

Workforce³One

Transcript of Webinar

Update on Submission of Unified or Combined State Plans under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

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ERIC BELLINO: To begin, I'm going to turn it over to Heather Fleck who is the unit chief at the Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor. Heather?

HEATHER FLECK: Thank you, Eric, and welcome everyone to our webinar today that we're just giving your federal update on where things are with unified and combined state plans under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act just so you can get – the states I know are eager to have some guidance, have more information as they're undergoing their planning efforts. So the purpose of today is just to provide you a little bit more than what you've had before and let you know when to expect certain federal products.

So I'm joined today by Karla Ver Bryck Block. She is the team leader of Monitoring and Administration at the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. And also joined today by Jim Doyle. He's a vocation rehabilitation program specialist at the Rehabilitation Services Administration, U.S. Department of Education. Brian Miller also from Rehabilitation Services Administration is not available to speak today; however, he's been an important part of our interagency working group on state planning.

Today what you can expect to get is a little bit clearer timeline for key planning products that we as a work group are going to be releasing, a preview of the submission process and online portal, as well as identification of some important actions you can be taking right now in your state. Then here is the agenda which is very similar to what I just said, and hopefully we'll have adequate time at the end of this for – to take some questions and provide answers.

Our lawyers had asked us to add a disclaimer to this presentation. So there it is. We do need to note that the state plan Information Collection Request – it's the document that specifies what the planning requirements are that you need to plan against – is not yet in final. We are still in the phase of public comment and finalizing the steps that we need to do to make that an official document. And please note that no state plan submission will be required until that Information Collection Request is finalized and published and final.

So just to remind you of what is in the unified and combined state plan, the unified plan is the minimum that a state needs to submit. And it includes the titles authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, adult dislocated and worker programs in Title I, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program from Title II, Wagner-Peyser services program Title III, and the vocation rehabilitation program which is in Title IV which amends the Voc Rehab Act.

JIM DOYLE: Rehabilitation Act.

MS. FLECK: The Rehabilitation Act. Thank you, Jim.

And then the governor also has an option – the state has an option of including a number of other workforce programs in its plan, coordinating with those programs. So a state may include any or all or as many of these as they want up here on the slide.

We have the Perkins program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, the SNAP program administered by the Agriculture Department, as well as the Food and Nutrition – or the work programs authorized by Food and Nutrition Act, Trade Adjustment Assistance Act program, jobs for veterans state grants program, unemployment insurance program, the senior community service employment program, and employment and training activities that may be carried out by programs authorized through HUD, and then the community services block grant program and the reintegration of ex-offenders program. So that is a long list of other programs that the state may choose to plan with to include informally in their state plan or less formally and also discuss partnerships in the plan.

So by statute, the plans are due by March 3rd, 2016. That's the statutory deadline, and that's the deadline against which we at the Departments of Labor and Education are really working toward in terms of trying to back up from that timeline and get our products out. So the departments – any program that's included from – that's a Department of Labor administered program or a Department of Education administered program, approval or a decision, rather, must be provided within 90 days of receipt of any plan that your state submits. And then any program that the state includes that is outside of the Department of Labor, Education purview such as a USDA program, a HUD program, an HHS program, those particular programs do actually get 120 days to review and provide a decision. So it's a little – it does add some complexity in terms of our logistics certainly for how those things – how that review takes place.

So to give you an update on where we are with things, I mentioned previously the state plan information collection. So we had posted that for public comment back in August, and hopefully most of you have seen that document. It's still actually posted on regulations.gov, and that's as well as I think you can get to it from our various websites at DOL and education. So we put that out for comment.

That's what has sort of our proposed ideas around what is required in a state plan, and right now we are working through the interagency work group we have here at the federal level, working through all the comments we've received. We're making changes to the Information Collection Request, as appropriate, or making decisions around what to do in regard to those comments.

Once we finish that process, we are required under the Paperwork Reduction Act process to submit another version to OMB along with the comments and our responses to those comments, it will then be published for an additional 30-day comment period. So you'll want to be looking for that next round, which will be hopefully within the next several weeks we'll be able to publish that for the next 30-day public comment period.

And then our target date for the final publication of the Information Collection Request is winter. Sorry we can't give you a more specific deadline – timeline than that, but it's sort of in terms of the – (inaudible) – of working through the different processes, looks like winter will be when we can get that finalized.

So just to remind you of what the general contours are of the state plan – and this is in the Information Collection Request that was proposed itself as well as sort of how the statute kind of organizes the state planning content, you're asked to identify up front what kind of plan you're submitting and which programs you're including.

And then the first major part of the plan is really the strategic section. This includes your economic, workforce, and then workforce development activities analysis to get a lay of the land as well as what's happening in your state. A lot of the Department of Labor programs are very familiar with this type of analysis. I believe it's newer to the education partners. So you could definitely be working on that together.

And then the strategic part also includes what the state strategy and vision is for the future of its workforce in the state. You can think of this portion of the plan as more of your sort of the higher level executive summary, if you will, of what the state intends to do. It's probably a good piece of the plan that you can use to communicate with different stakeholders in your state, employers, your legislature, more of the regular public citizens is sort of the – maybe the audience for that part of the plan.

And then the next part of the plan are really the nuts and bolts, the operational planning element. And this is where you begin to specify what exactly the state's going to do to realize its vision and implement the strategy that's proposed in the first section. So this portion of the plan really will get in some more depth about operating systems and policies the state intends to put in place, how things are organized across programs, different ways you're going to align your technology and data systems. Has a lot of compliance-oriented pieces in this section of the plan in terms of priority of service, how you're going to make the One-Stop accessible, and then a discussion about program specific pieces. There are certain requirements that only the Title I programs have. There are certain requirements that only the Title II and Title III and Title IV programs have. So there's sections of the plan that are very specific that was in the nuts and bolts of how you're going to implement those programs.

