Performing Outreach to Social Security Beneficiaries with Disabilities, Community Agencies, and Other Key Stakeholders

January 2018 (This resource document was taken directly from Unit 1 of Module 2 in the 2018 WIPA Training Manual)

The Importance of Outreach

Outreach activities introduce WIPA services to potential users including Social Security disability program beneficiaries and the agencies most likely to refer them. The outreach process is primarily a marketing or sales function. The outreach activities you perform are similar to what salespeople in the business world do. The objective of this specialized marketing effort is threefold:

1. Raise awareness of WIPA services within the disability community; educate beneficiaries and agency personnel about what WIPA services include and who they are intended to assist.
2. Promote employment of people with disabilities by educating beneficiaries and agency personnel on how earned income affects public benefits and how work incentives can help achieve employment goals.
3. Establish relationships with other agency personnel who support individuals with disabilities in their efforts to obtain and maintain paid employment. These disability professionals are helpful partners in your mission to increase employment outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Begin marketing WIPA services by finding ways to reach the targeted customer base — Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities who are interested in employment. You can reach eligible beneficiaries by contacting agencies that serve them, particularly agencies that provide vocational or employment services.

This unit includes marketing and sales methods for contacting these agencies. The main goal of
these marketing activities is to solicit appropriate referrals from partnering agencies in the local community. CWICs are responsible for informing and encouraging community agencies to refer eligible, high-priority individuals for WIPA services and to encourage beneficiaries to utilize work incentives planning services in their efforts to enter the workforce.

Outreach activities also include educating beneficiaries and community agencies about the effect of employment on the various public benefit programs. Education is critical because so much misinformation and misunderstanding surrounds this issue. Unfortunately, much of this misinformation is spread within the disability services community by well-intentioned but uninformed agency personnel. The purpose of outreach to disability services agencies is to increase community awareness of the many work incentives available to beneficiaries. The message of this educational effort is that employment and public benefits aren’t necessarily mutually exclusive. It’s quite possible for Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities to work and retain cash payments as well as medical benefits. It’s also possible to work and have an overall better financial outcome than by remaining solely dependent on public benefits. Increasing awareness of Social Security work incentives can ease the fear and uncertainty about employment many beneficiaries and the professionals who serve them feel. Knowledge of Social Security work incentives truly is power in this instance.

Finally, CWICs perform outreach to establish networks with key community stakeholders. WIPA services won’t be successful if CWICs provide them in a vacuum. Many other players should participate in the process of work incentives planning for real change to occur. Stakeholder groups are identified and described in Unit 3 of Module 1, but they include:

- State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (SVRAs)
- Employment Networks (ENs) under the Ticket to Work program
- State or regional Workforce Investment Boards and American Job Centers (AJCs)
- State or local intellectual disability or developmental disability agencies
- State or local mental health, chemical dependency or substance abuse agencies
- Centers for Independent Living (CILs)
- State protection and advocacy agencies (P&As)
- Public school systems
- Individual Development Account (IDA) or asset development programs
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Outreach activity must be a two-way street that builds reciprocal relationships. It’s not just about stakeholders knowing what WIPA services entail. It’s equally important to build relationships with key players and understand their roles. You will rely on these stakeholders as you work with beneficiaries to promote employment and enhance financial independence. The
more you interact and collaborate with other community stakeholders, the more successful WIPA services will be. Unit 3 of this module contains more details about how to work collaboratively with these stakeholder groups.

**WIPA Outreach Considerations**

Plan carefully before you conduct outreach to make sure you achieve effective results. Before you review specific strategies, consider the following important factors of the outreach function.

