# Study of Customer Satisfaction With Two ODEP Technical Assistance Centers

**Final Report**

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# Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL's) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) has a mission to develop and influence policies and practices to increase the number and quality of employment opportunities for people with disabilities. In 2016, ODEP sponsored a Technical Assistance (TA) Center Program comprising five TA Centers: the Job Accommodation Network (JAN); the Employer Assistance Resource Network (EARN); the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Y); the Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT); and the National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities (LEAD). These five Centers sought to promote successful employment policy and practices, and each had a unique focus, including assisting customers with workforce accommodations, systems-level changes, and accessible technology, as well as finding ways to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) of DOL, in partnership with ODEP, sought to examine customer satisfaction with the TA Center Program. The overarching goals of the study were to examine the extent to which the program meets customer needs, as well as the reach and satisfaction with services provided by the individual TA Centers. This executive summary begins with a brief description of the methodology of the study, followed by an overview of the key findings from the study. A more in-depth review of the methodology and findings is contained in the remainder of this report.

## Methodology

Westat conducted the study in two phases. Phase I focused on determining the feasibility of conducting a customer satisfaction survey of the five TA Centers by collecting information on their missions, the services provided, the targeted customers, and whether the Center was collecting customer satisfaction data. Phase II focused on JAN and EARN[1] customer satisfaction with the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the TA received, as well as perceptions of the extent to which the TA resulted in the adoption and implementation of ODEP policies.

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[1] By Phase II, the three other Centers were discontinued.

Westat began Phase I data collection in 2016 with semi-structured interviews of staff from all five TA Centers as well as ODEP liaisons to the TA Centers. The study team also conducted in-person site visits with three of the TA Centers. Lastly, Westat reviewed documents from the TA Centers, such as monthly metrics reports, quarterly reports, grant applications, work plans, meeting notes, and logic models. Westat conducted a content analysis of the interview transcripts to identify key themes related to assessing satisfaction among TA Center customers. Westat used all of the information collected to develop process maps for each TA Center, looking at similarities and differences among them with regard to service provision.

Phase II data collection began in 2019 with semi-structured telephone interviews of customers and staff from JAN and EARN. [2] Staff from JAN and EARN emailed their customers and invited them to contact Westat to participate in a telephone interview. This limits the generalizability of the data to only those few customers who responded to participate in the interviews. A detailed coding scheme was developed to organize and code the interview data using NVivo.[3] The study team then systematically queried the NVivo database and produced code reports to analyze the data germane to each research question and emerging theme.

Also in Phase II, Westat reviewed data on customer satisfaction and service utilization from both JAN and EARN, and explored trends in the numbers of electronic contacts and website visits and users. For the customer satisfaction data, we looked for changes in satisfaction by Center and the type of service received, and to determine whether the data collectors used a scientific approach for sample selection and addressed the potential for selection bias.

## Key Findings

Overall, findings from this study provide an overview of the structure of each TA Center, and an in-depth look at how JAN and EARN operated and the perception of the services provided. Findings from Phase I of the study illustrated the organizational structures of each TA Center, highlighting

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[2] By Phase II, three Centers were discontinued and data collection barriers involving privacy rules prevented Westat from contacting customers directly. So JAN staff invited 2,500 customers to contact Westat, and EARN staff invited about 200 customers to contact Westat, to complete an interview. Westat completed interviews with 75 JAN customers and 14 EARN customers.

[3] A qualitative analysis software program.

the similarities and difference. Phase II findings indicated that customers were satisfied with services received from the TA Centers and that one-third of the interviewed customers were making changes in their workplace due to the services received. Key findings from the study are summarized below, organized by research question.

## Research Question 1.
### How do the TA Centers operate within the context of ODEP?

- JAN's mission was to provide services related to the provision of job accommodations. JAN targeted all customer types: employers, people with disabilities, workforce agencies, policymakers/advocacy groups, community-based organizations, post-secondary education providers, and rehabilitation professionals/direct service providers.

- JAN placed a strong emphasis on one-on-one consultations that required a high level of engagement and interaction. JAN's services were implemented by a combination of online chat, email, telephone, and online video chat.

- EARN's mission was to increase the commitment and capacity of employers to recruit, hire, retain, and advance individuals with disabilities. The Center targeted employers and, to a lesser extent, rehabilitation professionals and direct service providers.

- EARN's emphasis was on providing general assistance by producing written materials, making presentations, hosting webinars and the askearn.org website, and presenting the opportunity for customers, partners, and other stakeholders to network and collaborate.

## Research Question 2.
### To what extent do customers perceive the assistance provided by Centers to be of high quality, high relevance, and high usefulness?

Customers in this study contacted JAN and EARN for different reasons, which is logical based on the different missions and objectives of the Centers. However, most customers interviewed contacted the TA Centers for assistance with reasonable job accommodations; questions about compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); to gather information and stay current on topics related to disability employment; and for continuing education purposes. When the customers interacted with the Centers, a large majority (85 percent of the 89 customers interviewed) used individualized services (e.g., one-on-one communication via telephone, email, or chat). And over 60 percent referenced resources posted on the TA Centers' websites.

Overall, the customers interviewed from both Centers were satisfied with the services they received. Customers were pleased with the timeliness of assistance received and viewed the staff person who

assisted them as having sufficient expertise. Customers from both Centers were satisfied with the websites and appreciated the breadth of information and the practical templates and examples provided. EARN customers were happy with the webinars available to them as they allowed the customers to stay current on the latest disability policies and to ensure their own policies match what others are doing. Most thought that the websites and/or webinars were easy to access and navigate. JAN customers valued the individualized TA consultations because it provided the opportunity to confidentially discuss a specific disability/accommodation situation with a trusted expert; to receive multiple options to solve a problem; and to receive support and validation.

According to staff interviews, JAN and EARN successfully resolved most of the requests for assistance that they received. Of the 67 customers interviewed about the outcome of their request, 57 (about 85 percent) said that the information received from the Center helped them to solve their issue. Among those 57, 34 were employers and 44 were repeat users of the TA Centers.

The remaining 10 customers reported that their interactions with JAN or EARN did not help them accomplish their desired outcomes. Half of these customers, all people with disabilities, sought legal assistance or help advocating for an accommodation request, services not provided by the Centers. Three other customers indicated that their employers ultimately denied their requests for accommodations. Two customers could not find a clear path forward because the information or guidance received was not specific enough to their issue.

### Research Question 3.
#### To what extent do customers perceive that the TA provided by the Centers has led to adoption and/or implementation of ODEP's policies and practices?

Center customers were asked whether the information provided by the TA Centers resulted in any changes at their organizations and, more specifically, whether those changes resulted in new policies or procedures related to disability employment. Nineteen of the 54 customers who responded reported making changes to their organizations' policies or procedures.

The changes described by customers included changes made at the organizational level and changes made at the individual level. Eight customers said that the services led to organizational-level changes to policy and procedure, and 11 described the changes as largely made at the individual level.

Examples of organizational-level changes that customers reported making include:

- Refining the organization's accommodation request protocols;

- Creating a "resource group for people with disabilities";

- Developing new procedural guideline on how to interview job candidates that disclose a disability, and how to determine what assistance the company could provide to help the candidate be successful in the position, if hired; and

- Writing the employment accommodation policy for the organization using the Center's guidance and reference materials.

Examples of the individual-level changes that customers reported making include:

- Using EARN's resources to create informal written guidance for managers on how to respond to employees' requests for accommodations; and

- Posting job openings in locations where those job candidates with disabilities would be more likely to see them.

The customers who reported that they made changes following their interactions with the TA Centers had no feedback on what, specifically, about the services they received facilitated their adoption of changes. Of these 19 customers, 18 of them were repeat customers.

Westat asked Center staff to comment on how ODEP could streamline data collection across Centers. Staff referenced the difference between the Centers and indicated that streamlining the process would be complicated. Overall, the Center staff were satisfied with the data collection systems already in place at the Centers. JAN used its JAN Electronic Management System (JEMS) to collect data on all interactions with customers and tracked customer outcomes using a monthly customer satisfaction survey implemented by JAN's evaluator, the West Virginia University (WVU) School of Social Work. EARN tracked traffic on their website and social media accounts, and EARN staff informally tracked their relationships with specific customers over time. EARN also tracked outcomes among clients who utilized the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) and tracked outcomes for webinar attendees using satisfaction questionnaires through George Washington University.

# 1. Introduction

The mission of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) in the United States Department of Labor (DOL) is to develop and promote policies and practices that will increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. In situations where the agency identifies positive or promising policies and practices, it promotes widespread implementation and adoption via outreach to share this critical information, and it provides technical assistance to appropriate levels of government (local, state, and Federal), as well as to service providers, non-governmental organizations, private employers, and persons with disabilities. The technical assistance might include specific advice, assistance, or training that builds the capacity of an organization, agency, or other entity's ability to implement desired changes.

The Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) of DOL, in partnership with ODEP, sought to examine customer satisfaction of the Technical Assistance (TA) Center Program. In 2015, CEO contracted with Westat to conduct a study of customer satisfaction with five TA Centers supported by ODEP. The Centers included: the Employer Assistance Resource Network (EARN); the Job Accommodation Network (JAN); the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Y); the Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT); and the National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities (LEAD). The goals of the study were to examine the breadth and reach of services provided by the individual TA Centers and the extent to which staff and customers perceived the program as meeting customer needs.

The research questions listed below focus the content and scope of the study, addressing how the TA Centers operated, the quality and utility of the services they provided, and the extent to which staff and customers perceived Center programs and services as leading to the adoption of ODEP's recommended policies and practices.

## Research Question 1.
### How did the TA Centers operate within the context of ODEP?

- What were the objectives of the TA Centers?

- Who were the customers of the TA Centers?

- What kinds of products and services were provided by the Centers?

- How did the TA Centers develop, refine and carry out their plans for fulfilling the needs of their customers?

### Research Question 2.
**To what extent did customers perceive the assistance provided by Centers to be of high quality, high relevance, and high usefulness?**

- How did customers define their needs and priorities?

- To what extent did customers perceive that TA Center assistance was instrumental in helping customers reach their desired outcomes?

- What was the variation within each Center in the quality, relevance, and usefulness of Center assistance across types of TA and participants?

### Research Question 3.
**To what extent did staff and customers perceive that the TA provided by the Centers has led to adoption and/or implementation of ODEP's policies and practices?**

- What factors did staff and customer perceive as influencing adoption?[4]

- What may be some of the promising practices in TA that led to adoption or implementation of a policy or practice?[4]

- How can ODEP track the adoption of policies and practices promoted in Center TA?

- What recommendations can be made for improving the process and methods of TA delivery provided?

- What internal performance measures could ODEP implement to track the efficiency, effectiveness, or utility of assistance provided by the Centers?

This report presents the results of the study, focusing on two of the five Centers, JAN and EARN. ODEP discontinued funding for the other Centers midway into this study.

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[4] This sub-question is not addressed due to the changes in the study design that limited the data collection activities and number of customers interviewed.

# 2. Study Design and Methodology

## 2.1 Design Overview

Westat conducted the study in two phases. The first phase comprised a feasibility study to inform a study design and data collection for the second phase. The first phase included development of process maps delineating the customers served and the services provided; explanation of the purpose, structure, function, and services provided by each TA Center; and exploration of the potential to access customer contact information. CEO and ODEP expected the feasibility study to address major challenges, such as making clear definitions of "customers," deciding whether they were primary or secondary, and assessing the potential for an efficient plan for sampling and surveying potentially diverse customers. A feasibility study report described issues and recommendations for moving forward with the assessment of customer satisfaction. Phase I also included the development of data collection instruments and a Privacy Records Act clearance package. Together, Westat, CEO, ODEP, and the Technical Expert Panel[5] reviewed the recommendations and decided on a strategy for moving forward.

The original plan developed in Phase I called for the collection of data annually over a 3-year period through two surveys. The first was a "pulse" survey to capture initial impressions of responsiveness, clarity, relevance, and perceived value of the TA Center helpfulness. The second and longer survey, intended for a random sample of customers served during the previous year, was created to develop a richer reflection of the helpfulness of the TA Center to the customer, including showing ways in which the consultation was helpful. The study design developed in Phase I changed significantly after Phase I because there were changes to the number of TA centers ODEP operated and the nature of the work changed for the remaining TA centers, particularly for EARN. In addition, there were data collection barriers involving privacy rules that could not be overcome during the life of this evaluation.

As a result, Westat revised the data collection design, working directly with JAN and EARN staff to have their customers contact Westat to participate in a single qualitative telephone interview instead

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[5] TWG members were John Kregel, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, Virginia Commonwealth University; Brenda Turnbull, Policy Studies Associates, Inc.; and Judy Young, Yang-Tan Institute of Employment and Disability, Cornell University.

of the series of two surveys. Although this plan limits the generalizability of the data only to those customers who responded to the interviews, it still provides useful information from recent customers of the Centers about their experiences and satisfaction. In addition, the Centers provided Westat with administrative data about website activities, numbers of electronic contacts, and summary reports.

