Philip: Good morning everyone. My name is Philip Kahn-Pauli. I am the policy and practices director for RespectAbility, and I'm delighted to introduce a very robust panel that covers a lot of areas of leadership across the government, across States. And I'm gonna work my way from right to left starting with the one and only Mary Lazare of the administration for community living over at the Department of Health and Human Services. ACL, which is her shop, has a lot of disability issues in its portfolio and Mary has brought a lot of tremendous collaborative leadership to disability issues in her time serving in this administration, and we're very excited to hear her perspective on building layers of cooperation. Next up, standing in for Jennifer Sheehy, is the one and only Michael Reardon, who is responsible for much of the great work that's being done by the Office of Disability Employment Policy. He has worked - done a great deal of work at the states leading the SEED initiative, leading the collection and collaboration of best practices, leadership at the local level around communities of practice, and I'm delighted to hear about what ODEP's up to. We are fundamentally interested not just in what the federal government can accomplish, though we've got one more federal person on our panel today, we have the pleasure of having Rachel Stevens from the National Governors Association here today. RespectAbility really as an organization came out of the leadership shown by governor Jack Markell many years ago as the chair of the NGA. And so NGA is carrying on that work, working with States, helping leaders really adapt and improvise around best practices. And next up we have Tina Williams from the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs. And OFCCP is very important around disability issues because many of the new requirements that came out over the last several years introduced hiring goals for federal contractors to become inclusive employers of people with disabilities. And so Tina is working on some very key focused reviews to really make that goal a reality. So let's give everyone on the panel a great big round of applause and welcome. [Applause] So I want to begin by asking each of you this question. Really you know, the last several years has seen tremendous change thanks to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Just last year a hundred thousand new jobs for people with disabilities entering the workforce. And so Mary, I want to begin with you by asking, you know, how are these changes creating more pathways for the workforce, and what more can we do to get people with disabilities into the workforce?

Mary: Well thank you Phillip for that question and - so three things happened as a result of WIOA that impacted ACL, the administration for community living. The first is that it transferred AT, the assistive technology program, to ACL. It also brought the Independent Living programs, which are the Centers for Independent Living and other services, and NIDILRR which is the National Institute on Disability Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research. That's a long one for you. But all three of those programs came to ACL as a result of WIOA. And so what it's created for us is the opportunity to be even more inclusive and wraparound in terms of looking at employment for people with disabilities. And what's important about that is that, one, and many of you may not be familiar with NIDILRR, so I want to do something real quick. Dr. Leslie Kaplan, would you stand for just a second Leslie? Leslie Kaplan is one of our principles in NIDILRR. Dr. Kaplan does a lot, heads a lot of the research around employment. That's one of the three domains in NIDILRR, health and outcomes, independent living, and employment. And so she is one of our experts in this area so she's my go-to person within NIDILRR to ask for research, statistics, data, practices. So there's a lot going on every year with NIDILRR in our research center relative to activity and work for people with disabilities. The AT program, which came over, is one which provides assistive technology to people with disabilities, which certainly helps them to, one, be out living more independently in the community, but as well, suits them even better to take advantage of work opportunities so AT. The AT program does anything from demonstrating assistive technology to providing loans to people so that they can afford assistive technology and providing it. They also do a great service in terms of taking technology back, refurbishing it, and then sharing it beyond so we do a lot to leverage the minimal resources that we have with the AT program. So the Independent Living program is also a result of coming to ACL, as a result of WIOA. The centers for Independent Living, one of the things that WIOA did was change the - add a core service of helping youth transition from education to work. So that cliff, as it's known, is often a time where the connection from education to work is lost. And so Centers for Independent Living use peer mentoring. And they work with individuals to help them transition either from institution out into the community. But many of those centers for Independent Living or CILs are also focusing on employment, and we are encouraging and fostering that focus through ACL to look at transitioning people from work, from vocational rehabilitation, to integrated competitive work opportunities. So those are just three simple examples, I can talk a little later, but I want to give others the opportunity. But those are certainly things that have impacted ACL as a result of WIOA.

Philip: Thank you. Michael?