**Social Security’s Expectations for WIPA Outreach Activities**

WIPA personnel must understand Social Security’s expectations for WIPA outreach activities. Social Security defines outreach as activities that include but aren’t limited to: describing WIPA services prominently on the organization’s website; engaging in dialogue with community, local, and state service providers to increase WIPA referrals; and meeting with diverse audiences to describe WIPA services. Based on specifications in the 2017 WIPA Terms and Conditions document, WIPA projects meet the following requirements:

- Limit outreach to 10 percent of work effort and expenditures.
- Limit travel costs associated with outreach efforts and, as feasible, coordinate outreach events with community partners including Area Work Incentives Coordinators (AWICs), Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) grantees, State VR agencies, American Job Centers, and other programs that may benefit WIPA participants.
- Target your outreach efforts to underserved populations such as transition-aged youth (defined as beneficiaries ages 14-25), veterans, Native Americans, and other racial, ethnic, disability, and socioeconomically disadvantaged or minority populations.
- Include the Ticket to Work Help Line as the primary contact for beneficiaries on websites, in brochures, and within outreach presentations to the greatest extent possible consistent with the WIPA business model. When the Ticket to Work Help Line refers beneficiaries to WIPA projects, serve the beneficiaries on a priority basis. Unit 2 of this module includes more information about how you should collaborate with the Ticket to Work Help Line.

Social Security conducts significant outreach for its work incentives programs through a Ticket Program Manager (TPM) contractor. Examples include Work Incentives Seminar Events (WISE webinars), operating the Ticket to Work Help Line, and disseminating information through social media outlets. Social Security doesn’t require WIPA projects to schedule and conduct
WISE webinars, but values WIPA participation. Social Security encourages WIPA project managers to support staff when invited to present on a WISE.

**Budgeting Staff Time to Perform Outreach**

Marketing WIPA requires staff time and the ability to handle increased demand from beneficiaries who hear about services through your outreach. If WIPA personnel do too much outreach, there may not be enough time or personnel to serve beneficiaries. Increasing demand for WIPA services in excess of program capacity to deliver them isn’t a desirable outcome. To avoid this, WIPA Project Managers must allocate no more than 10 percent of WIPA contract resources to outreach in the 2017 contract year.

Managers must also consider how to deploy staff resources for outreach activity. Will all WIPA staff members share in this responsibility, or only designated staff? You will need to consider and frequently reassess the advantages and disadvantages to both strategies. Some CWICs might have more skills or interest in marketing. Others might be so skilled at work incentives counseling that it wouldn’t make sense to have them perform outreach while beneficiaries are waiting for service. Pay close attention to allocated staff resources to achieve the best overall results.

Outreach is an ongoing activity. The target population for services is fluid, with new customers continuously joining the disability rolls. In addition, community-based service agencies often have high rates of staff turnover, and current beneficiaries as well as existing staff also need regular information updates to keep WIPA services in the forefront. Busy disability services workers sometimes forget about community resources, and WIPA services are no exception. Contact community agencies frequently to help them stay aware of your services.

**Developing and Following an Outreach Plan**

The outreach function may overwhelm CWICs who haven’t performed this role in the past. The key to successful outreach is staying organized and planning carefully. Develop a written outreach plan that lists agencies prioritized for outreach and how you’ll market to them. If outreach directly targets Social Security beneficiaries, clearly describe how to conduct those activities, too.

**Effective Outreach Techniques for WIPA Projects**

Once you determine staff and timing for outreach, focus on how you will perform the outreach activity. Which strategies or techniques are most effective for your local stakeholder groups?
combination of techniques can maximize your chances of reaching the target audience. Remember, the objective is to spread the word about WIPA services to as many people as possible in collaboration with partner agencies. WIPA stakeholder groups include Social Security beneficiaries and professionals who provide services to them. Make sure to broadly disseminate information across this community. Brief descriptions of common CWIC marketing and public awareness activities are provided below. This is by no means an exhaustive list. You know your local community best and should devise creative ways to market your services.

**Outreach Activities Directly Targeting Social Security Beneficiaries with Disabilities**

Although there is no single mailing list of all Social Security disability beneficiaries, there are still ways to directly contact beneficiaries. One is to work with local agencies that have extensive mailing lists to send out mass mailings, fliers, or email blasts announcing WIPA services. Some agencies distribute this information for free as a service to their clients. Agencies serving individuals with disabilities are prohibited by law from sharing their clients’ contact information with any other entity.

