacy roles. However, the program deploys 400-600 AmeriCorps members across the state every year and WorkSource only sees a handful of them. We

currently run an AmeriCorps State program in which members are placed individually, in small groups and large teams in schools, non-profit organizations and government agencies in nearly every county of Washington.

The Service Corps mission is to strengthen the capacity of local governments and nonprofit organizations, encourage and value diversity by serving geographically diverse communities, recruit a diverse applicant pool of volunteers from all backgrounds and areas of life, and increase the amount of volunteering and civic engagement in Washington state.

The program is funded through AmeriCorps federal dollars and local match dollars, and is housed within the Employment Security Department, as part of the Employment Connections Division. If you have an AmeriCorps member in your office, please take a moment to thank them for all they do to support your organization and their community. The service experience of many AmeriCorps members often has a lasting impact on their professional ambitions, and you can likely find many of your ESD colleagues who have served as an AmeriCorps in the past.

Story submitted by Joscelyn Minton, WSC Site and Member Services Lead Program Coordinator

Introducing the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Trade Worker Outreach Plan

Since the implementation of Trade Act's final rule changes in September of 2020, a team of individuals from Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Trade Readjustment Assistance (TRA) and Communications have been working on a communications plan to increase outreach efforts to notify likely eligible workers about the TAA program.

When a TAA certification occurs, ESD identifies these workers by connecting with their employer and obtaining contact information. ESD mails workers information about the program, process, training, and deadlines. However, we recognize the value in using additional methods to notify workers such as a public legal notice, social media, and electronic notification. The TAA team also connects with local Workforce Development Areas (WDAs) because of their unique insight into their communities. The new plan helps coordinate this work and outreach.

The plan is in final review, between Employment Connections leadership and the Washington Workforce Association's Brand and Media (BAM) representatives, before being cemented and approved in the next couple of weeks. Collaboration between the Trade program and our valued one-stop partners increases access to services for our shared customers.

Story submitted by Jordyn Johnsen, EC's Communications Consultant, for the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program

Welcome back RESEA

The long-awaited relaunch of the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program on January 11, 2021 had some twists and turns as EC staff balanced this work with assistance to UI customers. As a result, leadership agreed to implement a slow relaunch that better matched the number of EC Staff available to conduct RESEA

appointments. Until the work search waiver is lifted, our focus will be on re-employment services that emphasize helping our claimants become more employable, get them to start thinking about life beyond COVID, and assisting them with obtaining their dream job.



After 160 hours of intensive refresher training provided to over 200 staff, staff were eager to start serving RESEA claimants. As of March 5th, staff have successfully completed 3,327 RESEA appointments – what a tremendous accomplishment after suspending RESEA services for nearly nine months! **We would like to thank all RESEA Staff for their hard work and commitment to excellence!** Along with other EC staff, they adapted very quickly to conducting remote

appointments during this challenging COVID Pandemic.

Program leads were excited to hear the news that we have a phased plan for the return of our EC Staff who have been providing support to UI Claimants. The timing couldn't be better! We will be offering quarterly intensive refresher training in the next few weeks for these staff that have been away from RESEA for quite some time.

Quarter two training is linked on the [EC Transitions Calendar](#):

- RESEA Refresher Training March 29-31, 2021 (1:00–5:00 p.m.) *(Designed for Staff who attended RESEA Intensive Training and just need a refresher)*
- RESEA Intensive Training April 5-8, 2021 (8:30-12:30 p.m.) *(Designed for New Staff or existing Staff that need a more in-depth RESEA Training)*

Story submitted by Juan Martinez, RESEA/Wagner Peyser/MSFW Program Operator

How innovative solutions helped a Veteran reach their career goals

We'd like to pull back the curtain and show our statewide team an example of some of the innovative solutions our Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) funded co-workers (Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialists, Consolidated Veteran Services Representatives (CVSR) and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVERs)) perform to assist the Veteran customer, who have significant barriers in reaching their career level employment.

Veterans enrolled in the Veteran Affairs' Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program follow a vocational plan with an ultimate goal of career level employment that will accommodate for the Veteran's injuries incurred during military service. As these Veterans complete their vocational plans, the Veterans are referred to our statewide DVOPs and CVSRs.