Michael: Okay so from the ODEP perspective I guess WIOA did two really significant things. First, it confirmed that people with disabilities are actually legitimate consumers of Department of Labor supports and services. Mostly looking at the AJCs, the American Job Centers, which there are about 2,000 across the country, so to make that the front door for all consumers including people with disabilities, it had to be programmatically and in many cases physically accessible to people with disabilities. So WIOA as opposed to WIA did that. The second major impact of WIOA for people with disabilities is basically that it updated the law to better approximate reality. So it for the first time, for instance, it really focused on transition services for youth, so that when they go from from school to employment it, there's - the Department of Labor is involved in that process, it's not just a Department of Education responsibility. It saw competitive integrated employment as a legitimate targeted expected outcome for people with disabilities. And it also limited the use of sub-minimum wage. So under the 5-11 program, there are a whole series of steps that agencies have to go through for a young person under the age of 24 before there can be a placement in a non-competitive sub-minimum wage environment. And so again, the expectations are different, that the expectations met what is currently going on. So a lot of times employers and policy makers aren't necessarily where people are at. So that - over the last 20 or 30 years, things have changed significantly for people with disabilities, young people especially. They're much more educated, they're much more tech savvy, their expectations are very different than the previous generation. Employers don't necessarily know that. Policymakers, US representatives, state representatives don't necessarily know that. And so what WIOA did basically is to help update, you know, that idea of what constitutes significant employment for people with disabilities.

Philip: Thank you. Alright. NGA, take it away.

Rachel: I think I would really echo from the state perspective a lot of what was just shared about - and what really changed in terms of changing expectations and kind of shifting some of that alignment toward those transition services. About 15% of each state's funding allocation for VR under WIOA must be designated for transition services for youth 14 to 24. And that might not sound like a lot, but it's a big enough chunk that it really does re-align focus for state folks working in workforce development and in vocational rehabilitation. To avoid redundancy, I'll talk a little bit about some work I think we uniquely bring to the table. My group, NGA solutions, among other things provides technical assistance to Governors, state agency staff, and since I'm on the workforce team, to State Workforce boards. State Workforce boards, as many of you might know, under WIOA are comprised of just over 50% industry representatives as well as people from workforce, labor, and other education agencies. That's important because what the most recent WIOA legislation did was, by incorporating VR and making it, as you said, kind of a legitimate part of what the services are that Departments of Labor at the state level are providing, they also had to bring it to the attention of workforce boards. And so that meant that employers working on these boards, working with the governor to develop statewide sort of comprehensive workforce policy, have this as one of the populations that they're very conscientiously thinking about. That was a big shift and I think that's really led to a lot of state action around this area. A lot of legislation, a lot of governor's executive orders have taken place since WIOA to address things like improving coordination for things like transition services, as well as employment support services. And a lot of states are also taking a closer look at their own employment practices as well. So I think that this sort of, as was indicated, really shifted the focus for state policymakers as well as federal policymakers. And I think by having VR as part of a plan - some of you who are familiar with WIOA might know there's two plan options, unified and combined. VR is a required partner under both plans. So both plans must incorporate VR into the statewide workforce development strategy, and I think that that's really been starting to lead to positive changes. States are still very much in the phase of working on and implementing the plans that they laid out in 2014, so I think it's certainly still a work in progress, and that's something we're doing a lot of work with States on right now.

Philip: Wonderful, thank you. And Tina?

Tina: So as my colleague just mentioned briefly I will not go into a lot of the redundancy. So what I will do is let you know sort of where this impacts OFCCP. So we understand that WIOA has some sort of transition of services and the importance - but I think one of the things that's critical for us to realize is that what it did do for the sake of OFCCP was shed some light on what was necessary and what was important within this space, particularly for federal contractors. It was imperative that we sort of took advantage of our mandate which is section 503, and focused on how to encourage federal contractors to hire individuals with disabilities, by highlighting the benefit, the impact, the minimal costs of doing so, to highlight that individuals with disabilities display a large number of qualified skill sets. So we've taken our role at OFCCP by highlighting what we can do, and that's educating, providing outreach to these contractors, meeting with them on a regular basis in an environment such as this. So what you'll see from our agency is something that we're referring to as focused reviews. Within this space, our first set of focus reviews is dealing specifically with section 503. And we have committed the agency to reviewing more than 500 or so federal contractors solely on the premises of what are they doing in terms of hiring individuals with disabilities, in terms of meeting their utilization rate, albeit it is aspirational, it should become mandatory at some point. Trying to see how are they hiring, how are they recruiting, how are they promoting, how are they paying fair wages, how are they compensating individuals with disabilities? So that's sort of the shift that OFCCP has made. This is a new shift for us, because we are known as an enforcement agency, and now we are focusing more so on compliance assistance. So that is the impact that its had on a federal level with OFCCP, and I'm certain we'll have opportunities to get into more of what we are doing specifically as the panel continues.