Public school systems might be able to help you reach beneficiaries who might still be in school. When possible, provide fliers to special education teachers, school counselors, or family resource center to send home to parents. Schools might even mail fliers to students and their families or send an email message. WIPA projects could announce not only their services, but also invite students and families to attend an informational session about Social Security disability benefits and employment. Repeat the process every year to catch new students entering the system and to reinforce messages to students or families who have attended past informational sessions.

Outreach to transition-age youth can be particularly challenging to WIPA staff because many youth aren’t connected with the disability services community. For an excellent discussion of outreach activities designed specifically for transition-age youth, refer to a Policy & Practice Brief produced by Cornell University, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Employment and Disability Institute titled, “Conducting Outreach to Transition-Aged Youth: Strategies for Reaching Out to Youth with Disabilities, Their Families, and Agencies that Serve Them.” This paper is available at:  [http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/publications/PPBriefs/PP_25.pdf](file:///http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/publications/PPBriefs/PP_25.pdf)

In addition, WIPA projects may directly reach beneficiaries via traditional mass marketing techniques such as television or radio advertisements, or public service announcements. While these outreach activities might be expensive, the gain in referrals can be worth the cost. Remember, Social Security must approve all WIPA project marketing materials.

**Marketing Presentations to Community Agencies and Groups**
It’s not enough to send letters of introduction to stakeholder agencies and then wait for referrals to arrive. You need to facilitate in-person meetings to explain what services you offer and how these services can help beneficiaries achieve their career goals. Providing marketing presentations to stakeholder groups and community agencies is an essential component of any outreach plan. WIPA projects need to plan all face-to-face outreach meetings very carefully.

**REMEMBER:** Social Security expects WIPA projects to limit travel costs associated with outreach efforts and, as feasible, coordinate outreach events with community partners including Area Work Incentives Coordinators (AWICs), Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) grantees, State VR agencies, America’s Job Centers, and other programs that directly benefit WIPA candidates. Limit face-to-face outreach activity to events that will maximize the number of appropriate referrals. Avoid outreach activity that doesn’t generate high-priority referrals.

Face-to-face outreach meetings should never be impromptu. Carefully plan them with agency management to include the largest audience possible. In some cases, the audience will only include professionals, but in other cases, the audience may include beneficiaries, family members, caregivers, and service providers. WIPA projects should seek to attract the largest and most diverse group possible. Hold meetings at various times to accommodate different schedules. Many family members won’t be able to attend during standard work hours. Hold some meetings on nights or weekends to attract the most people possible.

Focus on general awareness of WIPA services during these meetings. Key information to provide includes:

- Description of services provided and any limitations on these services;
- Identification of the main objective of WIPA services;
- Description of who is eligible for services and which beneficiaries are a high priority for services; and
- Instructions on how to make referrals for services.

You must be clear about who isn’t eligible for services to attract appropriate referrals. Don’t assume the audience knows who to refer or who would benefit from WIPA services. Provide written information listing eligibility and criteria. The more you educate your referral sources, the less time you will waste handling inappropriate referrals.

Be clear about the goal of WIPA services during your presentations. Referral sources often think the program is designed to maximize public benefit payments or to keep beneficiaries from losing benefits due to employment. Neither of these perceptions is correct. In fact, the
objective is to provide WIPA services that promote employment and enhance financial stability for Social Security disability beneficiaries. Put this objective in writing to clearly identify the goal of WIPA services and avoid misconceptions.

When describing services, include examples of what types of assistance you don’t provide. Community agencies frequently think WIPA projects provide representative payeeship services or actively manage benefits by reporting beneficiary income to Social Security. WIPA personnel should never engage in these functions. If referral sources have unrealistic expectations about what the program does, they will make inappropriate referrals or be disappointed in the services offered. Manage expectations by providing clear written information during presentations.