## 2.2    Data Collection

Westat conducted in-person and telephone interviews with Center directors and their senior staff during the Phase I data collection. In addition, the Westat team collected written documents about each of the TA Centers. From these data, Westat developed a clear understanding of each Center's mission and operation. Senior Center staff provided Westat with key background on the mission, services, targeted customers, and whether the Center collected customer satisfaction data. In addition, staff provided documents that supported what they said in the interviews. In sum, the interviews were conducted with six staff from EARN, seven staff from JAN, two staff from PEAT, five staff from LEAD, and six staff from NCWD/Y.[6] Westat also interviewed each of the Federal (ODEP) liaisons to the TA Centers, asking about mission, work plans, and the funder's reporting expectations. Westat also received and reviewed documents about each of the TA Centers, including monthly metrics reports, quarterly reports, grant applications, work plans, meeting notes, and logic models.

Under the revised Phase II design, Westat gathered data to assess customer satisfaction and to document the processes by which ODEP policies and practices were delivered to and adopted by JAN and EARN customers. JAN and EARN directed customers to Westat for telephone interviews.[7] The Centers used their existing case record systems to email customers and explain the purpose of the study and request that any interested parties contact Westat via telephone or email to schedule an interview. The telephone interviews with JAN and EARN customers provided data on two important dimensions of the customer experience: (1) satisfaction with the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the TA received, and (2) the extent to which the TA resulted in the adoption and

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[6] Westat worked with the Executive Director at each Center to purposefully select staff for the interviews. Interviewees included the Executive Director, senior staff, and evaluation researchers.

[7] EARN told webinar participants about the Westat study and instructed those interested and willing to participate in a telephone interview to contact Westat at the telephone number or email address provided.

implementation of ODEP policies. Westat conducted telephone interviews with JAN and EARN staff to add a broader perspective of specific Center/customer interactions. The interviews with Center directors and staff provided their perspective on the TA services provided and the perceived adoption of ODEP's policies and practices.

The TA Centers also provided reports on their own customer satisfaction surveys, number of calls received, number of web hits, and other contact records. The Westat team reviewed these data to determine what contributions they could provide to address the research questions.

Ultimately, Westat conducted 98 telephone interviews with customers and staff from both JAN and EARN between May and August 2019. Eighty-nine of the interviews were JAN and EARN customers and nine of the interviews were Center staff (Table 2-1). The customers included 42 employers, 27 people with a disability, 13 service providers, and 5 relatives or friends of a person with a disability (Table 2-2).[8] Ninety-four interviews were audio recorded and transcribed; four interview respondents declined to be recorded, and interviewers typed notes during the interviews. All transcriptions and notes were uploaded to NVivo 11, a qualitative analysis software, for coding and analysis.

Table 2-1.    Total interviews conducted, by center and by interview type

| Interview type | JAN | EARN | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Customer | 75 | 14 | 89 |
| Staff | 7 | 2 | 9 |
| Total | 82 | 16 | 98 |

Source: Westat qualitative interview with customers.

Table 2-2.    Total interviews conducted, by center and customer type

| Customer type | JAN | EARN | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Person with a disability | 27 | 0 | 27 |
| Employer | 34 | 8 | 42 |
| Relative or friend | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| Service provider | 8 | 5 | 13 |
| Other | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 75 | 14 | 89 |

Source: Westat qualitative interview with customers.

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[8] JAN staff invited 2,500 customers to complete an interview with Westat, and EARN staff invited approximately 200 customers to complete an interview with Westat.

## Study Limitations

Because this was a descriptive study, it did not provide for making causal inferences. Also, without implementing the original two surveys, and because of the small number of respondents, we could not identify factors that would lead to adoption or implementation of ODEP policies. Further, Westat did not have control of sampling of the customers. Rather, interested customers were asked by the Centers to contact Westat if they were willing to participate in an interview. A total of 89 customers self-selected to participate; they were not randomly selected. Thus, the findings are not generalizable to all customers of JAN and EARN, but reflect only the views and experiences of those who participated. In contrast to the customers we interviewed, others customers might have been able to provide examples of adoption and/or implementation of ODEP policies.

## 2.3    Analysis

### Qualitative Data Processing and Analysis

Appendix A provides a detailed description of the qualitative data processing and analysis for this study. Briefly, the Westat qualitative researchers read the interview transcripts to orient themselves to interviewee ideas about, and practices pertaining to, the employment of people with disabilities. After reading through the transcripts, Westat constructed a preliminary coding framework based on the prominent themes. Thematic codes in the codebook were used to identify text that reflect positive attributes and facilitators; negative attributes and challenges; and services that were the least or the most useful; valuable; and relevant. Three Westat staff tested the coding scheme during two exercises. After this second exercise, staff demonstrated sufficient inter-coder reliability that allowed all three staff to proceed with coding the remaining transcripts independently. Westat created a codebook that listed the code names, definitions, and examples of applicable data. Upon completion of coding, Westat systematically queried the NVivo database and produced code reports to analyze the data germane to each research question and emerging theme.

### Administrative Data Processing and Analysis

Westat reviewed the customer satisfaction survey data to determine customer satisfaction by each Center (i.e., JAN and EARN) and by the type of service received (one-on-one consultation, webinar,

etc.). Westat also examined trends over time in other administrative data (e.g., number of web hits, number of unique users, and number of calls received) using descriptive statistics (e.g., percentages, means, medians, and standard deviations) and cross-tabulations. Westat also reviewed the survey methods to determine the sampling approaches and explore potential for selection bias.

# 3. TA Center Mission and Operation Within the Context of ODEP

ODEP established TA Centers to serve a diverse set of purposes, functions, and customers. Operating with funding from ODEP grants, the Centers assist employers, Federal agencies, state governments, non-profit organizations, people with disabilities, and others with technical assistance and policy development, leading to improved integration of people with disabilities into employment.

This chapter provides background and understanding of the JAN and EARN Centers. The chapter also discusses each Center's purpose, objectives, customer base, the types of services provided, and how the Centers delivered those services. The majority of the information for the chapter comes from Phase I interviews and documentation from the Centers. However, the chapter also contains insights about the Centers developed during Phase II.

## 3.1 Objectives of the TA Centers

Both Centers operated with a mission and objectives targeting a particular set of community needs. Together, the Centers aimed to achieve specific functions within ODEP's larger programmatic and policy goals, working toward improving opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in the national workforce.

### 3.1.1 JAN

West Virginia University (WVU) began operating JAN in 1983, and the Center largely served the same populations using the same methods through the ensuing years. Through its long history, JAN established a set of specific TA methods and relationships with its customer base and partners. JAN focused on the job accommodations that allow people with disabilities to perform their job functions. JAN offered services to employers and people with disabilities regarding strategies for using accommodations in a new job or an existing job.

The specific objectives of JAN included:

- Provide technical assistance via telephone, email, internet chat, social networks, text messaging, TTY, and Skype;

- Maintain/improve infrastructure of its website askjan.org;

- Provide training to employers and service providers about workplace accommodation options and practical solutions;

- Provide a 15-step SNAP tool to employers to self-assess their online job application system;

- Conduct employer-focused research with the JAN Workplace Accommodation Cost/Benefit Study; and

- Assess performance and evaluate impact by continuing Customer Satisfaction study and askjan.org website evaluation.

In FY 2016, grant funding for JAN was $2,499,901, supporting 30 staff members, 26 of whom were full-time while serving its large call center and live-chat center. In addition, JAN had several partner organizations, as shown in Table 3-1. The WVU School of Social Work conducted the customer satisfaction surveys for JAN. Other partners collaborated with JAN to provide various products (e.g., guides and videos), or provide conferences, webinars, or trainings.

Table 3-1.     JAN partner organizations and their contribution

| Organization | Partner's Contribution |
|---|---|
| WVU School of Social Work | External partner that managed JAN's Customer Satisfaction Survey |
| Integrated Global Strategies, LLC | Collaborated to produce a training video |
| Deb Dagit Diversity, LLC | Collaborated to develop a reasonable accommodation guide |
| Bobby Silverstein – Powers Pyles Sutter & Verville PC | Collaborated to review data points collected by JAN and policy implications of the data |
| US Business Leadership Network ([USBLN]; new name is Disability: IN) | JAN and USBLN collaborated to conduct outreach, education, and technical assistance activities promoting the hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities. Example of activity - partnering for USBLN's annual conference and annual webinar series. |
| National Business and Disability Council (NBDC) | JAN and the NBDC collaborate to conduct outreach, education, and technical assistance activities promoting the hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities. Example of activity - partnering for NBDC's Quarterly Think Tank Series. |
| National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS) | JAN and the NMSS collaborated to conduct outreach, education, and technical assistance activities promoting the hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities. Example of activity – JAN provided intermittent training for NMSS members, review of documents. |

**Table 3-1.       JAN partner organizations and their contribution (continued)**

| Organization | Partner's Contribution |
|---|---|
| DC Metro Business Leadership Network | JAN and the DC Metro BLN collaborated to conduct outreach, education, and technical assistance activities promoting the hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities. Example of activity – JAN provided the DC Metro BLN members with training. |
| Matrix Absence Management | JAN and Matrix Absence Management collaborated to conduct outreach, education, and technical assistance activities promoting the hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities. JAN provided a "warm transfer" for Matrix employer customers when they had questions regarding the ADA or reasonable accommodation. Matrix also assisted in submitting conference presentations. |

Source: Authors' compilation.

## 3.1.2    EARN

Cornell University began operating EARN in 2009, although management of EARN later moved to the Viscardi Center in 2014 and then moved back to Cornell University in 2019. Over that period of time, EARN established a clear mission, methods, and customer base. EARN worked to improve employers' capacity and willingness to hire and retain employees with disabilities. It did this by helping employers understand the benefits of hiring people with disabilities as well as understanding employer obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Center's objectives included the following:

- Build a comprehensive communications campaign for employer engagement;

- Develop a policy agenda that helps contribute to significant policy changes or recommend and/or interpret existing policies;

- Assist employers to foster inclusive workplaces to promote the employment, reemployment, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities; and

- Continually assess effectiveness and adjustment plans to reflect lessons learned and changes in ODEP's policy and programmatic priorities.

In FY 2016, grant funding for EARN was $1,843,350, supporting 22 staff members. EARN had assistance from several consultants and subcontractors as shown in Tables 3-2 and 3-3. EARN contracted with the George Washington University (GWU) Graduate School of Education and Human Development to serve as an independent evaluator. GWU interviewed customers; reviewed customer evaluations, including the results from a self-study survey; and conducted follow-up interviews with EARN's partners who completed the self-study survey.

**Table 3-2.      EARN consultants and their role**

| Name | Affiliation | Role |
|---|---|---|
| Lisa Stern | Consultant | Provided trainings, usually to private businesses |
| Dinah Cohen | Consultant | Provided trainings, usually in the federal sector |
| Bobby Silverstein | Consultant | Created a large number of our policy briefs and written TA materials dealing with regulations/laws/etc. |

Source: Authors' compilation.

**Table 3-3.      EARN partner organizations and their contribution**

| Organization | Partner's Contribution |
|---|---|
| Concepts Communications | Communications / PR / social media / website content |
| US Business Leadership Network (New name is Disability:IN) | Ran quarterly "Circle" meetings with companies who were leaders in disability inclusion |
| National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) | Created policy briefs/TA materials for state legislators (and staff); helped disseminate content to state government points of contact |
| Georgia Tech Center for Advanced Communications Policy | Researched trends in the area of public policy; reviewed literature and industry periodicals to determine best practices and trends related to disability inclusion |
| Georgetown University McDonough School of Business Global Social Enterprise Initiative | Researched and created messaging to persuade and inform employers about disability inclusion |
| George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human Development | Assessment and evaluation |

Source: Authors' compilation.

## 3.2      How the Centers Develop, Refine, and Carry Out Their Plans

Both Centers used a proactive approach when deciding what technical assistance, training and, other services to provide. They identified needs for services and gaps in their customers' knowledge by staying well-informed about current events, trends, policies, and regulations that pertain to their customers, and by listening to their customers and the larger disability community's challenges, questions, and requests. In addition, ODEPs guidance, input, and feedback also influenced the determination of the services to provide.

### 3.2.1      JAN

Customer requests, questions, and feedback were the primary determinants of the services JAN offered. JAN developed a strategic plan to guide service delivery, focusing on providing individualized guidance and support to customers. Customers contacted JAN through phone, email,

text, social media, and live chat support. Frontline staff responded to these contacts and communicated with the customer to determine whether JAN could meet the customer's needs. If JAN could not, the customer was referred to an appropriate organization that could help, such as referring an individual for legal representation or referring an employer to EARN for specific trainings and webinars. There was also an online form available for customers to submit a question or request.

JAN also placed an emphasis on a continuous improvement loop, using feedback from their customers and ODEP, to improve upon the services they provided. In addition, when new regulations or policies were released, JAN explored how those changes would affect their customers, and they used that information to inform the development of additional services and resources. Appendix B presents a process map illustrating the flow of services at JAN.