DVOP Paul Pelot, from WorkSource Bellingham, was referred such a Veteran – a Veteran that was 100% disabled because of her service injuries. She had just

completed her VR&E sponsored master's degree in Counseling from the University of Washington. Prior to the completion, this Veteran was a regular non-paid volunteer at the Bellingham Veterans Center as a Veteran's Service Officer. This is a critical role in assisting other Veterans navigating the complicated maze of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits and a role that frequently is partnered with our JVSG funded staff across the state.

One of the main functions at the Bellingham Veterans Center is providing readjustment counseling for those Veterans and surviving family members who served in combat. It was this Veteran's goal to become a readjustment counselor. The director of the Vet Center was familiar with this Veteran and was interested in her applying for an anticipated opening. However, along with many other problems attributed to the COVID pandemic, one was a delay in USAJobs posting the open counselor position at this Vet Center. After several months waiting for the position to post, with the Veteran unemployed and actively seeking this employment opportunity, DVOP Paul Pelot and LVER Bill Adamek shifted strategy to help this Veteran reach her career goal.

One of the unique pathways into federal employment is through Non-Competitive Appointment. One of the eligibilities for this pathway is a person with a disability (*please note – this pathway is for ANYONE with a disability – not just Veterans*). The pathway is accomplished with obtaining a Schedule-A letter, a letter prepared by a licensed medical practitioner that only discloses that an “intellectual disability, severe physical disability or psychiatric disability” exists. A template for this letter is readily available and offered by [DOL](#).

With the Schedule-A letter in hand, both DVOP and LVER connected with the Employment Connection Specialist from the Department of Veteran Affairs. This VA expert was the connection between the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), which is the Human Resources arm of federal employment, and the Bellingham Vet Center. From there, a direct hire was made in less than 3 weeks!

If you would like to know more about the Schedule-A letter process, please engage with your local JVSG funded staff or reach out to the Veterans and Military Families Program team – Program Operator, [Seth Maier](#) or Program Support Specialist, [Monique Martin](#).

Story submitted by Seth Maier, Veterans & Military Families Program Operator

Ask away: A regular column supported by a pack of experts

This month we introduce a panel of resident experts on a range of topics. Next month they will begin taking turns answering your burning questions on these important topics:



Ella the Cat, Human Resources, Budget and Professional Pathways expert.



Claire the Dog, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion expert.



Juliette the Cat, Communications and Customer Service expert.



Sage the Dog, WIOA policy and Integration expert.



Abraham the Ram, Leadership expert.

To submit a topic or question for our experts to answer, [click here](#).

Kudos

RESEA kudos

Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) would like to acknowledge some outstanding individuals and their teams, as they worked through some early bugs with the Reemployment Appointment Scheduler:

Kudos to Sean Wiley and WorkSource Mason County! His keen observation skills alerted us to a serious problem that was occurring within our Reemployment Appointment Scheduler and the prioritization of the profile scores. We were able to fix the issue, ensuring that we were serving claimants with the highest profile scores and most in need.

Kudos to Shelley Blackburn and WorkSource Skagit! Their quick thinking and curiosity alerted us to a serious problem that was occurring within our Reemployment Appointment Scheduler and the selection process. We were able to fix the issue before it impacted hundreds of UI Claimants that were not eligible for RESEA.

Kudos submitted by Juan Martinez, RESEA/Wagner Peyser/MSFW Program Operator

Kudo submissions

If you'd like to submit kudos to be shared in The Connection, send them to [Jordyn Johnsen](#).

Make sure to also submit your kudos to "ES-tounding!", to be shared in the all-staff NewsNet articles. You can do so by emailing NewsNet@esd.wa.gov. To find all newsletter stories, go to the [NewsNet home page](#) on InsideESD.

Taking a break doesn't always mean unplugging

A productivity and health article by Alexandra Samuel for the Harvard Business Review.

Frequent breaks help recharge our batteries at work, and while screen-free respites are usually best, sometimes you just can't get away from your devices—and sometimes you just don't want to. But the good news is that tech-based or-enhanced breaks can give you some of the same benefits as the offscreen variety, if you are able to include some combination of physical movement, social interaction, and brain stimulation. So take a few minutes to sing karaoke along with your favorite YouTube video, feel guilt-free about firing up a video game, or set aside time to chat with friends in the middle of the day.

For the full article, [click here](#).