**Participation in Resource Fairs**

Another useful strategy is to staff a booth at local resource fairs, conferences, or other large gatherings of stakeholder groups. These events may include state rehabilitation association meetings, conferences for special education teachers, or advocacy group meetings. You can reach a significant number of people in a relatively short time by attending these events. Even more effective is securing a place on the agenda to make a public awareness presentation. Staff these events with trained CWICs because beneficiaries commonly ask questions about their own situations. Prepare to provide information about the effect of work on benefits to beneficiaries attending these events, and hand out Social Security publications that describe work incentives (such as the Red Book) as well. You can find the current version of the Red Book online here: [https://www.ssa.gov/redbook/](https://www.ssa.gov/redbook/)

**Dissemination of Marketing Materials**

CWICs often disseminate marketing materials to spread the word about work incentives counseling services. Materials often include brochures, fliers, posters, or other printed materials. Dissemination methods could include mass mailings, email blasts, brochures left at Social Security or VR office waiting rooms, or displaying posters where beneficiaries are likely to see them. Displaying posters prominently at the local Social Security office or in the waiting rooms of the local Medicaid or welfare agencies is particularly effective. Be creative, and think about where your marketing materials will attract the most eligible people.

**IMPORTANT:** Social Security must approve in advance all WIPA project marketing materials. The 2017 Terms & Conditions document contains the following directive:

“WIPA grantees shall not distribute brochures, materials, articles, or website materials without first requesting review and approval from the designated Social Security Project
Officer. Any approved publications shall contain the following disclaimer:

“This document is funded through a Social Security cooperative agreement. Although Social Security reviewed this document for accuracy, it doesn’t constitute an official Social Security communication.”

If your WIPA project is developing outreach materials, contact your VCU Technical Assistance Liaison to see if approved examples are available for reference. In the coming year, the VCU NTDC will collect outreach and training materials used by existing WIPA projects, then create a repository of approved material for reference when creating new presentations or brochures. VCU will also create outreach presentations and brochure templates for WIPA projects to use. These materials will be stored on the VCU NTDC website in a fully accessible format for projects to download and share.

**Websites for WIPA Projects**

Maintaining a website for your WIPA project is a great way to disseminate information without incurring travel or postage expenses. Use a website to describe services and limits on services, communicate eligibility criteria, and explain how beneficiaries are prioritized for services. Be sure to include specific information about how to request services or refer someone for services. You can also highlight success stories and provide summary information about work incentives. In today’s information-driven world, a Web presence is an absolute necessity.

WIPA projects must adhere to Social Security requirements when developing websites. First, the ORDES Project Officer must approve all content in advance. Second, websites and other electronic communications must comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. In the coming year, VCU NTDC will be available to assist WIPA projects with the presentation, accessibility, and readability of websites.

**Developing Effective Marketing Presentations**

Before presenting WIPA services to stakeholders, be prepared to answer the audience’s most important question: “What’s in it for me?” If you are unable to articulate how your WIPA project can benefit them on a personal level, you won’t be able to “sell” the service and receive referrals. People don’t buy things they don’t want or think they don’t need — it’s that simple.

An effective marketing presentation answers these four basic questions:

- What are the tangible benefits of WIPA services?
• What problems will WIPA solve?
• How will WIPA services prevent potential future problems?
• What are the unique “features” of WIPA services?

Answers will vary depending on the stakeholder group. Never assume what one group perceive as a benefit of WIPA services will be of equal value to another group. Each group will value different aspects of the program. Evaluate the interests of your stakeholders and customize your sales pitch to match.

When presenting, highlight the benefits of the service and what problems it will solve. Consider making a list of important benefits and features to include in handouts or show during presentations. Customize the list to meet the needs and interests of each stakeholder group. Making a list of benefits and features helps you think about the interests of the audience in advance. The more prepared you are to address their specific interests or concerns, the more effective your presentation will be. Speaking extemporaneously is never recommended — preparation and practice are the keys to success.