JAN customers were assigned to a staff member, according to the team line-up that determined which staff member was available for a new customer. Staff members communicated with the customer to discuss their needs and then, during that same initial contact, provided expert guidance and coaching specific to the customer's needs. In addition to verbal guidance, other resources were offered, such as a tool kit, training, or a workshop. If the services met the customer's needs, JAN considered the service delivery complete. If the services did not, the customer was routed back to the initial contact phase. If the need could not to be met by JAN staff, then the staff member provided the customer with a referral within 24 hours.

## 3.2.2　EARN

EARN determined what services to provide by conducting a needs assessment and identifying industry trends. EARN completed field reconnaissance and literature reviews on an ongoing basis to collect information on the needs of its target community. Based on this information, EARN set priorities for technical assistance and training delivery. EARN staff developed responses to the needs in each identified priority area and created a plan to meet those needs. EARN staff developed materials or products in response to the needs and identified potential target customers for outreach. In addition, EARN sometimes received specific requests from customers. A customer could have reached out to EARN in one of two ways: via EARN's website or by contacting EARN staff directly. When a customer accessed the website, the service provision was passive. The customer

either collected the necessary information from the website and moved on, or was unable to find the information and then contacted EARN directly. Appendix C presents a process map illustrating the flow of services at EARN.[9]

If a customer had a question, EARN staff determined whether the information needed to be customized or if the existing information was sufficient. If the existing information was deemed insufficient, EARN staff obtained approval from ODEP to customize existing materials to meet the specific need of the customers. After providing the service, EARN staff worked to determine whether the customer required any additional services, such as a new training need. If they did, the process began again. Otherwise, they were included in an effort to collect customer satisfaction data on the services provided.

## 3.3    Customer Base of the Centers

The JAN administrative data indicated that between October 2017 and August 2019, JAN received a monthly average of 2,183 calls and an average of 1,429 electronic contacts (e.g., emails or chats). In addition, the askjan.org website had a monthly average of 151,491 unique web users. The EARN administrative data indicated that between January 2015 and September 2019, the askearn.org website had a monthly average of 5,075 unique visitors. In addition, EARN had an average of 219 participants per webinar between October 2015 and August 2019.

ODEP TA Centers served a wide range of customers. We identified seven main categories:

- Employers (e.g., Federal agencies; small and large businesses);

- Workforce agencies (e.g., American Job Centers; Vocational Rehabilitation programs; Independent Living Centers);

- Policymakers/advocacy groups (e.g., Federal agencies that make policy; nonprofits that advocate for people with disabilities);

- Community-based organizations (e.g., youth service organizations);

- Post-secondary education community (e.g., community colleges; faculty; school administrators);

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[9] The de-emphasis at EARN of individualized TA is not reflected in the process map.

- People with disabilities (including their parents or children); and

- Private rehabilitation professionals and other direct service providers (e.g., technology providers; juvenile justice system).

JAN and EARN overlapped in providing services to employers, but JAN's focus was specific to helping employers with job accommodations needs, whereas EARN focused on improving employer capacity and willingness to hire and retain employees with disabilities. EARN helped employers understand the benefits of hiring people with disabilities as well as their obligations under the ADA. Employers were the main customer base for EARN, whereas JAN's customer base also included persons with disabilities, advocacy groups, community-based organizations, government agencies, and service providers.

## 3.4 Types of Services Provided

ODEP considered TA to be specific advice, assistance, or training that builds the capacity of an organization, agency, or any other entity's ability to implement desired changes. We have identified the following six main types of services that Centers provided:

- Individualized TA provided via in-person trainings or online chat, e-mail, and/or telephone;

- In-person presentations and workshops;

- Webinars and other online presentations;

- Online information dissemination (e.g., policy briefs, toolkits, newsletters);

- Networking, collaboration, partnership development/establishment; and

- Referrals to other local service providers and resources.

Individualized TA services were tailored to meet a particular customer's needs and were often provided over the course of several interactions with opportunity for the customer to offer feedback and request additional assistance. Examples of individualized TA included individualized trainings, consultations, and support of customers seeking to implement a specific program, procedure, or policy.

Other TA services were created and disseminated with a broader group of customers in mind. These services might have also included products, such as written materials, resources, and toolkits, as well as suggestions on how to comply with current policies. Webinars were used to present information on more general topics, such as disability employment for small businesses and ways for states to assist companies with employing people with disabilities.

### 3.4.1    JAN

JAN's emphasis was in providing one-on-one consultations. It provided customers with timely responses to individual inquiries. Individualized TA was provided remotely via a combination of online chat, email, telephone, and online video chat. JAN provided a high level of engagement and customer interaction as it communicated directly with the customer to fully resolve the request. It was not unusual for the Center staff and the customer to interact on several occasions to exchange information.

The askjan.org website provided resources and information about job accommodations. In addition, JAN referred customers to local service providers and resources using the "Resources" section on its website, containing a comprehensive list of organizations and agencies that provided additional resources and services for employers and people with disabilities.

### 3.4.2    EARN

EARN sought to help employers understand their legal obligations toward hiring and working with people with disabilities, and it provided guidelines and support to equip employers to comply with those policies. Its emphasis was on providing general assistance by producing written materials, making presentations, hosting webinars and the askearn.org website, and presenting the opportunity for customers, partners, and other stakeholders to network and collaborate. EARN provided online platforms through which customers could network with each other and with key stakeholders in the employment and disability fields.

In 2017, ODEP directed EARN to suspend the customized trainings component of their work that was offered directly to employers and instead to focus on using intermediary organizations to reach more employers. EARN's new mission was to "train the trainer" by increasing the resources and capabilities of intermediary organizations. The intermediary effort was reflected in the

Inclusion@Work Network, a means to raise awareness and employer-led actions. The EARN Inclusion@Work Network provided a mechanism to reach thousands of employers through membership organizations (i.e., intermediaries). EARN provided intermediaries with news briefs, toolkits, website and social media assistance, and speakers for intermediary luncheons or conferences.

# 4. Customer Perceptions of Relevance, Usefulness, and Quality of Services

This chapter provides the feedback collected from customers of JAN and EARN during telephone interviews conducted between May and August of 2019. We also present a summary of findings from the administrative data provided by the Centers in 2019.

## 4.1 Reasons Customers Contacted the Centers

Customers contacted the TA Centers for different reasons. However, most customers interviewed contacted the TA Centers for assistance with reasonable job accommodations (from both the employee and employer perspective); questions about compliance of the ADA; to gather information and stay current on topics related to disability employment; and for continuing education purposes.

### 4.1.1 Reasons Customers Contacted JAN

JAN provided services to a range of customers, including people with a disability, employers, relatives/friends of people with a disability, and service providers. Each of these customer types contacted JAN for issues related to disability employment, but the specific reasons differed by customer type.

Employers primarily contacted JAN for resources and guidance to address specific employees with disabilities and requests for accommodations. Employers sought feedback from JAN on issues related to compliance with and responsibility under the ADA. Several employers also indicated that their reasons for calling the Center pertained to a prospective employee, not just current ones. One employer gave the following example:

> *We have a call center division and we have an applicant that came in that was blind, and he did well during the first round of interview processes. And so the management team came to me and wanted to make sure that we had appropriate accommodations should we move forward with the hire. And because this was our first hire with somebody with them being blind, and that level of disability, we weren't 100% sure in terms of what types of technologies and other capabilities we would need to explore, to make sure that he was successful should he pass the second round of interviews.*

Another reason employers contacted JAN was to obtain feedback on how best to respond to an employee's accommodation request. In these instances, employees presented their employers with a new type of disability and accommodation request, and the employer wanted guidance on how to assess what a reasonable accommodation might be and potential solutions.

Like employers, service providers called JAN to request guidance on a specific employer/employee issue. The eight service providers interviewed served as intermediaries for employers and other service providers. They work either with people with disabilities or groups of employers in a particular community and field questions from their constituents regarding disabilities and reasonable accommodations. They called JAN to confirm their understanding of the specific disability and the array of reasonable accommodations that people can request or provide.

While both JAN and EARN work with employers, only JAN works directly with people with a disability. Among the 27 persons with a disability interviewed, 23 indicated that the primary reason they contacted JAN was to discuss accommodation requests they had made or were considering making. More specifically, these 23 individuals had been unsuccessful in obtaining accommodations from their employers and contacted JAN for guidance on their rights and what approach they could try next or planned to request an accommodation for a disability, and so they contacted JAN to determine what information to include in their request.

Two of the 27 customers with a disability contacted JAN after their employers terminated them, and two others called to discuss strategies for applying for jobs as a person with a disability. With regard to the former, those individuals contacted JAN to determine whether their employer had unlawfully terminated them following the disclosure of a disability. The two people who contacted JAN in the middle of a job search and application process sought feedback on when and how to declare their disability. One said that a potential employer asked him during the application process about the accommodations that he would need:

> *I applied for a job, a part-time job, and when I put down…they asked me, did I have a disability? I said I had cancer. Then they notified me and asked me what type of accommodations I would need. I had contacted [JAN] in reference to that because the last time I worked I didn't have a disability. I didn't need accommodations or I didn't need any of that, so I didn't know how to handle the question correctly, so I contacted [JAN] in reference to that.*

Finally, five respondents were relatives or friends of a person with a disability, and they contacted JAN for assistance on that person's behalf. Similarly, relatives and friends contacted the Center to determine what reasonable accommodations a person with a disability could make, or whether there had been discrimination against a person with a disability at work or during the job application process. One person reported, *"I called JAN because my nephew is looking for a job. One of the places that he wanted to apply – a restaurant – told him that he couldn't apply because of his disability. I was calling JAN to find out if that was legal. It didn't seem right to me."* Another respondent watched their partner struggle at work due to a disability and contacted JAN to determine what resources could help them be successful in managing their condition and their workload.

## 4.1.2    Reasons Customer Contacted EARN

Employers and service providers represent EARN's primary customer base. The 14 EARN customers (8 employers, 5 service providers, and 1 "other") we spoke with said that they contacted the Center for one of three reasons:

1.    To stay current on the disability and accommodation landscape;

2.    To meet continuing education requirements; and

3.    To obtain resources or guidance on specific impairments or accommodations.

Given that respondents were recruited from the list of customers who had recently attended an EARN webinar, the first two reasons are not surprising. Employer customers used webinars as a means of staying current on the broad range of policies and procedures, and to fulfill any continuing education requirements that an employer may have had. One employer worked for an organization that developed and manufactured technology and devices used for accommodations and used EARN to stay current on the needs of people with disabilities. He reported, *"As much as we can, we want to keep up on all things related to, 'What are the needs of people with disabilities?' It's really about reaching out to EARN to be proactive about the products that you're developing to make sure that they're accessible to people with a variety of limitations."*

Westat interviewed five service providers who contacted EARN for reasons very similar to those of the employers who were interviewed. The service providers were looking to receive continuing education credits by attending a webinar; receive information on new approaches to disability employment and technology related to accommodations; and assist a third party with questions or challenges related to accommodations.

> "EARN helps us stay abreast of the best practices and cutting-edge technologies and accommodation techniques that ensure that our employees are getting everything that they need to be successful on the job."
> - Service provider, EARN customer

## 4.1.3 Requests That Challenged JAN/EARN Staff

According to interviews with Center staff, JAN and EARN successfully resolved most of the requests for assistance that they received. However, staff reported that there were two areas where they struggled to assist customers: (1) a customer wanted JAN/EARN staff to determine the best course of action for them; or (2) a customer raised an issue for which no current policy framework or resource exists.

Staff at JAN and EARN cited the highly nuanced nature of disability policies and procedures, and pointed out that there might have been more than one solution to a problem. As one JAN staff commented:

> *You know, sometimes when it comes to this type of work, there's not a clear-cut answer. An employer may call [to ask], "What are my responsibilities?" And there may not be one answer to that. In other words, there may be different interpretations of what the correct answer may be. So, we could say, "This situation has been looked at like this…and here's another way to look at this situation." Then it's up to the employer to figure out which way the employer wants to go. Because we don't do legal advice, we provide the technical assistance. In other words, we provide what information is available that comes to the ADA. We can't necessarily tell [them], "This is exactly what you'd have to do." We can say, "Here's an option, here's another one, here's another option."*

According to JAN staff, some customers experienced frustration with this lack of clear-cut answers and wanted JAN staff to tell them exactly what path to follow rather than hear about their options or information on the different ways that laws have been interpreted.

Two JAN staff commented that the other challenge to their work was assisting customers with an issue that was so new that no current policies or resources existed. One of them provided the

example of the move from cubicles to open work environments, and the need to adapt early guidance to this new work style:

> *So a lot of people previously, when you had private offices and you had your own space, really they self-accommodated. So they didn't necessarily need to disclose their learning disability or that they have post-traumatic stress. In these new environments they do have to.…And again, that's why we really try to stay really close to our customers and listen very carefully about the trends so that we really can be on that cutting edge. And if we can't be on the cutting edge, then we pull those employers together and say, "Hey, what are you all doing? Who's doing best practices? How could [we] build upon what you're doing?"*

The second staff person added that the available technology had not yet caught up with all the supports that persons with a disability need; thus, there might not have been a single, perfect resource to provide accommodation for a disability.