Philip: Wonderful, thank you. [Applause]

So I mean we really, here in Washington, see the scope of government, and several years ago the Government Accountability Office did a review of Disability Employment affiliated programs and found that there were 45 different programs funded by the federal government to help people with disabilities get training, get jobs transition to the workforce, transition into independent living. That's a lot of programs, that's a lot of pots of money, and it's a lot of different agencies, not to mention the 50 states. So I'm really curious in terms of working between federal agencies, working between the federal and state government, how can all of us together as advocates in and out of government start building layers of cooperation and collaboration? And this is obviously a set up for you, Mary, to talk about some of the great leadership that's coming out of ACL these days.

Mary: Thank you Philip. So in regards to collaboration and working together, ACL has put together - its the best words I can think of - a collaboration of various federal agencies, small business administration, Social Security Administration, Department of Transportation, Commerce, OPM, who else am I forgetting, Education, Labor - how do I forget labor? Just about eight-nine different federal agencies and departments, and we have a representative from each one of these agencies. We meet on a monthly basis. It's a multi agent multi-agency task force on employment of people with disabilities. Our goal is this - that someday we don't have to call this a multi-agency task force for employment of people with disabilities, but a multi-agency task force for employment of people with abilities, and that's the goal. The end goal is we want to take advantage of this time and this economy which is one where there are lots of jobs. We hear employers say, "I can't find people." We've had people come and talk to us about, "we can't find people to manage our health facilities" and things like that. And one of the first questions we say is, "who is your target audience?" So often we hear well we need able-bodied individuals, and we say we you need to talk about people with abilities, and so the focus of this task force is one that looks at - how do we work together? It started with a report that David and a group that I believe several of our ACL staff had participated on for about two years or so, where they put - compiled information and issues that existed in federal agencies regarding what were the obstacles, what things needed to be done, what were recommendations. We decided to take a look at that report and not start anew, but to bring these agencies together with their current programs and talk about what can you do to accelerate the work that you've been doing. Because what we noticed is that the gap between people working, people employed without disabilities and people employed with disabilities, the difference kept staying the same. There was no increase in the number of people with disabilities. They're not catching up percentage-wise. And so what we needed to do is say okay, we're not starting anew, we're not starting new programs. As you mentioned, Philip, there's hundreds of programs out there. How do we work together to create some synergy, to encourage catalyzing acceleration of what you're doing, what can you do more that will help achieve employment? And so that's the focus of this group and we meet monthly. We have attached ourselves. So Ollie talked earlier about how do we network? So one, we network by finding people from each of the agencies to come together. It's taken us a while to say, "please share your good bad and indifferent data and outcomes and impact." We want to know how we can help one another in this effort and so we are addressing - what are you doing, what are those barriers, and people are coming together. And I think it's because when you have to report what you're doing, you're more likely to speed up what you're going to achieve so you have something positive to report. And so just by the nature of saying we're coming together to share information and work together - is catalyzing that kind of activity. We also noticed that the President, through an executive order called for a National Council for the American Worker, which brought a focus to apprenticeships and training programs. And so we hear employers saying I need a workforce, that workforce is not coming. And so Ivanka Trump heads a council with a variety of very large employers, and so Ollie, we did what you said. We called and said, "hey we're doing an effort, you're doing an effort, we have a focus on people with disabilities, how can we work together?" So we now attend the staff council meetings and what we do is continuously infuse the message - please don't forget there is an important audience of people with abilities that we would like you to focus on, so we're there infusing that message and making sure that's being heard. We're working together as a collaborative task force of different federal agencies. And we're beginning to now address, what are those things that we as federal agencies have created by all these combinations of programs and rules and regulations, that are either slowing or impeding what we know is more people can be employed. So that's part of our work is starting to break down, what are the barriers that we have created by all of these different agencies creating rules without talking together.