Be clear about the purpose of the presentation and stay on-message. Tell the audience what to expect in advance, then continue with the prepared presentation outline. Marketing talks are intended to help the audience understand what WIPA services include, who they serve, and what benefits they offer. They aren’t the appropriate setting to train the audience on the details of the Social Security work incentives or other federal income support programs. Marketing and training are very different, and you must never confuse these functions. This is also not the time to counsel specific individuals, even if members of the audience ask case-specific questions. If questions about specific cases arise, ask to meet with the individual after the presentation for a private discussion. Addressing case-specific issues in front of a group often confuses the audience. Don’t let audience members lead the presentation off-track.

Limit marketing presentations to 45-60 minutes, which should be sufficient to achieve your desired goals, particularly if you arrive prepared and stay on-message. The presentation must be accompanied by written materials, such as program brochures or fact sheets, to reinforce what is presented. Keep printed materials brief and user-friendly. Make sure to provide correct contact information and give instructions about how to access services.

Whenever possible, partner with other players to provide outreach or marketing presentations. If more than one WIPA project exists in the state, seek opportunities for staff members from different agencies to work together on marketing functions. WIPA projects should collaborate with Social Security Area Work Incentives Coordinators (AWICs) on outreach efforts. Additionally, most large Social Security offices have public affairs specialists, Work Incentives Liaisons (WILs), or other staff who perform community awareness functions. Teaming up is a great way to build
relationships and demonstrate the partnership between Social Security and the WIPA project.

“Staying On-Message”

Communicating a clear and consistent message is crucial for a successful marketing campaign. This process is commonly referred to as “staying on-message.” While staying on message may be simple when selling a product like toothpaste, it becomes rather challenging when marketing a complex service such as WIPA. Even more challenging is selling the notion that employment and disability benefits aren’t mutually exclusive when beneficiaries have spent months or years proving to Social Security that they are incapable of working at a substantial level in order to initially qualify for benefits. To avoid misunderstandings, you must clearly state your message. You must convey the following five points whenever conducting outreach or marketing activities:

1. Paid employment and Social Security disability benefits aren’t mutually exclusive — beneficiaries don’t have to choose between work and benefits.
2. It’s possible to work (even full-time) and keep Medicaid and Medicare in almost every case.
3. It’s possible to work and come out ahead financially, even if Social Security and other agencies reduce or cease public benefits.
4. It’s possible to receive disability benefits again if they are lost due to employment.
5. WIPA services aren’t intended to force people off of benefits or help them maximize use of public benefits.

If you focus on these points and constantly reinforce them, you can correct a great deal of misinformation. Repeat these points at every event and interaction with beneficiaries, family members, and community agency personnel so people can really understand the message and accept it as fact. Communicating this message is a never-ending process and one of the most basic services you will provide to your local community.

The “Anti-Message” — A Warning!

There is one message you must be vigilant to avoid communicating. In the world of WIPA we refer to this as the “anti-message.” The intent of WIPA services isn’t to indefinitely keep individuals on disability benefits. You shouldn’t act as if it’s your job to “save” beneficiaries from benefit cessation or termination due to employment at all costs. You mustn’t behave in ways that cause beneficiaries to unnecessarily fear working above SGA, earning wages over the SSI break-even point, or earning more than the 1619(b) threshold amount. Similarly, don’t routinely encourage all beneficiaries to suppress their wages or net earnings from self-employment (NESE) in order to retain benefit eligibility. Finally, it isn’t your duty to find some
way, any way, to reduce countable earnings to evade benefits cessation or termination.