## 4.2    Services Used by Customers

In this section we explore three specific types of services that customers mentioned during telephone interviews:[10]

1.    Individualized TA provided by telephone, online chat, and/or email;

2.    Information posted on EARN's and JAN's websites; and

3.    Webinars.

### 4.2.1    Individualized Services Used by JAN Customers

As shown in Table 4-1, nearly all interviewed JAN customers (73 of 75) used the individual TA services at some point. Fewer than half of the interviewed JAN customers (30 of 75) used the website, and only one customer reported attending a webinar.

As shown in Figure 4-1, most of the interviewed JAN customers (28 respondents) preferred to contact the Center via telephone, followed by a combination of telephone and email. A total of 29 customers reported engaging with JAN multiple times using different modes of communication

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[10] We do not list all the services offered by the TA Centers, because customers' comments focused on these specific three service types only.

during their most recent interaction (telephone and email; telephone and online chat; or email and online chat) (not shown in Figure 4-1). In those instances, interviewed customers said they absorbed the information received during their initial conversation with JAN staff, and re-contacted the Center when they had follow-up questions. In two instances, customers said they followed up because they did not receive a prompt response to their initial contact.

Table 4-1.    Number of interviewed JAN customers, by type of TA used and by customer type

| Customer type | Individualized TA | Website | Webinar | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Person with a disability | 27 | 10 | 0 | 27 |
| Employer | 33 | 11 | 1 | 34 |
| Relative or friend | 5 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| Service provider | 7 | 6 | 0 | 8 |
| Other | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 73 | 30 | 1 | 75 |

Source: Westat qualitative interview with customers.

Figure 4-1.    Mode of communication for individualized TA in most recent contact with JAN



E-mail only (12)    Online chat only (4)
Telephone and e-mail (24)    Telephone and online chat (4)
E-mail and online chat (1)    Telephone only
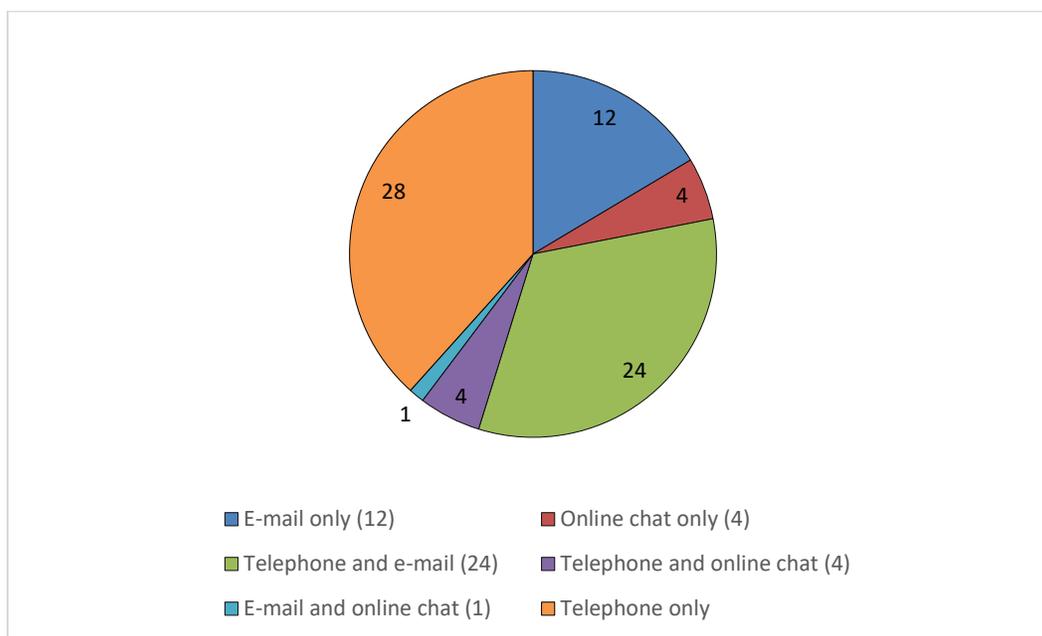
## 4.2.2    Services Used by EARN Customers

As shown in Table 4-2, 10 of 14 interviewed EARN customers attended webinars, 3 of 14 used the website, and only one used the individual TA services. This distribution of services delivered aligns with EARN's recent emphasis on providing services to intermediaries rather than individual customers and the customers EARN directed to Westat for the interviews.

Because they utilized webinars, the majority of the interviewed EARN customers did not contact EARN directly (e.g., phone or email) but instead learned about the webinars through a newsletter or other information distribution containing a listing of upcoming webinars sponsored by EARN. However, there were three EARN customers interviewed who contacted EARN directly: two by phone and the third by both phone and email.

Table 4-2.    Number of interviewed EARN customers, by type of TA used and customer type

| Customer type | Individualized TA | Website | Webinar | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Person with a disability | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Employer | 0 | 2 | 6 | 8 |
| Relative or friend | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Service provider | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 1 | 3 | 10 | 14 |

Source: Westat qualitative interview with customers.

## 4.3    Customer Perceptions That Services Were Instrumental in Reaching Desired Outcomes

Sixty-seven of the 89 interviewed customers provided answers when asked whether the services they received from JAN or EARN helped them to achieve their desired outcomes. Fifty-seven (85.1 percent) of them stated that information received had helped them resolve their issue and 10 (14.9 percent) stated that the information was not helpful (Table 4-3). Among the 22 customers who did not answer, the question was not applicable for 6 of them because they did not contact the TA Centers for help with a specific issue, but instead attended a webinar for continuing education. The other 15 interviewed customers were unable to answer the question definitely because their issue was ongoing and it was too soon to judge whether they had achieved a solution to their issue.

Table 4-3.    Whether customer had their issue resolved by the TA center

| | Issue Resolved | | | | | |
| | Yes | | No | | Total | |
| Center | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| JAN | 50 | 84.7 | 9 | 15.3 | 59 | 100 |
| EARN | 7 | 87.5 | 1 | 12.5 | 8 | 100 |
| Total | 57 | 85.1 | 10 | 14.9 | 67 | 100 |

Source: Westat qualitative interview with customers.

Notes: All percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Table 4-4 indicates whether customers had their issue resolved, by customer type. One of three relatives or friends of persons with a disability and 6 of 18 persons with a disability did not have their issue resolved. Most of the interviewed service providers and employers had their issues resolved (8 of 8 and 34 of 37, respectively). In addition, 44 of 45 repeat users and 13 of 22 first-time users reported that their issue was resolved (not shown in the table).

Table 4-4.    Whether customer had issued resolved, by customer type

| | Issue Resolved | | |
| Customer Type | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Person with a disability | 12 | 6 | 18 |
| Employer | 34 | 3 | 37 |
| Relative or friend | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Service provider | 8 | 0 | 8 |
| Other | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 57 | 10 | 67 |

Source: Westat qualitative interview with customers.

## 4.3.1    Customers Who Accomplished Outcomes

As mentioned above, a total of 57 JAN and EARN customers reported having received sufficient information from the Centers to resolve the issue they had contacted the center about. Of those 57, 50 were JAN customers and 7 were EARN customers.

### JAN Customers

The 12 people with disabilities who accomplished their desired outcomes had contacted JAN (Table 4-5) for help with a specific issue, typically a request for a workplace accommodation. Five of these customers said they used information received from JAN to prepare for a conversation with their human resources department about a request for accommodation. A positive side effect of receiving individual TA from JAN was that the customers reported feeling validated and emboldened to advocate for themselves. Another customer said that the information he received from JAN helped him to understand his rights as an employee, and also helped him determine whether legal action would be required to resolve a problem.

**Table 4-5.**   Customer that had issue resolved, by customer type and by center

| Customer Type | JAN Number | EARN Number |
|---|---|---|
| Person with a disability | 12 | 0 |
| Employer | 29 | 5 |
| Relative or friend | 2 | 0 |
| Service provider | 6 | 2 |
| Other | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 50 | 7 |

Source: Westat qualitative interview with customers.

Note: N = 57.

Twenty-nine JAN employer customers reported they received sufficient information to resolve their issues. These 29 JAN employer customers contacted JAN for assistance with navigating an accommodations request by an employee. They sought feedback from the Center on things like what accommodations had been tried elsewhere, and whether the employer's draft response to an employee's request met all the current requirements. One employer customer described how his company used the information received from JAN:

> [I] sat down with our ADA committee and sat down with the supervisor of this particular employee and discussed the situation. And I looked up all of the information that [JAN] had sent me, and so I provided that information to the ADA committee and to the supervisor over this employee. And as I thought about those suggestions, then there were a couple other things that came to mind, and I laid those out as options for them.

A service provider organization explained that the assistance from JAN helped him find a job for a client:

> [The JAN staff] were just outstanding. …And we hashed ideas back and forth and we came up with, that we would disclose in a cover letter. Her abilities, disabilities, you know, just try to put something together and it landed her a job.

Another service provider stated that, *"I was really happy with how well they understood what I was looking for, and be able to give me practical resources."* Another service provider explained that he had extensive knowledge of accommodations and disability employment-related issues but still found new information through JAN:

> It was a request of a group of hiring managers, and a consulting company that was helping to educate hiring managers of corporations about the strengths of people with autism, and how people could be accommodated. And we have a lot of experience here with employing people with every disability. However, we wanted to check our perceptions

*of what is available. And indeed, I learned a lot of ideas for reasonable accommodations that we had not previously tried or known.*

### EARN Customers

An EARN employer explained how information from EARN helped answer questions he had about ensuring that the application process to his organization is as accessible as it could be. He explained:

> *Really in our looking at the strategy of the company as far as inclusive hiring, what was going to be our next step for, again, this was about digital accessibility, so making sure a candidate can apply online for a job with us. They can navigate the different systems we have after an interview. And also how to find a vendor to help companies with all that. And there were a lot of tips.*

Four employer customers said that they relied on EARN to keep them informed of emerging issues related to disability employment as part of their continuing education efforts. One such employer customer explained that he utilized EARN's resources and services *"to reinforce what I know and just to make sure I'm on top of my game at this point."* Another employer stated that she used EARN's resources regularly for *"professional, personal education. Education for myself."*

## 4.3.2    Customers Who Did Not Accomplish Outcomes

Ten customers reported that their interactions with JAN or EARN did not help them to accomplish their desired outcomes. This perceived shortfall, however, was largely a result of misplaced expectations and employer pushback.

### JAN Customers

Five of JAN's customers, all people with disabilities, explained that they required legal assistance or help advocating for an accommodation request, but JAN did not provide such services. Three other JAN customers indicated that they received the information they needed, but did not achieve their desired outcomes because their employers ultimately denied their requests for accommodations. Moreover, an additional JAN customer could not resolve his problems because the information or guidance JAN provided was not specific enough to provide a clear path forward.

### EARN Customers

Only one EARN customer interviewed stated that he did not receive sufficient information to resolve the issue he contacted EARN about. In this case, the customer had received information from EARN that was difficult for the customer to understand. The customer explained: *"I felt that the information was a little over my head."* This customer suggested that the information provided in the webinar was too technical for his understanding.

## 4.4 Extent of Variation in the Quality, Relevance, and Usefulness of TA Services

### 4.4.1 Most Valued Service

Forty customers discussed the services they valued the most, either for the quality or relevance of those services. Their responses closely mirrored the data they provided on use: individualized TA consultation services and the Centers' websites were most valued (see Tables 4-6 and 4-7).[11]

Table 4-6.　　Most valued service, by customer type

| Customer type | Most valued service | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Individualized TA | Website | Webinar | Total |
| Person with a disability | 9 | 1 | 0 | 10 |
| Employer | 14 | 8 | 1 | 23 |
| Relative or friend | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Service provider | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Total | 26 | 11 | 3 | 40 |

Source: Westat qualitative interview with customers.

Table 4-7.　　Most valued service, by customer history

| Customer Type | Most Valued Service | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Individualized TA | Web site | Webinar | Total |
| First-Time User | 9 | 2 | 0 | 11 |
| Repeat User | 17 | 9 | 3 | 29 |
| Total | 26 | 11 | 3 | 40 |

Source: Westat qualitative interview with customers.

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[11] One EARN customer indicated that they most valued the individual consultation service, even though the Center moved away from providing that service in the last 2 years. The results presented here pertain predominantly to JAN's services.