Philip: Gotcha. Thank you Mary. And Michael can you talk about what ODEP is doing to foster collaboration?

Michael: Very quickly so when it comes to collaboration, that's what ODEP does because we have to. Not because we're going to heaven, because we have to do that. So we're a relatively small agency. By federal agency standards, we're in the low tens of millions, which Mary is probably laughing at secretly. So we, therefore, depend upon the kindness of strangers. Very influential strangers, so we're the Blanche DuBois of federal agencies. So we have to to depend upon HHS and DOT and all these other agencies in order to be able to push our agenda. And so that's what we do. So when we work with, whether it's the private industry sectors like technology sector - just in last week I was in New York, there was a conference of technologists, large technology companies and small, dealing with both augmented reality and virtual reality, etc - and we want to be in their space, because we want to change what they do to be more cognizant of the employment related needs of people with disabilities. And so we depend upon that with everything. Since we're small we can't afford a lot of in-person listening sessions and dialogues and that type of thing, so we do it online. So we have something called ePolicyWorks - Those of you, we had a huge dialogue just last month on 14c, for instance, in which we had thousands of participants, and we did that all online. So we were able to do that and have that many people involved making use of that technology, and also because we didn't have the funds to meet with everybody all around the country in person. And so that's basically what we do and that's a model that we work with.

Philip: Gotcha thank you.

Mary: Can I mention something?

Philip: By all means Mary...microphone? Mary: I think it's small but mighty. When he talks about ODEP as part of our task force everyone on the task force decided to use ODEP's phenomenal campaign materials. I just happen to have some here with me, but I want to share some of the wonderful things that they do. We have decided we're not going to create our own campaign. We're going to use what they have. So they have phenomenal materials that Department of Labor has put out, so I encourage you to go on their website and use their campaign materials, because we, as eight or nine other agencies have decided to do so. So we appreciate the collaborative effort.

Philip: And so if anybody here wants an action item, an action step that they can do and take home today, I would encourage you to go to the ODEP website and look up something called the Working Works PSA. It's a new campaign and that's got some really great materials and you can post it. I'm going to show my age here and say that you should go out and post it on social media, post it on your facebook feed, on your twitter account because it's - you know - that message of abilities and what people can contribute that's really out there, so. All right, now, talk about NGA in the States.

Rachel: I think in states one thing that we definitely see a lot of is the task force model that was previously mentioned at the federal level. Of course in States I think you know you can kind of get to a point you have a tap about everything and some of the effectiveness might dwindle a bit. So one thing that we've seen be really effective certainly are responses to opportunities provided at the federal level. One is the PROMISE federal grant program, I know that's really big - I mean, I heard from so many states when we were doing research last year on this about how impactful that effort has been in their state to making them really rethink long term systems change, and how they align their services across agencies, and how they collaborate with one another. I think from the state perspective, something really important to acknowledge is that the Governor has a huge opportunity to play a really big role in this. Federal initiatives certainly help. I think at the end of the day a lot of folks working across agencies in these areas, they're burdened with a lot of work and not a ton of resources. And so they're really going to be thinking about who they're answering to when it comes to taking that extra step to really collaborate across agency lines, and the Governor has an opportunity to kind of set that expectation and set that bar for their agencies. So over the last few years we've definitely seen Governors taking that initiative, whether it's issuing executive orders, or less formal mandates for agencies to collaborate with one another. And we've also seen some Governors exploring opportunities to establish specific offices dedicated to this. Massachusetts has an office that's really focused on doing this across agencies. Maryland most notably has a cabinet-level position, they have a secretary on disabilities. They've had that since former governor Bob Ehrlich's administration, and I think that's been really powerful in that state. I think we see - really as far as state coordination efforts go, I think Maryland's one example, and I think part of the reason they really shine is because Governors across party lines have consistently cared about this issue and been very vocal about it, and because of that cabinet level position that's really able to elevate it to the level of a lot of these other policy areas and help foster that coordination with other cabinet level agencies.