While it may not be in the best interest of some beneficiaries to fully terminate from benefits due to work, this is certainly NOT the case for all beneficiaries, or even most beneficiaries. Terminating from benefits isn’t a universally “bad” thing and isn’t harmful in the majority of cases. CWICs mustn’t present this outcome in a negative way when counseling beneficiaries. In fact, those with the capacity to earn wages sufficient to cause termination are frequently better off financially by doing so as long as they consider all costs of employment and they continue to meet health care needs. Work with each beneficiary to determine what his or her goals are, and support him or her to achieve the highest earning potential possible within the framework of those goals. Counseling techniques or messages that discourage beneficiaries from working or frighten them into retaining attachment to public benefits is contrary to everything WIPA services work to achieve.

Managing Customer Expectations during Outreach

An important aspect of successful marketing is managing customer expectations. Many of us have experienced being sold a product after a salesperson has made many grandiose promises only to be disappointed after purchasing the product. That is something WIPA projects must avoid at all costs when marketing and delivering services. It’s better to “undersell” the services and then exceed customer expectations. This is how to create satisfied customers.

Underselling = Developing Realistic Expectations

The phrase “underselling” means helping customers achieve realistic and reasonable expectations of the benefits and outcomes of WIPA services. It’s crucial to not make promises you can’t keep.

An example of this would be telling beneficiaries that WIPA services will ensure that overpayments don’t occur. No matter how diligent you might be in your work with a beneficiary, mistakes can occur. You can’t control the internal workings of the Social Security Administration.

Another example is to promise beneficiaries or service providers that you’ll personally handle all work incentives issues such as claiming Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWEs) or writing Plans to Achieve Self-Support (PASS). This is bad practice on several counts. First, you won’t have time to fulfill commitments like this, nor would you want to foster this level of dependency with beneficiaries. Beneficiaries who receive WIPA services must be active participants in the process and need to understand they will have an active role in developing
and managing work incentives. Similarly, you may need to help Social Security personnel understand what they can reasonably expect from WIPA services. You aren’t responsible for reporting wage information for beneficiaries, nor do you function as representative payees in managing benefits. You must have a crystal clear understanding of your role and its limitations. You must clearly and consistently communicate your role, and its limits to all stakeholder groups.

**Overdelivering = Exceeding Customer Expectations**

CWICs who successfully manage the expectations of beneficiaries and referral sources are more likely to meet or exceed those expectations when providing WIPA services. For a CWIC, meeting expectations means providing clear, correct, and complete benefits information that helps beneficiaries achieve their employment goal and enhances financial stability. At a minimum, your job is to answer benefits questions, lay out available options, and provide specific information about the pros and cons of various courses of action. The ultimate goal, however, is to “overdeliver” services or go beyond what the beneficiary expects. This doesn’t mean you should do everything for the beneficiary. Exceeding expectations means being creative and going beyond merely answering questions posed by beneficiaries. It means applying your work incentives expertise to maximize the positive outcomes from employment.

**Establishing Trust = Delivering Quality WIPA Services**

Finally, to be successful over time, you must establish trust by consistently delivering high-quality services. Word of mouth is a powerful marketing tool that can work to your advantage or disadvantage. Beneficiaries and agency personnel will talk to each other about their experiences with WIPA projects. A dis-satisfied beneficiary or community stakeholder can severely damage a program’s reputation for long periods of time. Slick marketing presentations will never make up for shoddy service delivery. Keep in mind that the beneficiary is only one of the “customers” you need to think about. You must also provide great service to referral sources and the other key stakeholder groups in order to protect the reputation of the program. Successful CWICs treat every interaction with a beneficiary or stakeholder as a valuable marketing opportunity.

**Evaluating Outreach and Marketing Efforts**

WIPA projects must track outreach activities to determine which are most effective in soliciting referrals. Projects that maintain and review good outreach data will learn a great deal about which activities work and which don’t in terms of soliciting referrals.
Keeping Track of Outreach Activities

You can track outreach by maintaining a chronological list that includes marketing presentations, who presented, and who attended. You can develop a list of attendees by passing around a sign-in sheet for name and contact information. If there are sufficient time and staff resources, developing a database, mailing list, or email list also is helpful. These can be used to prepare mass mailings of brochures, newsletters, or other materials to keep stakeholders updated about services. In addition, you should collect and track data on how beneficiaries hear about the program or who referred them.