## JAN Customers

When asked what they valued about the individualized TA consultations, JAN customers pointed to the following three features:

1. The opportunity to confidentially discuss a specific disability/accommodation situation with a trusted expert;

2. Receiving multiple options to solve a problem; and

3. Receiving support and validation.

JAN customers reported that they often felt uncertain about where to start looking for guidance on specific disabilities and accommodations, and being able to directly contact an expert saved them time and guesswork. One JAN customer was quick to point out the value placed on the Center's longstanding expertise: *"I know JAN has been around for a long time. I think that's part of it too – they've earned my trust."* Other JAN customers echoed that sentiment, comparing the Center's ability to quickly provide trusted guidance and potential solutions to their experiences contacting other organizations with disability questions, where the organization transferred them from one staff person to another without ever having their questions fully resolved. Finally, two JAN customers emphasized the value they placed on the opportunity to speak confidentially with the Center. One explained, *"There's no fear in reaching out to make sure that we're being compliant. It doesn't put us on a radar somewhere, you know."*

> "….You can only go so far dealing with just getting information off the website. You do need a specialist who can point you to more nuanced information that's very specific to your situation. So I tend to value people more than just going to a website."
> - Employer, JAN customer

Although most customers expected a single solution to solve a problem, four interviewed customers said they appreciated that the individual consultations provided them with multiple avenues to pursue. *"She was receptive of what I needed and then she provided the different resources and I decided which one would be best for my situation. I was very appreciative for that,"* commented one employer customer of JAN. Customers also indicated that JAN staff emailed them links to additional resources from which they could learn more about the possible accommodations for a disability, and what was tried in the past. Although staff sensed that most customers wanted a single answer or solution to a problem, the few

customers interviewed expressed appreciation for having received information on their options to help them make informed decisions moving forward.

Another feature of the individual TA consultations valued by customers was the support and validation they received from the Center. Two persons with a disability called their consultations with JAN "empowering," and said it helped to receive information that they could take back to their employers to self-advocate for an accommodation. Employers spoke about the value of being able to use the Centers as a sounding board to verify that their policies complied with current laws and industry norms. One employer added, *"Most of these situations are pretty complex, they're not as cut and dry. So I think being able to talk to another person to say, 'Hey we've got this but there's complications because this is also an issue or that's also an issue,' so for me talking to a person to be able to really describe the situation is helpful for me."*

The nine JAN customers who said they most valued the information provided via the Centers' websites indicated that they appreciated both the breadth of information and the practical templates and examples provided. Employers, in particular, appreciated the websites. One employer customer of JAN mentioned the usefulness of the "A to Z of Disabilities and Accommodations" page,[12] *"because we have employees that do present with things that we've not heard of before, and so we can go and pull up something and we can be instantly educated about what it is."* Employers also used the website to search for potential accommodations that they could provide to employees with varying disabilities and needs. Finally, both people with disabilities and employers said that they appreciated the sample forms and templates provided on the websites to help individuals disclose a disability to an employer and request an accommodation, and to help employers respond to such a request.

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[12] https://askjan.org/a-to-z.cfm

**EARN Customers**

Three of the EARN customers interviewed—two service providers and one employer—named the webinars as their most valued service. They appreciated having the webinars as a means to stay abreast of the latest disability policies, and to ensure that their internal company policies matched what other employers were doing. And one EARN customers stated EARN's website was the most valuable service because of the wide range of topics covered by the information available.

## 4.4.2    Timeliness of Services

**JAN Customers**

JAN customers also shared their thoughts on the timeliness of the individual TA they received, and how well the staff expertise matched their needs. Overall, JAN customers expressed satisfaction with the timeliness of assistance received. Among the 73 customers who utilized individual TA consultation services during their most recent interaction with JAN, exactly half of them received immediate assistance (see Figure 4-2); nearly one-quarter of the customers received assistance within 24 hours.

> "As a government contractor, we do…a lot of our business on military bases. Shockingly, we were getting pushback from our government customer about one of our people with disabilities utilizing a service animal. EARN helped me. Literally, I think I took verbatim some of the language and cut and pasted it into an email saying, 'Look, these are the regs. This is what we have to do to comply as an employer.' It helped. The customer didn't push back after that."
> - Employer, EARN Customer

Figure 4-2.    Timeliness of assistance received during individual TA consultations with JAN



Pie chart legend:
- Immediate, no wait (37)
- Less than 24 hours (17)
- 1-2 days (4)
- 3+ days (3)
- Unknown (13)*

Chart values: 13, 3, 4, 37, 17
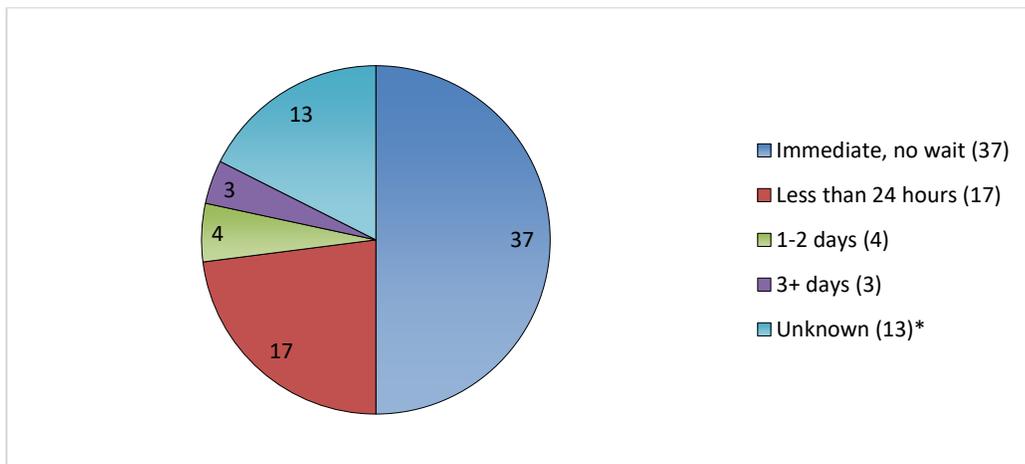
\* Customers could not recall how long they waited before receiving a response.

The response times varied slightly by the mode of communication. For example, all customers who reached out to JAN via online chat received immediate assistance, and those who called the Center received assistance either immediately or within 24 hours. The seven customers who reported waiting one day or more for a response had reached out either completely or in part by email (i.e., they contacted a Center by more than one mode of communication). Two customers felt frustrated by the wait times, but one suspected that being located in the Pacific Time Zone may have contributed to the challenge they faced in reaching Center staff in the Eastern Time Zone.

### EARN Customers

All but three of the EARN customers interviewed attended webinars and did not contact EARN directly for services. There were three customers, however, who did contact EARN by telephone. All three of these customers were very satisfied with the timeliness of EARN's response. One customer explained, *"The first time we reached out to them I was surprised, we even got a contact back and especially so quickly. Very refreshing actually."*

## 4.4.3    Perception of Staff Expertise

### JAN Customers

All JAN customers reported that the staff person who provided them with individual TA had sufficient expertise to provide targeted feedback and guidance. Customers noted that, unlike their experiences with other call centers, JAN staff did not transfer them repeatedly from one person to another, but directed them quickly to a specific person who could help them. One customer, who worked at a local service provider, particularly appreciated that JAN had specialists that could speak to particular types of disabilities and accommodations:

> *I enjoy the fact that JAN has specialists that are within a subgroup. It's not necessarily generalists. It'll be those specialists that have a deep wealth of knowledge and information about a particular type of disability, such as neurocognitive or disabilities that maybe are physical in nature. The way that JAN has those subject matter experts within this category is, I think, very helpful, because I know that the person that I'm talking to has a good grasp of the limitations and restrictions that may be associated with that particular condition more than standard generalists would have.*

Customers commented repeatedly on the nuances involved in navigating disabilities and accommodations, and the difficulty of determining a path forward. For that reason, customers valued having JAN staff as expert resources to provide the more specific guidance and information needed to resolve their questions.

### EARN Customers

EARN customers that were interviewed were predominantly webinar attendees, so their interaction with EARN staff was very limited. However, there were four EARN interviewees who commented on the expertise of EARN's staff. These customers were pleased with the staff and found them to be well matched to their needs. One EARN customer explained:

> *I think that what I find most helpful is that I believe that they are all well versed in their general areas of expertise. And if they don't have the information, they will put you on hold I'm going to go grab Brett and have him come over and answer this question because I think he has more experience in this area and might be more helpful. But they don't transfer... My experience has been they don't transfer me to another individual. They bring another individual into the conversation. So it gives them the opportunity to hear what's being shared and to learn from that as well.*

Another EARN customer was pleased with how quickly EARN staff was able to comprehend and address the issue: *"I was really happy with how well they understood what I was looking for, and be able to give me practical resources."*

## 4.4.4    Customer Perceptions of the User-friendliness of Online Services

The survey asked 44 customers (those customers who reported having used online services) about the user-friendliness of the TA Centers' online services, and 36 of those (81.8 percent) found the websites and/or webinars easy to access and navigate. Those who found the online services user-friendly said they especially liked the following aspects:

- The search tools;

- The "For Employers" and "For Individuals" pages on JAN's website, which recognized that customers' needs may differ by their role; and

- The information written in layman's terms.

Despite the positive feedback, JAN and EARN customers expressed that they would have liked to see changes to make the online resources even easier to access and navigate.

### JAN Customer Suggestions for Improvement

One person with a disability requested that where the website referred to the exact language of a law or regulation that it also would provide a "dummy version" that summarized the law in simple language. An employer felt that JAN could have made its "A to Z of Disabilities and Accommodations" page[13] more intuitive: *"I was looking for the limitation of mobility and it's not under 'M,' but then I find it's actually under 'U,' use of mobility aids. So I think things like that could be cleaned up where I'm not going to intuitively look at the U's so then I have to scan every single limitation."*

Two customers (one employer and one person with a disability) did not think the online services were user-friendly. The individual was a first-time visitor to JAN's website who struggled to find the information needed on service animals in the workplace. The customer was ultimately successful in finding information on that topic, but ended up calling JAN for assistance because the online information was not specific enough to the situation faced. The employer was a repeat visitor to JAN's website who valued the breadth of resources available, but said, "You have to know what you're looking for" to successfully sift through the information. These customers said they suspected that the novice or first-time visitors could be overwhelmed by the volume of information.

### EARN Customer Suggestions for Improvement

A small number of EARN customers commented on EARN's website. Three of these customers hoped that EARN would have created a video archive of past webinars and made it available on the website (this is a service that EARN provided, but the customer did not realize it). Three EARN customers wanted EARN to highlight any new information that was being posted on the website, making it immediately obvious where the new information was located. Both of these suggestions are discussed in more detail in Section 5.5.2.

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[13] https://askjan.org/a-to-z.cfm

# 5. Adoption and/or Implementation of ODEP's Policies and Practices

## 5.1 Customer Perceptions That Services Led to Adoption of ODEP Policies or Practices

Interviewed customers were asked whether the information provided by the TA Centers resulted in any changes at their organizations and, more specifically, whether those changes resulted in new policies or procedures related to disability employment. Fifty-four interviewed customers[14] indicated whether or not they made a change in policy or procedure. Among those 54, 40 were from JAN and 14 were from EARN. Nineteen interviewed customers (12 at JAN and 7 at EARN) said they changed a policy or procedure as a result of their interaction with the Center. Of the 19 customers who reported having made changes at their organization, 8 reported having made organizational-level changes and 11 reported having made individual-level changes (not shown in the table).

Table 5-1. Number and percent of interviewed customers indicating a change in policy and procedure, by center

| Changed Policy or Procedure | JAN | EARN | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 12 | 7 | 19 |
| No | 28 | 7 | 35 |
| Total | 40 | 14 | 54 |

Source: Westat qualitative interview with customers.

### 5.1.1 JAN Customers who Reported Changes

Six JAN customers reported that JAN services led to organizational-level changes to policy and procedure. Among those JAN customers that made organizational-level changes, four received individualized TA services in their most recent interaction with the Center, and two received individualized TA in addition to perusing the website for information.

> "We built our whole reasonable accommodation program around the resources they have on their website."
>
> - Employer, JAN customer

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[14] This question was asked of employers and service providers.

Customers made various organizational changes to how they worked with existing employees as well as prospective hires. One employer spoke about refining its organization's accommodation request protocols:

> *Well, before I started here, there was already a packet that HR used to have those reasonable accommodation conversations. Part of the packet was confusing to me, just the way that it was structured, and the questions that we were and weren't supposed to ask. So by having this correspondence with JAN, I was able to then go into that packet and move questions around, change some of the questions, add new questions to facilitate a conversation that is helpful to the employee, but also compliant with ADA and all the regulations surrounding requests for reasonable accommodations.*

Other kinds of organizational changes that employers made following their interactions with JAN included the following:

- Creating a "resource group for people with disabilities";

- Developing new procedural guideline on how to interview job candidates that disclose a disability, and how to determine what assistance the company could provide to help the candidate be successful in the position, if hired; and

- Writing the employment accommodation policy for the organization using the Center's guidance and reference materials.