Philip: All right, thank you Rachel. And obviously you know we were just talking about a certain conference we were at in Chicago where we were seeing a lot of that collaboration within industry, so I'm curious, can you talk about the focused reviews and how those are going to foster collaboration and how federal contractors are working together?

Tina: Certainly. So what I'd like to do is highlight this in two prongs actually because I think that OFCCP has taken advantage of a wonderful opportunity to not only collaborate with other federal agencies such as ODEP, but also to find an opportunity to collaborate with federal contractors. So with regards to ODEP, Michael has done a disservice by not highlighting all of the many things that they have done especially in terms of assisting our agency. Not only did they have the knowledge, but they also had the resources and certain materials already prepared that we were able to essentially adapt. So one of the highlighted things that I'd like to recognize that OFCCP and ODEP have done is to come up with sort of an award. It's called the EIDy, the excellence in disability award. And the two agencies are partnering together to highlight those federal contractors, both large and small, and what we like to call pace setters, who are really going down the right path - headed in the right direction to do what is necessary to bring forward more individuals with disabilities into the workforce. To change the wage gap, which is by statistics just staggering in terms of how much less they are paid than those that do not have disabilities. I think at this point it might be in upwards of 30 cents on the dollar so right now ODEP and OFCCP are working together in terms of highlighting those companies that come forward and volunteer and are reviewed for a series of criteria to establish whether or not they are deserving of such an award in this particular space. But I think what's very different and unique for OFCCP at this go around is the collaborative efforts that we're putting forth with the contractors themselves. For those of you that are very familiar with OFCCP, you certainly understand that we are looked at as sort of Big Brother, sort of looking down on what they're doing, looking at all of their documents, looking at all of the outreach efforts that they have, looking at all of the recruitment efforts that they have, and that's just a small portion of what we are actually entitled to look at legally. In this capacity, we are not trying to have what we've traditionally had, which is rather adversarial to say the least. We are trying to collaborate with the contractors more, and by doing so we've established a landing page, we've highlighted best practices that they can adapt, very simple things. Things that do not cost that much in terms of hiring perhaps a chief accessibility officer, a centralized accommodation repository, things that you don't normally see when you go on-site to the facilities that certainly could be changing in terms of how can we bring more individuals into the workforce. Because I agree with Mary, as she mentioned in the beginning, it's not so much about individuals with disabilities, it's about qualified individuals that have the skill set to perform the job. It's based on merit, not so much what they have or don't have. It's based on are they able to do the job. So in collaborating with the contractors we are offering them compliance assistance. We're meeting with them early on. We're trying to assist them in establishing best practices that they can then adapt at their facilities, hopefully with regards to having a long term impact on what happens once they've identified where their challenges are. So we've had a lot of opportunities now in this space to collaborate with a lot of people he mentioned, Phillip mentioned the Disability:In conference last week. OFCCP was invited to that conference as well. We met with a lot of large companies but we also met with the small mom-and-pop companies who really want to do better but somehow they just don't know exactly what they need to do. This is an opportunity for us to educate them, and that's why I think this all starts. Before we can collaborate, we have to educate ourselves through our partners with ODEP and some other agencies, and now we're taking that information, we're packaging it, and we're going to capitalize off that and share that information with our contracting community. And hopefully, the goal is to see a change, a much needed change, and I anticipate that we will see that.

Philip: Wonderful, thank you. So I've been asking a lot of questions and I certainly want to invite the audience to ask some questions. So are we using the note cards? yes...are we- ok. We're doing the microphone. Again, adaptability improvisation, these are skills that people with disabilities bring to the workforce, I think we all know that, one way or another and - my colleague from JFNA.

Audience Member: Yes Phillip this is Aaron Kaufman from JFNA. My question is, while all of these efforts warm my heart, what are you - Mary indicated by the fact that people march into our office sometimes and say that we need able-bodied workers that there's still a lot of stigma about hiring people with disabilities. So although programs and laws in the world can be great, but what are your agencies doing and what are the states doing to break down attitudinal barriers and change misconceptions about the abilities of people with disabilities?

Philip: Thank You Aaron. All right, who wants to take that one?