Tracking Referral Sources and Checking Penetration of Populations

WIPA Project Managers should track details that determine which stakeholder groups generate the most high-priority referrals. It’s simple — during the initial call ask beneficiaries who referred them, and keep track of this information. Tracking referral sources also helps determine which misunderstand the objective of the WIPA project. Agencies that repeatedly refer ineligible or low-priority individuals need more education. Tracking referral sources helps managers know when agencies need another outreach or education session.

Referral source data will also indicate which population groups you are successfully reaching and which need more outreach attention. WIPA Project Managers should examine beneficiary demographics to make sure outreach efforts are penetrating each subgroup of Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities in your local service area. In some cases, projects might miss certain age groups, such as transition age youth or beneficiaries over age 60. In other cases, outreach efforts might not attract some disability groups or minority populations. All of this information has important implications in terms of outreach design and delivery. WIPA projects can’t evaluate how effective outreach efforts are if they fail to collect data and review it periodically.

NOTE: Social Security expects WIPA projects to target outreach efforts to underserved populations such as transition-aged youth (defined as beneficiaries at least 14-25 years old), veterans, Native Americans, and other racial, ethnic, disability, and socioeconomically disadvantaged or minority populations. You need to track how well your project is reaching these priority populations during outreach!

Refining Strategies to Increase Priority Referrals

When reviewing outreach results, keep in mind that maintaining the same approach often means getting the same results. CWICs need to change their outreach strategies to attract beneficiaries that they haven’t attracted in the past. Take a critical look at the groups you are
presenting to and how you contact them. What approaches might work best with underrepresented groups? Talk to your WIPA team, brainstorm techniques, and ask stakeholders for advice on contact methods. Outreach strategies need to constantly evolve to keep targeted audiences engaged and interested.

**Accommodating Disability and Cultural or Ethnic Differences when Conducting Outreach**

WIPA services are available to all eligible high-priority beneficiaries regardless of disability, ethnicity, gender, race, age, or any other characteristics. Unit 4 of Module 7 covers this important issue. You should read this unit before conducting outreach in the community to ensure all participants benefit from outreach activities. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when designing outreach activities for all potential participants:

- Choose locations that are physically accessible to all beneficiaries, regardless of disability.
- Bring materials or handouts in a variety of formats including large print, Braille, and on CD.
- Arrange for a certified sign language interpreter to attend, if needed. Make sure attendees know how to alert the project if an interpreter is necessary.
- Include foreign language interpreters when conducting outreach activities in areas with high concentrations of persons who speak a foreign language. Offer outreach meetings in a variety of locations and at a variety of times to accommodate transportation needs and work schedules.
- Choose locations accessible by public transportation, because many beneficiaries don’t drive.
- Offer free or low-cost childcare to increase family attendance.

**Conclusion**

As a CWIC, you are part of a larger team of people dedicated to improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities. You have an important role to play on this team, but can’t play it in isolation. Conducting outreach to disability services organizations and other community stakeholders is the critical first step to joining the “team” for each beneficiary served. When community agencies that support people with disabilities in achieving their employment goals know about and utilize WIPA services, the entire team functions more efficiently and will achieve better outcomes. WIPA projects must make an ongoing effort to spread the word about the availability and importance of WIPA services. You must make sure
your partner agencies understand the services you provide and whom the program serves. It’s only by mutual understanding, cooperation, and collaboration that Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities will reach the shared goal of employment.

**Conducting Independent Research**

Policy & Practice Brief produced by Cornell University, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Employment and Disability Institute titled, “Conducting Outreach to Transition-Aged Youth: Strategies for Reaching Out to Youth with Disabilities, Their Families, and Agencies that Serve Them.”

This paper is available online at: [http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/publications/PPBriefs/PP_25.pdf](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/publications/PPBriefs/PP_25.pdf)