In addition to these six customers, another six JAN customers reported having changed their organization's policies or procedures at the individual level. These changes were often made by the person who directly contacted the Center, who then disseminated their thoughts or learnings with others at the organization. All of the JAN customers who made individual-level changes at their organizations had contacted JAN for assistance with a specific situation related to providing accommodation for an employee (e.g., mobility accommodations for an employee who could not climb stairs and had a second-floor office; accommodation for a telework employee who required specific furniture). Similar to the JAN customers who made organizational level changes, these respondents had used the individualized TA services alone or in combination with the resources posted on the Center's website. Customers felt that their interactions with JAN gave them new information about accommodations, which, in turn, empowered them to use their knowledge and influence their organizations practices on a larger scale. "*I think it maybe influences or changes our approach on individual situations, but I would say that it is influencing overall practices or policies within the organization,*" said one customer.

## 5.1.2    EARN Customers Who Reported Changes

Two customers reported that EARN services led to organizational-level changes. Between the two EARN customers, one attended a webinar and the other utilized the Center's website in their most recent interaction with EARN. As one of these EARN customers explained, "*Changes to processes across the board have been made to again, make sure that we're advertising in the right places, that we're having folks self-identify at the applicant stage, and then also those that are hired, you know, self-identifying. And also being able to document the places that we have done active outreach to try to recruit from that specific population.*"

Five EARN customers reported that EARN services has led them to make individual-level changes to policy and procedure at their organizations. For example, one employer customer described using EARN's resources to create informal written guidance (i.e., not adopted as formal policy by the organization) for his staff managers on how to respond to employees' requests for accommodations. Another employer customer worked with EARN to improve their own hiring efforts of persons with disabilities, and began posting job openings in locations where those candidates, specifically, would be more likely to see it. As with the EARN customers who made organizational-level changes, these customers made changes following a webinar or a search of the resources posted on EARN's website.

## 5.2    Factors That Influence Whether Customers Make Changes

The 19 customers who reported that they made either organizational or individual-level changes following their interactions with the TA Centers had no feedback on what, specifically, about the services they received facilitated their adoption of changes. However, in reviewing the characteristics of the customers who made changes, we found that the vast majority of the customers (18 of 19) were repeat customers. Furthermore, all 12 of the JAN customers who reported making changes had used the individualized TA services in their most recent interaction with the Center. A little more than half of those JAN customers (7 of 12) also used the website.

## 5.3    Promising Practices in TA That Led to Adoption or Implementation of a Policy or Practice

We cannot speak directly about promising practices that led to adoption or implementation because the interviews did not identify examples of adoption or implementation of ODEP policies and

practices tied directly to specific TA Center practices. Based on the 19 customers noted above who made organizational or individual-level changes following receipt of Center services, we know that customers relied extensively on the resource materials provided on the Centers' website, such as information about the law and employer responsibilities and information about reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. JAN employer customers said they relied on the individualized services and website resources to guide them in making decisions about accommodations at the individual level, and they also attempted to implement an organizational policy or practice.

## 5.4 How ODEP Could Track the Adoption of Its Policies and Practices

According to the Center staff interviewed, the differences between EARN and JAN with regard to how services were delivered, and to whom, made it difficult to conceive of how ODEP might streamline data collection across Centers. The staff considered whether ODEP might create a uniform tracking method for customer interactions and outcomes across Centers but could not recommend a strategy to do so. Staff seem satisfied with the internal tracking systems currently in place at each Center but were willing to make changes if ODEP desired additional information or more uniform measures across the Centers. One staff person also reported that the data the Centers already provided to ODEP could be better utilized, particularly on web and social media activity, because they suspected "there's a lot of data in there that [they] are not mining completely."

Some Center staff also suggested shifting the focus of the current data tracking systems to focus more on tracking interactions and outcomes with employers, specifically. These staff said that specific employer customers were less likely to be in a position of authority to implement changes in employers' policies. Thus, by focusing more resources on tracking interactions and outcomes among employers, the Centers could collect information that is more valuable on planned or attempted policy changes. Staff also requested a clearer definition of what constitutes a "policy change" from ODEP's perspective. As one staff explained, there is no standard definition to guide staff in tracking that outcome across Centers or to clarify to employers completing surveys what kind of organizational changes count as "policy change": *"Because some employers hear policies, [and ask] 'Are you talking about our dress code? Are you talking about our leave policy? What are you talking about?'"*

When asked about the possibility of ODEP creating its own customer surveys, staff did not think that would yield a strong response because customers would not be likely to recognize the office and would ignore the request. However, staff expressed willingness to revise the surveys they already field to better serve ODEP's needs.

## Tracking Customer Interactions and Outcomes

JAN and EARN used a variety of tools, including databases, questionnaires, and informal conversations, to track customer interactions and outcomes. As previously mentioned, EARN's work moved away from one-on-one interactions with customers and instead focused on creating generalized resources and hosting webinars. In contrast, JAN heavily concentrated its efforts on providing individualized technical assistance to clients through calls, emails, and live chats.

### How the TA Centers Track Customer Interactions

**JAN.** JAN used its JAN Electronic Management System (JEMS) to collect data on all interactions with customers. When a customer contacted JAN, staff recorded the customer's name, occupation and employer, contact information, and disability/impairment. They also briefly summarized the reason for the contact, including any suggested solutions. Each customer had a file in JEMS that contained all of that customers' contacts over time, making it easy for JAN staff to look up a customer and see the notes from any earlier communications. Customers also had the option to contact JAN anonymously, if desired. Overall, JAN staff described the database as comprehensive, well-integrated into their daily activities, and able to accommodate the high volume of requests the Center received. In addition to tracking customer interactions, JAN tracked website visits and social media activity.

**EARN.** EARN tracked traffic on their website and social media accounts. EARN no longer retained a centralized system for tracking incoming calls and ongoing conversations with customers due to its shift away from providing individualized TA services directly to employers. To manage the few requests received, EARN staff used an informal tracking tool in Microsoft Excel to record those requests. Regarding EARN's Inclusion@Work Network, GWU (EARN's evaluator) conducted annual follow-up discussions with Network members to better understand the employer engagement approach and to identify promising models and practices. GWU concluded that the

Network was meeting its performance goals, noting that in year 5 of the grant, events were highly successful in adding to employer knowledge and willingness to engage in actions to support the recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion of people with disabilities.

## How TA Centers Track Outcomes

**JAN.** JAN tracked customer outcomes using a survey. As JAN's evaluator, WVU's School of Social Work conducted a monthly customer satisfaction survey on JAN's behalf that focused on four types of customers: employers, people with disabilities, professionals, and self-employed. The surveys covered several categories of questions, as indicated in Table 5-2, including some questions on customer outcomes. For example, the survey asked "was an accommodation made?" and "was the information used to argue for or make a policy change?"

Table 5-2.       Categories of survey questions, by type of JAN customer

| Category | Type of Customer | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Employer | Professional | Person with a Disability | Self-Employed |
| Contact reason | X | X | X | X |
| Information/demographics | X | X | X | |
| Accommodation decisions | X | X | X | |
| Accommodation solutions | X | X | X | |
| Effectiveness (of the accommodation) | X | X | X | |
| Costs | X | X | X | |
| Direct benefits | X | | | |
| Indirect benefits | X | | | |
| Legislative outcomes | X | X | X | |
| Website | X | X | X | X |
| General satisfaction | X | X | X | X |
| Self-employment expectations | | | | X |
| Self-employment status and resources | | | | X |

Source: JAN Customer satisfaction surveys.

Table 5-3 provides survey results for a few outcome measures. For some measures, a 5-point rating scale was used (5 = exceptionally well and 1 = not at all) and for others the percentage of respondents was used. Unfortunately, the reporting of aggregations over time, starting from July 2008, makes it unclear to readers of the reports what is the contribution from the past year. It would be more informative to report just the numbers of those that completed the survey in one year, like that shown in the final column.[15]

Table 5-3.     Survey results for select JAN employer survey items

| Outcome | July 2008 – September 2016 | July 2008 – August 2017 | July 2008 – August 2018 | September 2018 – August 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Information provided met needs | 4.70 | 4.75 | 4.70 | 4.69 |
| Would use service again | 99.7% | 99.8% | 99.8% | 98.9% |
| Likely to refer others to JAN | 4.94 | 4.94 | 4.94 | 95.6% |
| Legislative information helped them to understand laws | 88.7% | 88.9% | 88.8% | 88.3% |
| Legislative information was used to change policy | 26.8% | 26.6% | 26.3% | 22.4% |
| Number of completed surveys | 1,206 | 1,234 | 1,251 | 521 |

Source: JAN Customer satisfaction surveys.

In summary, the categories of items listed in Table 5-2 can provide useful information to understand JAN's customers and their needs. JAN staff described a "continuous-improvement loop" whereby JAN used the survey data to implement changes related to the topics covered and methods of service delivery. The challenge for JAN has been that few customers (28 and 17, respectively, in 2017 and 2018) responded to the survey.[16] Beginning in 2019, the WVU School of Social Work switched to email contacts and a web survey to increase the number of respondents. This dramatically increased the number of respondents in a given year, but no more than 20 percent of contacts completed any of the four surveys. The low rate of completion could have limited their

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[15] However, JAN leadership receives the monthly results of survey data so it can respond to customers that express any dissatisfaction.

[16] It appears that only 28 new responses emerged between September 2016 and August 2017 and 17 between August 2017 and August 2018. However, by aggregating results since July 2008, the results for the latest year are not apparent.

ability to determine the full breadth of customers' needs and characteristics or the outcomes of their interactions with JAN.

**EARN.** EARN staff informally tracked their relationships with specific customers over time. By tracking the interactions over time and retaining a history of customer relationships, EARN staff also heard about outcomes when customers volunteered the information. As one staff person said, the informal nature of tracking customer outcomes meant that the data are "not as easy to quantify." The anecdotal data received on customer interactions (and data on outcomes for webinar attendees) were included in reports EARN submitted to ODEP.

EARN also tracked outcomes among clients who utilized the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP), a resource that connected Federal agencies with qualified job candidates. Staff talked about how they tracked WRP job candidates from the moment they create a profile through the outcome of their job search process:

> *For example, we were recruiting college students through WRP to a new opportunity that could help them find private jobs. So we were tracking through the database…how many people logged in? How many people created their profile? How many jobs were they browsing? Did they actually go to the website and apply for the jobs? Then we were following up with those folks to see, "Hey, did you get a response? Did you get an interview? Did you get hired?"*

EARN tracked outcomes for webinar attendees through GWU, using questionnaires. The questionnaires asked participants to rate six factors on a 4-point scale where 4 is excellent, 3 is good, 2 is satisfactory, and 1 is unsatisfactory. Table 5-4 presents the six factors and the range of the ratings across the most recent 10 webinars that occurred between 2017 and 2019. Overall satisfaction ranged between 2.96 and 3.44 on the 4-point scale.

Table 5-4.　　Range of EARN customer satisfaction on six satisfaction factors

| Customer satisfaction factors | Range of satisfaction ratings |
|---|---|
| Quality of the information received | 3.09 – 3.60 |
| Relevance of the information to your work | 3.20 – 3.68 |
| Opportunity for questions/interactions | 2.87 – 3.43 |
| Webinar materials | 2.95 – 3.44 |
| Accessibility of webinar format/features | 3.09 – 3.54 |
| Overall satisfaction | 2.96 – 3.44 |

Source: GWU Webinar Reports

In addition, GWU administered a knowledge self-assessment at the start and end of a webinar. Later, it generated webinar reports with the results of the questionnaires and the pre/post assessments, and provided count information on webinar registrants and participants, number of surveys, and return rate on customer satisfaction questionnaires.

EARN leadership sent a follow-up email to webinar attendees that volunteered for a telephone interview with GWU. The email listed the following three questions for the telephone interview discussion:

1. Have you used the information or do you anticipate using the information from the presentation?

2. How have you used the information, or how do you anticipate using the information from the presentation?

3. Do you have other suggestions for increasing the effectiveness and potential impact of EARN's webinars?

GWU also used a survey form for evaluation of each training event that included: (1) the ranking of satisfaction on six aspects of the training (similar to Table 5-4), (2) the rating of improvement in knowledge, (3) the rating of providing additional clarity, (4) likelihood of recommending the training to a colleague, (5) main "take aways," (6) topics to cover in future training events, and (7) additional comments.

In Year 2 of their grant, EARN and GWU started a partner self-study process. EARN and its partners completed a self-study questionnaire, and then participated in a follow-up interview with GWU. GWU also reviewed partners' monthly reports before conducting the interviews. GWU asked partners for their reflections on the EARN collaborative and their individual contributions and relationships.

## 5.5 Recommendations for Improving the Process and Methods of Service Delivery

The survey asked all interview respondents for suggestions on how EARN or JAN could improve services, and 54 of the 89 customers provided suggestions for improvement.

## 5.5.1　Suggestions from JAN customers

Forty-four JAN customers provided suggestions for improvement. Customers' suggestions largely fell into three categories:

1.　Content and navigability of JAN's resources;

2.　Providing guidance on how employers should respond to employees and job applicants following the disclosure of a disability; and

3.　Conducting more marketing and outreach.

Five people with disabilities suggested that JAN revise the website to make it easier for customers to locate the information they seek. One customer described a time when she had called JAN for information that was available on the website, but which she had not been able to locate on her own. Other customers explained that they did not know what to look for on the website, because they were unfamiliar with the terminology used by professionals in the disability field. Similarly, one customer explained JAN should translate the "legalese" of disability policies into layman's terms. Jargon-free materials may be especially helpful for people with disabilities and their families trying to understand accommodations for an emerging medical issue, as opposed to employers or other entities that work with disability policies on a regular basis.