Mary: I can start, especially since you referenced me. I what I think is critical to that is that we were - when I talked about accelerating people being hired, the reason is because when we infuse our workforce with a higher concentration of people with disabilities, the fact that they are in the workforce performing is one of those opportunities for employers, and you address the smaller employers looking for assistance, mid-sized employers - we need that critical mass to demonstrate, "Oh, this really is working quite well." And so we need that cultural movement to - you all, RespectAbility is so impactful in terms of influencing through media and television and so forth. I think that's a cultural shift but that's - to achieve that cultural shift it can't be, as you just said, by saying hire, or they're people with abilities. It has to be demonstrated. And that's why we feel it's so important to take advantage of this economy now, where there are jobs and there are people available, is to get as many of those people into the workforce that demonstrates these abilities. And that's what starts, in our impression, to begin to change the tide is show, demonstrate and see how wonderful the opportunity is.

Michael: And very quickly both Mary and Tina alluded to - ODEP develops these products that are hopefully valuable to the various stakeholders and the reason we do that - so we're a policy office, and so we develop, you know, policy options, law, rule, regulation guidance - that type of thing. But we also develop the technical assistance that goes behind it. So the ADA passed, you know, 29 years ago, but we also fund the job accommodations Network and reason we do that is that we want to say to employers, you have this obligation related to the ADA but here are free resources that you can use to help you meet that obligation. We do that with with the section 1 ADA checklists and the guides, and all that type of thing, so the local employment networks and the employers, etcetera, understand their obligations under WIOA and how they can meet those obligations. And so you can't just do policy, without the technical assistance. You need both to work.

Rachel: Thank you and I just want to pick up on Mary's point and underscore the importance of employers telling their stories. That's something we've seen to be just so incredibly impactful in our work with States. We hosted a Learning Lab last year in May in Wisconsin with teams of agency folks from six states, and we had employers come in and speak with them about this issue - about reducing stigma, about ways that they can be engaged in that work and there are certainly different policies and practices states can implement to ensure that they're engaging with business proactively. But I do think identifying strong champions and elevating them, and giving them opportunity to share their stories of success themselves, is incredibly powerful. I know we had CVS health come in, and of course they have a lot of really fantastic programs and folks who can speak very powerfully about those programs and the benefit they've seen for their business model and for their overall workforce. We also - you know, I think it's important to emphasize businesses of different sizes. So we also had some midsize and local employers come in. I think one example that I saw just make eyes around the room really light up was a small manufacturer, a family-owned manufacturing company who employs people with disabilities through a state program, through Wisconsin's project search program, and has found that there are particular individuals with different abilities that make them actually uniquely gifted at - and people who really enjoy certain types of tasks and jobs in that manufacturing facility more than other workers. And they have found that those people - they're better at these jobs, and that's something that as an employer they acknowledged they didn't expect. They didn't really think that's what they'd find. They thought they were doing something good for the community, and it wound up being good for their business, and it wound up being good for their team, for their team's morale - it changed the culture of their office and I saw people, you know, I'm sharing this relatively ineffectively, when this individual who runs this company was sharing this story, people there were really gravitating toward that, wanted to know more, and wanted to hear about how they could be involved in this program that was helping employ youth and young adults in this type of place. So I think that those stories just - I really can't express enough how important those are to multiple audiences: to other employers, to parents and families, and certainly to policymakers as well, because these businesses are some of their constituents too. I also want to take this opportunity to talk a little bit about what states are doing when it comes to acting as model employers. I think this is one thing that states have been picking up a lot more recently, and it's been really transformational. Essentially, States as model employers means that they're examining their own hiring practices, their own employment policies, even things like their own civil service examination policies, and ensuring that people with many different types of abilities are able to participate at every step of that process, and that they're really creating an inclusive and diverse state workforce. States being able to model that effectively has then shown employers this is important and it's effective, and it helps break down that stigma because it signals this is a very effective workforce that I could also be tapping into to fill all these jobs that I'm so upset are not full yet. Just a couple quick examples. The civil service examination can present surprisingly a huge barrier for some people with different abilities. And so Illinois and New York are two good examples of states that have really comprehensively looked at how they do that, and how they make sure everybody can access those examination opportunities. I've mentioned Maryland already. Maryland, in addition to their cabinet level role, recently - I believe last year - established a cross-agency position. I think that's something really interesting for States to look, at as far as someone who can look across agencies and align and coordinate and sort of strategize their own efforts to engage people with disabilities in the state workforce. So I'm excited to kind of see where that goes. And we have a ton of Governors signing legislation on this as well. Most recently, Governor Cooper of North Carolina signed a bill to this - sort of - excuse me, signed an executive order to direct state government to become really a leader in recruiting and creating an inclusive job climate for people with disabilities. And again, I think that is a really easy opportunity we see from the state perspective for states to model this and help break down the stigma through action, rather than just through, sort of, marketing.

Philip: Gotcha. Thank You Rachel. For those of you who are gonna stick with us to the end of the day, keep that thread about Governors in your mind, because we're going to talk about something that you can do about that. So Tina, can you quickly talk about the role of an award program for rewarding good business?

Tina: So I think one of the important things that we have decided to highlight in terms of what our collaborative efforts are and the impact that is having - I think to speak to the gentleman's question, barring having some sort of regulatory changes or policy changes, I think I'd be remiss if I would say it's going to be slightly difficult. But it doesn't mean that it can't happen. I think that this gives us another opportunity to make the change ourselves. So when you think about collaboration, and you think about what can you do in the interim, what can you do immediately without having those changes, you start to think about what is the scope here. And the biggest scope for us has been identifying those best practices, highlighting those companies that have very well-rounded robust disability and inclusion programs. If you go to our section 503 landing page with OFCCP, you will see that we've highlighted several companies, including CVS health, Microsoft, Pepsi, what-have-you, and they feel very proud to have their programs listed on our website. Because, again, we are an enforcement agency. So for us to recognize the efforts that they've put forth because they have been working very hard in that space - it certainly has become encouraging to other contractors, both small and large, to start looking at what they have and their companies. I think outside of that, we decided to start leading by example. And that meant that even within our own agency, we looked at - what have been our policies in terms of hiring? How are we messaging to our own employees within our office construct those that need reasonable accommodations? What can we do? We did a series of what I like to commonly call the TED talk videos. Our Director Leen did an internal and an external messaging, to both contractors and staff, the importance of having a very robust, well-rounded, diverse, inclusive workforce. I know we're focusing on individuals with disabilities, but I think it extends past that. I don't like to give it so much attention by using that term because these are just individuals that want to work. These are individuals that have a skillset just like you or me. It's no difference. The fact that they lead in - I've not met a person yet, including myself, that leads off by saying, "Hi, my name is Tina Williams, and I have a disability." No, I normally say, "hi, my name is Tina Williams, I happen to be a wife and a mom, and the deputy director of this agency, an attorney by trade, oh and by the way, if you were to ask me, yeah, I do have a disability, but oh well, it doesn't define me." I don't think people sit around and say, this is the the most forefront thing that I want you to know about me. When they come to the workforce and they apply, including me, that's not something that they bring to the table. They bring their skillsets to the table, their education, the qualifications - they are there based on their merit. So I do understand that it's not some warm fuzzy feeling that's gonna come across and we're going to make this change tomorrow. But I think that collectively it's gonna require not only federal agencies, state, federal, lawmakers, policymakers - but it's also going to require the efforts of everybody in this room, and everybody that I talked to about this topic. It's going to require all of us to work together to make a change and I think that we can collectively do it. And if we have to take baby steps, then that's fine. But let's start to educate those people that find challenges. I see that that's where we make the biggest impact with our agency. As I go around and I participate in these panels, I find that in a very short period of time, maybe a month or so, contractors call me and they're like, "I want to talk to you about our program. I want you to post our program. I want you to highlight our program." And when I look at it, it is a significant difference from where they may have been before. Within our agency we have an aspirational utilization rate of 7%, right? Over 98% of the companies are not meeting that goal. Plain and simple. I'll just be very honest with you. But what I am seeing is that those companies that once had zero are now moving up to three and four. I know that may not be a lot, but in the grand scheme of things it may have a long term impact of where they may be within five years or ten years. One of the other things that I think is equally as important is what we've started to do, and that's redefine, redesign, realign - whatever SAT vocabulary words you choose to use. We are focusing on the Self-ID form. because the Self-ID form, for our agency is where it all begins, and for most contractors, companies, even if they're not a contractor - how do you know how many individuals with disabilities are in your workforce? What are the challenges that individuals are facing when they decide whether or not to fill out a Self-ID form? Is it welcoming? Is your whole recruitment process welcoming? So those are some of the things that I think we need to start campaigning against. Those are some of the things that all of us can become champions in our own right of where we can go and what we can focus on. And so that's how I would suggest we start this process of really bringing more individuals into the workforce collectively.