Five customers stated that the information JAN provided online was not specific enough to their needs and required tailoring. As one person with a disability explained:

> I just think it would be nice if there was someone to just kind of speak with and say hey look, when you're on the job, you fall under the Americans with Disabilities Act, these are the things you qualify for, this accommodation, that accommodation, based on what your disability is. If they were able to just go into a little bit more detail…there are a lot of disabilities and accommodations vary. It would be nice if they could have zeroed in on it and say, "Okay, what is your disability?"

This customer's comment may support the perception among JAN staff that some customers feel frustration when there is no single, specific solution to a problem, but rather multiple options that a customer could pursue.

Five employer customers wanted more information from JAN on how to work with current employees and job applicants with disabilities. One employer thought it would help to have written guidance on how to respond when an employee discloses a disability:

> *But as far as when an employee notifies you [about a disability] … what questions are you allowed to ask? Something like that I think would be great. You know, giving us some general guidelines on the do's and don'ts of how you talk to someone about their medical conditions. Because you know a lot of employees won't even bring it up in fear that they're going to lose their job. But then, somehow or another they may talk to another coworker as a friend, and somehow or another it gets back to usually somebody in HR, and how does HR handle it?*

Other employers wanted information on how to develop job descriptions and job postings, and how to navigate the hiring process when an applicant discloses a disability.

Seven JAN customers felt the Center could do more outreach and that the people who could benefit from JAN's services do not always know it exists. As one employer customer stated, "*I would think the only thing I could say about the program is that they need more visibility because when I mention it to other people, they don't know about it.*" Additionally, one person with a disability said she wanted to see JAN encourage its employer customers to make employees aware of JAN's services: "*Maybe just try to make it so more employers are aware of JAN and are telling their people with disabilities about it. Like in my case, I wish I had known about it before I actually stepped down, before I quit work.*"

Finally, 12 customers, all persons with disabilities, expressed frustration with JAN's inability to enforce the ADA or provide legal advice. One person with a disability said, "*I guess I hoped somebody would say, 'Oh, well, we can have a representative call them and tell them…explain to them why it might be a good idea to consider giving accommodation to a qualified, disabled worker.'*" It is important to note that these customers' expectations were inconsistent with JAN's authority; thus, their suggestions do not fall within the scope of JAN's work.

## 5.5.2    Suggestions From EARN Customers

Ten customers suggested ways to improve EARN's services. Four of the customers' suggestions focused on EARN's website. For example, three customers suggested that the website should highlight new information and resources to be more visible so that they do not have to scroll or check the resources page for updates to earlier information. Echoing that sentiment, another customer said EARN should highlight new regulatory changes or laws that relate to disability employment.

Several of the suggestions from customers pertained specifically to the webinars. Two customers wanted EARN to offer webinars more frequently, and another two customers wanted a wider range of topics. Three customers requested that EARN post videos of webinar recordings on the website so they are accessible later to those who could not attend at the scheduled time. It is worth noting that a review of askearn.org confirms that EARN provided an archive of recordings of webinars. Some customers also remarked that EARN should have used titles for webinar that are clear, because the titles did not always clearly convey what would be discussed. To provide clarity upfront, those customers wanted more materials or information on the webinars beforehand so they could determine whether the material would be relevant and useful to them. Two customers experienced technical difficulties with accessing the webinars and suggested that EARN provide a technical support person during the webinars. It is worth noting that several of these suggestions were made by customers who wondered if EARN was already doing these things and the customers just did not know about it.

Finally, three customers thought that EARN could do more outreach to make employers aware of its resources and services. As one customer stated, "*People aren't necessarily aware of EARN or its resources. So I think finding ways to be a little higher profile would probably be useful.*" Additionally, two customers thought it would be helpful to the disability community at-large to have the five TA Centers collaborate and leverage each other's resources to serve the disability and employment field. One of those customers suggested having "*a facilitated meeting of all the different groups that are funded, where they go around the table and talk about what they're doing.*"

## 5.6     Internal Performance Measures ODEP Could Implement

In this section we consider what additional internal measures ODEP could implement to track the efficiency, effectiveness, or utility of assistance provided by the Centers. To do so, it is important to first determine what measures are already in place.

ODEP required JAN and EARN to submit quarterly progress reports following a uniform template and to include tables and appendices as necessary. In these quarterly progress reports, the Centers reported making progress toward achieving their goals. The quarterly reports were comprehensive in covering Centers activities/services and some outputs.

The JAN quarterly progress report covered the following:

- **Individualized technical assistance –** how many inquiries were received; what was the average response time; what was the number of inquiries by customer type; and the top inquiries by broad subject;

- **Electronic information services –** brief website activity report covering top searched keywords, website visit trends by month, most popular pages within the website, and JAN's social media presence;

- **Development of technical assistance, training, education, and outreach documents and materials –** topics and types of materials developed and the target audience;

- **Training services –** list of top subjects requested, number of trainings provided, and number of training recipients;

- **Strategic outreach and communications –** description of outreach and communication mechanisms used, assessment of most successful mechanism, and, if observable, most successful for difference audiences;

- **Collaborative relationships –** complete a table of information on new collaborative relations developed during the quarter, with comments on difficulties encountered; and

- **Program evaluation –** brief descriptions of program evaluation activities during the reporting period.

The EARN quarterly progress report[17] was more of a narrative description of the activities completed or scheduled by EARN, by focus area, and the tasks within each focus area:

- Employer-focused research – initiate and conduct research in support of an employer-focused research topic;

- Partner engagement – collaborate with national, state, and regional business association networks through the I@W Network, Excellence in Disability Inclusion (EDI) Award Winners, Circle members, Federal partners and other ODEP-funded initiatives to create engaging and actionable resources grounded in the business environment across the resource levels defined in the introduction;

- Compliance, Technical Assistance, and Training – develop employer resource research topics; host EARN webinars; present at national conferences; update and enhance existing askearn.org content;

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[17] This is based on the new EARN grantee's quarterly report (Cornell University).

- Website and dissemination activities – maintain and improve askearn.org; targeted outreach efforts; WRP success stories;

- Overall evaluation – ongoing project evaluation; evaluation and progress reports;

- Administrative and reporting – monthly statistics and metrics report; quarterly performance measures report; quarterly financial reports; annual project activities report; construct tracking system; and

- Challenges encountered and remedial actions taken.

In addition to the quarterly reports, JAN and EARN submitted monthly metric reports to provide ODEP with further information on Center outputs. Centers collected and submitted information such as number of hits on a website, average time spent on a website, most visited web pages, traffic on the Center's social media accounts, number of phone calls received, and number of trainings requested.

The outcomes of Center activities were difficult to identify and measure. However, the Centers had partners that collected customer feedback, including customer satisfaction and, to some extent, indications of how the customers used the services. Examples of this included an employer making an accommodation or changing company policy related to disability employment, or an individual securing an accommodation that allowed continued employment. The Centers provided a few highlights from these evaluations in the quarterly reports, but more information could be extracted from those evaluations if ODEP asked the Centers to provide more details.

Data on the success of the Centers in leading customers to adopt or implement ODEP policies or practices would be most impactful to ODEP for assessing its investments in the TA Centers. ODEP should consider requiring Centers to identify specific promising practices for motivating customers to adopt or implement ODEP policies or practices. ODEP would need to clarify its definition of "promising" and the standards by which the Center could identify a practice as leading to adoption or implementation of policies or practices.

In addition, ODEP could consider requiring the Centers to follow up with employer customers to determine whether the employer's organization adopted or implemented policies or practices as a result of the services received. Because of the potential burden this might cause, we recommend that ODEP conduct a small pilot study first.

# 6.    Summary of Findings

ODEP established TA Centers to serve a diverse set of purposes, functions, and customers. Operating with ODEP grants, the Centers assist employers, Federal agencies, state governments, non-profit organizations, people with disabilities, and others with technical assistance and policy development for the integration of people with disabilities into employment. The purpose of this study was to examine customer satisfaction with its Technical Assistance Center Program by determining the extent to which ODEP's TA Centers met customer needs, as well as to examine the reach and satisfaction with services provided. This chapter presents a summary and discussion of the findings, organized by the three research questions. But first, we discuss several limitations of the study:

Because this was a descriptive study, we could not make causal inferences. Also, without the original two surveys, and because of the small number of respondents, we could not identify factors that would lead to adoption or implementation of ODEP policies. Further, Westat did not have control of sampling of the customers. Rather, interested customers were asked by the Centers to contact Westat if they were willing to participate in an interview. A total of 89 customers self-selected to participate; they were not randomly selected. Thus, the findings are not generalizable to all customers of JAN and EARN, but reflect only the views and experiences of those who participated.

## 6.1    How the TA Centers Operate Within the Context of ODEP

The missions of the Centers differed in terms of target population and goals. JAN's mission was to provide services related to reasonable job accommodations. JAN targeted all customer types: employers, people with disabilities, workforce agencies, policymakers/advocacy groups, community-based organizations, post-secondary education providers, and rehabilitation professionals/direct service providers.

EARN's mission was specific: to increase the commitment and capacity of employers to recruit, hire, retain and advance individuals with disabilities. In contrast to JAN, EARN targeted employers and, to a lesser extent, rehabilitation professionals and direct service providers.

ODEP considered technical assistance to be specific advice, assistance, or training that builds the capacity of an organization, agency, or any other entity's ability to implement desired changes. The services provided by the Centers included six main categories:

1.   Individualized TA provided via in-person trainings or online chat, e-mail, and/or telephone;

2.   In-person presentations and workshops;

3.   Webinars and other online presentations;

4.   Online information dissemination (e.g., policy briefs, toolkits, newsletters);

5.   Networking, collaboration, partnership development/establishment; and

6.   Referrals to other local service providers and resources.

JAN and EARN had different approaches to service provision. JAN placed a strong emphasis on one-on-one consultations that require a high level of engagement and interaction. EARN emphasized providing assistance that was generalizable and therefore had a wider reach. As part of their work, both JAN and EARN produced written materials, gave presentations, hosted webinars, and presented the opportunity for customers, partners, and other stakeholders to network and collaborate.

## 6.2     Customer Perception of TA Provided by Centers

Customers contacted the TA Centers for different reasons. Specifically, employer customers sought guidance and assistance with different disability employment-related issues in order to stay current on the disability and accommodation landscape, meet continuing education requirements, and obtain resources or guidance on specific disabilities or accommodations. Service providers also requested guidance on employer/employee issues. People with a disability and/or their relatives/friends sought information on accommodation requests they had made or were considering making, or sought guidance on their rights.

Customers from both Centers were satisfied with the services received from the Centers. Specifically,

- Customers expressed satisfaction with the timeliness of assistance received and viewed the staff person who assisted them as having sufficient expertise;

- Customers valued the Centers' websites for the breadth of information and the practical templates and examples provided;

- Customers appreciated having webinars available as a means to stay abreast of the latest disability policies, and to ensure their own policies match what others are doing. Most said that the websites and/or webinars were easy to access and navigate; and

- Customers valued the individualized TA consultation because it provided the opportunity: (1) to confidentially discuss a specific disability/accommodation situation with a trusted expert; (2) for receiving multiple options to solve a problem; and (3) for receiving support and validation.

JAN and EARN staff said they successfully resolved most of the requests for assistance that they received. However, Center staff reported that there were two areas where they struggled to assist customers: when a customer wanted JAN/EARN staff to determine the best course of action for them; and when a customer raised an issue for which no current policy framework or resource exists.

Among the 89 customers interviewed, 67 responded to questions asking whether the services received from JAN or EARN helped them to achieve their desired outcomes. About 85 percent (57 customers) said the information received from the Centers helped them to solve their issue. Half of those customers were employers, and over half of them were repeat users of the TA Centers.

Ten customers reported that their interactions with JAN or EARN did not help them to accomplish their desired outcomes. Half of these customers, all people with disabilities, sought legal assistance or help advocating for an accommodation request, services not provided by the Centers. Three other customers indicated that their employers ultimately denied their requests for accommodations. Finally, two customers could not find a clear path forward because the information or guidance received was not specific enough to their issue.

Interviewed customers were asked how JAN and EARN could improve services. Suggestions for JAN included:

- Revise the website to make it easier to locate information; some of the technical language used on the website should be made easier to understand;

- Provide more information on how employers should work with current employees and job applicants, such as how to respond when an employee discloses a disability and how to develop job descriptions and job postings; and

- Conduct more marketing and outreach so more employers and employees are aware of resources and services.