Philip: So say we all. Alright, I have time for one last question from the audience so let's get her the microphone. You have the pleasure of closing out this panel with the last question.

Audience member: A lot of pressure there. Well let's go back to transition then. Oh, Laurie Becker Starkloff, disability Institute, thanks. Talk a little bit, if you could, about the 15% and how well utilized those funds are being spent at this point in time, and when can we see the result of that work and that revenue being spent in our workforce?

Rachel: That is a fantastic question, and I'll start with a brief answer from the state perspective, and I certainly welcome other thoughts on this as well. This is a reference to the 15% of VR allocations under WIOA that are expected to be spent on transition services for 14 to 24 year olds. I think at the moment from what we've seen in terms of - I know we have not worked with all 50 states on this particular issue, but from what we've seen with the states we have worked with, I think implementation and draw down or - I should say, expenditure of those funds for that purpose - is mixed in terms of its success. I think some states have really been ahead of the game when it comes to effectively implementing transition services, and being able to align those efforts in a way to effectively use those funds. Other states have certainly, I think, been struggling to identify where they need to be using those expenditures, where they can use them most effectively, and in doing the outreach to the people that they need to be engaging in those services. As far as when you can expect to kind of see that impact on the workforce, given the age group I think that that answer is also going to vary. Ideally, when you were talking about our high school youth, hopefully that's going to be evident in their transition. I think some states - we've already seen, for example, a handful of states we've worked with like Wisconsin and Maryland - we've seen an increased rate of high school students either going to post-secondary education or into employment in the integrated and competitive environment. That's already very positive and I think the transition services component is of course extremely important to that process, as well as some these other components around collaboration and engaging with employers. So I think we're starting to see some of those results. I think that honestly, across states, so much of this varies so widely, so I don't want to put a number of years on it personally. But I do think we're starting to see some really good results with that.

Philip: All right. I lied. One very last question, it has got to be quick and whoever wants to take it has got to take it.

Audience Member: Okay it may not be too quick. Sorry. My name is Bob Rudney, on the board of the DC Center for Independent Living, where 90 percent of our clients are African-American and earn less than $10,000 per annum. And many of the - most of them are unskilled - denied of marketable skills, are on benefits, would like to get off benefits, would like to you know have supplemental income to augment their benefits. What are your programs, your agencies doing to reach the most disadvantaged - the disadvantaged individuals with disabilities?

Philip: Mary you get to take it away.

Mary: I'm gonna take it away. One of the individuals I'd like to introduce you all to is Dr. Jennifer Johnson who's sitting here in the audience. If you'd stand for a moment Jennifer? Dr. Johnson leads our office on the administration for intellectual and developmental disability, so a lot of the programs that we've been talking about are - these people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, we know are part of a group that's the hardest to secure and maintain employment. So a lot of the grants and funding that ACL is looking at - and working more collaboratively across offices, independent living programs, administration on intellectual disabilities - we're putting more focus on getting people into training and apprenticeship programs, which is why we attached ourselves to the National Council for the American Worker. It's looking at apprenticeships and training programs and we've encouraged them. Remember, apprenticeships and training programs need to include people with disabilities. So sitting in some of these groups you hear them talking about - there are many able-bodied Americans out there who can fill jobs. We're again addressing to them, there are many people out there with abilities. That's what we want you to think about. So we're encouraging the apprenticeships and training programs that will take people from education, vocational rehabilitation, into the workforce is to include them in these apprenticeships and training programs. A lot of the programs do address as well how do we do this cultural shift. Dr. Johnson's office is looking at - how do we address expectations of individuals, and bridge them from education into the workforce and they're doing a lot of these programs. I'm not going to go through all the specifics because I see the minutes going here, but we can certainly answer a lot of those questions for you offline.

Philip: All right thank you very much. Let's wrap this up with a huge round of applause for our lovely panel. [Applause]