Suggestions for improving EARN included:

- Highlight new information and resources more visibly on the website;

- Offer webinars more frequently and on a wider range of topics;

- Post videos of webinars on the website so they are accessible at a later date;

- Provide webinar titles that clearly convey the topic and provide materials before the webinar;

- Provide webinar technical support for those having difficulty connecting; and

- Provide more outreach to employers to make them aware of resources and services

## 6.3    Customer Perception That the TA Provided by the Centers Has Led to Adoption and/or Implementation of ODEP's Policies and Practices

There were 54 interviewed customers who indicated whether the information provided by the TA Centers resulted in any changes at their organizations and, more specifically, whether those changes resulted in new policies or procedures related to disability employment. Of those 54, 12 JAN customers and 7 EARN customers reported having made changes to their organization's policies or procedures. Among those 19 customers who reported changing their organization's policies and procedures, 18 were repeat customers.

Customer respondents spoke about a variety of changes made, ranging from changes at the organizational level to changes made at the individual level. Eight customers said that the services

led to organizational-level changes to policy and procedure and 11 customers described the changes as largely made at the individual level.

Employer customers made various organizational changes to how they work with existing employees as well as prospective hires. Examples of these changes include:

- Refining the organization's accommodation request protocols;

- Creating a "resource group for people with disabilities";

- Developing new procedural guidelines on how to interview job candidates that disclose a disability, and how to determine what assistance the company could provide to help the candidate be successful in the position, if hired; and

- Writing the employment accommodation policy for the organization using the Center's guidance and reference materials.

The individual-level changes were made by the person who directly contacted the Center, who then disseminated their thoughts or learnings with others at the organization. Examples of these changes include:

- Using EARN's resources to create informal written guidance for managers on how to respond to employees' requests for accommodations; and

- Posting job openings in locations where those job candidates with disabilities would be more likely to see them.

# Appendix A.
# Qualitative Data Processing and Analysis

At the pre-analytic stage of the study, the Westat qualitative researchers read the interview transcripts to orient themselves to interviewee ideas about, and practices pertaining to, the employment of people with disabilities. After reading through the transcripts, Westat constructed a preliminary coding framework based on the prominent themes. The coding scheme consisted of two sets of codes: (1) codes that reflected the key topics in the discussion protocol and (2) "thematic codes" that were developed inductively and reflected participant opinions and reactions to their experience with the TA Centers. The codes that reflected the key topics in the interview guide included:

- Type suggestions for improvement; and

- Customer experience with other TA Centers.

Thematic codes in the codebook were used to identify text that reflect positive attributes and facilitators; negative attributes and challenges; things that were the least or the most useful; things that were valuable; and things that were relevant.

Three Westat staff tested the coding scheme during two exercises. These three team members first met to review and discuss the preliminary coding scheme. Key to this discussion was understanding what each code represented and under what conditions it should be applied to the data. Team members independently coded two transcripts, then ran a coding comparison to test inter-coder reliability. The staff then reviewed all sections of text that were coded inconsistently and discussed why they either did or did not code the text, or why they used different codes. For example, some customers discussed instances of efficiency with regard to the Centers' services that were not examples of services being "well-matched" or "timely" (codes that already existed). Coders discussed whether these instances could fit under an existing code, but ultimately decided to create a new code, *"general efficiency."* The disjuncture in coding was critical to the analytic process and allowed team members to identify: (1) duplicative codes (referring to the same concept) that can be combined, (2) missing codes that need to be added (the existing coding structure does not have nodes for certain key concepts), and (3) codes that simply need to be more clearly defined. Once

team members reached general agreement about the coding structure, the team conducted the same exercise a second time with two new transcripts. After this second exercise, staff demonstrated sufficient inter-coder reliability that allowed all three staff to proceed with coding the remaining transcripts independently. As needed, the team met to address any questions or concerns and adjust the coding structure.

Part of the coding scheme included a classification sheet that was applied to each transcript to capture discrete data, such as the type of service utilized and whether someone is a first-time or repeat customer (there were 59 repeat customers; 47 from JAN and 12 from EARN). This classification sheet helped to streamline our subsequent analysis and reporting, and provided discrete subgroups for analysis. Westat created a codebook that listed the code names, definitions, and examples of applicable data. We treated the codebook and coding scheme as living documents, and continuously refined them as staff coded and analyzed data.

Upon completion of coding, Westat systematically queried the NVivo database and produced code reports to analyze the data germane to each research question and emerging theme. As part of that analysis, Westat explored themes by subgroups of respondents, such as customers of JAN versus EARN, or customers who utilized different services (e.g., webinars, one-on-one consultations). Those more detailed analyses helped to determine whether a theme holds true across all respondents or merely for a specific population. For each theme uncovered in the data, staff compiled both supporting and dissenting evidence, which served as another check to determine whether a theme holds true for all respondents or just for some.

- Type of Service or resource;
- Customer type;
- Reason for contacting the center;
- Customer outcomes; and
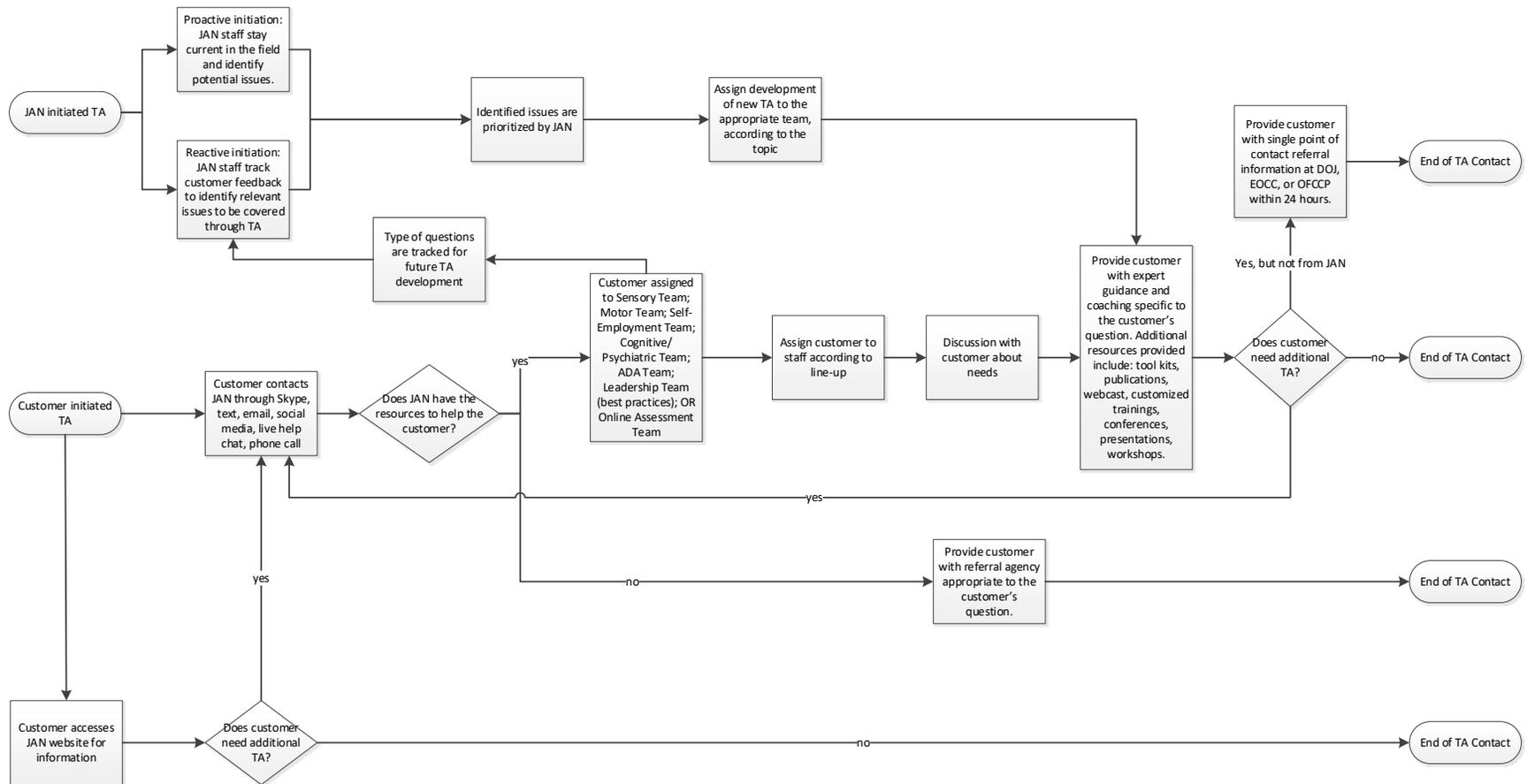- Customer reported changes to policies or procedure.

# Appendix B.
# Job Accommodations Network Process Map

A process map is a structural analysis of a process flow, created by producing a workflow diagram – in other words, it represents a picture of a process. Westat worked with the JAN staff and the corresponding ODEP leadership team to create a process map illustrating the steps taken for service delivery. The process map focuses on technical assistance and training provision and not policy analysis. In addition, for ease of presentation, we made the decision to leave out the internal customer satisfaction and evaluation feedback loop that Center had in place. We briefly discuss the following aspects of the process:

- Customer intake;

- Division of labor/assigning of staff;

- Determination of what services to provide;

- Delivery of services; and

- Follow-up with customers.

**Customer-Initiated Service Delivery.** A customer could access JAN's website for information and/or contact JAN through phone, email, text, social media, and live chat support. Frontline staff fielded these contacts and communicated with the customer to determine whether JAN could meet the customer's needs. If JAN could help, the frontline staff obtained information in order to assign that customer to one of seven teams: sensory team; motor team; self-employment team; cognitive/psychiatric team; ADA team; leadership team; or online assessment team.

**Center-Initiated Service Delivery.** JAN viewed Center-initiated service delivery as two distinct processes: proactive initiation, in which JAN staff stayed current in the field and identified potential issues; or reactive initiation, in which JAN staff tracked customer feedback to identify relevant issues to be covered through services. Either way, issues were identified and were prioritized by JAN. The priority issues were assigned to one of the JAN teams, according to the issue, and that team was tasked with developing new services.

**Figure B-1.    Process map: JAN**



Figure B-1. Process map: JAN

Westat

JAN initiated TA

Proactive initiation: JAN staff stay current in the field and identify potential issues.

Reactive initiation: JAN staff track customer feedback to identify relevant issues to be covered through TA

Identified issues are prioritized by JAN

Assign development of new TA to the appropriate team, according to the topic

Type of questions are tracked for future TA development

Customer assigned to Sensory Team; Motor Team; Self-Employment Team; Cognitive/Psychiatric Team; ADA Team; Leadership Team (best practices); OR Online Assessment Team

Assign customer to staff according to line-up

Discussion with customer about needs

Provide customer with expert guidance and coaching specific to the customer's question. Additional resources provided include: tool kits, publications, webcast, customized trainings, conferences, presentations, workshops.

Provide customer with single point of contact referral information at DOJ, EOCC, or OFCCP within 24 hours.

End of TA Contact

Does customer need additional TA?

Yes, but not from JAN

no

End of TA Contact

Customer initiated TA

Customer contacts JAN through Skype, text, email, social media, live help chat, phone call

Does JAN have the resources to help the customer?

yes

yes

no

Provide customer with referral agency appropriate to the customer's question.

End of TA Contact

Customer accesses JAN website for information

yes

Does customer need additional TA?

no

End of TA Contact

# Appendix C.
# Employer Assistance Resource Network Process Map

A process map is a structural analysis of a process flow, created by producing a workflow diagram – in other words, it represents a picture of a process. Westat worked with the EARN staff and the corresponding ODEP leadership team to create a process map illustrating the steps taken for service delivery. The process map focuses on technical assistance and training provision and not on policy analysis. In addition, for ease of presentation, we made the decision to leave out the internal customer satisfaction and evaluation feedback loop that Center had in place. We briefly discuss the following aspects of the process:

- Customer intake;

- Division of labor/assigning of staff;

- Determination of what services to provide;

- Delivery of services; and

- Follow-up with customers.

**Customer-Initiated Service Delivery.** At the time of data collection for the feasibility study, EARN customers could contact EARN directly for services. Since then, ODEP had EARN change its model to deemphasize the individualized TA approach and to create more resources to serve more employers, in general. So, EARN provided services to intermediaries, who then provided the services/information to employers. The process map for EARN contains data relevant to EARN's model during the feasibility study.

At the time of the feasibility study, a customer could reach out to EARN in one of two ways: via EARN's website (no direct contact) or by contacting EARN staff directly. When a customer accessed the website, the service provision was passive. The customer either collected the necessary information from the website and moved on, or was unable to find the information and then contacted EARN directly. A customer could directly contact EARN frontline staff, who could then determine whether the customer had a question or required training. If the customer had a question, staff determined whether the information needed to be customized or if existing information was

sufficient. If existing information was deemed insufficient, EARN staff would obtain approval from ODEP to customize existing materials to meet the specific need of the customers.

**Center-Initiated Service Delivery.** EARN completed field reconnaissance and literature reviews on an ongoing basis to collect information on the needs of its target community. Based on this information, EARN set priorities for technical assistance and training delivery.

# Figure C-1.    Process Map: EARN