And then there's a set of assurances, both common assurances that across partners need to be providing as well as specific assurances for just each program. And then there's an appendix that includes performance goals for your state, and then the Information Collection Request will also include all the different requirements that any combined plan partner you include, those requirements that you must address for those programs as well as the common elements that are up in the earlier part of the plan.

So another product – because that was the ICR. Another product we intend to put out as federal partners is joint guidance on planning. And this will be more of an instructional document to assist you and facilitate the planning effort in your state. It will include sort of the departments' vision for how planning should take place, provide some specific instructions you'll need to know just on logistics basically about how and where to submit your plan.

It will include the deadline for submission, a link to the final state plan information collection instrument, and any other reminders the departments think are helpful to you in your planning

efforts. And again, we hope to time the release of this program guidance to coincide with when the Information Collection Request is finalized as well. So sometime in the winter you can look for that, and we expect that document to be developed jointly across our departments.

So that's where we are with some of the – those two products. I'm going to now turn it over to Jim Doyle who is going to provide you a sneak peek of the submission portal that is under development.

MR. DOYLE: Great. Thank you, Heather. At this time the departments would like to introduce and provide a brief overview of the state plan portal. It should be noted the departments intend to conduct a more thorough webinar and issue guidance specific to the portal in the near future. We believe this portal will provide states a number of benefits when developing and submitting the unified or combined state plan.

Just to name a few of these benefits, the portal will allow access to multiple users throughout the state, create uniformity across all portions of the plan to create a true unified plan, identify and provide prompts for all the required elements of the unified or combined state plan, ensure all plans are accessible and compliant with Section 508, and will allow each of the federal agencies included in the state plan to receive the plan at the same time.

The state plan portal will allow users to identify and submit all required elements of the unified state plan including the common elements and the program specific elements for each of the six core programs. The screenshot shown in this slide demonstrates the structured outline of the state plan in the left pane, which includes both the common elements and the program specific elements.

The state plan portal will also be designed to allow states to submit a combined state plan by simply choosing any of the optional programs the state would like to include in the plan. You will note in this screenshot included in this slide a state will have the option to include one or more optional programs. Once an optional program is chosen, the planning elements for that program will become available through the portal.

One of the benefits of the state plan portal is it will allow multiple staff throughout the staff in different locations to work on different sections or portions of the plan at any given time. The users will then have the ability to save each section independently before proceeding on to another section.

The state plan portal will be designed in accordance with the final information collection instrument once it receives final approval. Once the final information collection request or ICR has been approved and published, the portal is expected to go live and become available to the states. It is important to note that once the final regulations have been published, there may be changes that affect the portal. These changes will be made to the portal at that time to assure compliance with the regulations.

As noted before, additional guidance from the departments will be provided on the portal, including how states will access the portal, general overview of the state plan portal, how users

in the state will obtain the necessary permissions to enter or edit information in their state plan, the functionalities of the portal including the tools and options available to the users, and how the state will formally submit state plan to departments through the portal.

States are encouraged to begin developing documentation related to their state plan in preparation of the portal going live. Information developed for a state plan can be copied into the appropriate sections of the portal once it becomes available. This can be done by simply copying and pasting the information into the relevant sections.

It should be noted, if multiple users are accessing the same plan at the same time, information can be saved without affecting the other users. The only exception to this would be if multiple users are accessing the same edit box at the same time, which is fairly unlikely.

The screenshot included in this slide is an example of an edit box that will be available to the user throughout the state plan portal. As discussed previously, a user will be able to access each section of the state plan independent of the other sections, allowing the user to save their information before moving on to another section of the plan.

Users within the state will be able to gain access to the relevant sections of the plan. This will allow different staff and departments within the state to develop and complete specific portions of the state plan independent of the other sections of the plan. For example, the authorized staff within a state will be able to access the adult education and literacy program sections of the state plan as shown in the next slide.

In this example, this section of the plan can be completed once the authorized user has developed this portion of the plan. Of course no portion of the unified state plan can be submitted independently. The plan must be completed and submitted in its entirety.

Once the state has developed and entered all information for a unified or combined state plan, the plan will be submitted to the departments through the portal. Upon submission the plan will be made available immediately to the Department of Labor, Department of Education, and any other federal agency that's included in the plan. Since this will happen instantaneously, the submission date and the date the plan is received will be the same.

So at this time Karla will talk about what states can be doing now to prepare.

KARLA VER BRYCK BLOCK: Thanks, Jim. We recognize that states are in various stages of planning for and implementing WIOA, and one important aspect of transitioning to WIOA is to ensure your state workforce boards are WIOA-compliant.

Chief elected officials should review the new requirements in the law and outlined in the Department of Labor guidance, TEGL number 27-14, which is entitled Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act transition authority for immediate implementation of governance provisions to reconstitute and recertify boards, specifically regarding the constitution of the WIOA-compliant board that is responsible for the designation of local workforce development areas, the

identification of regions, the development of criteria for local board appointments, and beginning a state planning process.

Additionally, as noted in Department of Labor TEGL number 19-14, when establishing standing committees, states are strongly encouraged to focus on serving youth, low-skilled adults, Indians and native Americans, individuals with disabilities, and other priority groups in the local area.

Planning should be well underway at this time for the state plan which is due no later than March 3rd. We encourage you to identify and ensure that appropriate stakeholders are at the planning table and that everyone is participating in the conversations as a team. All partners should be at the table and participating fully as equal partners in the development of the strategic planning and operational elements.

WIOA requires state and local areas to enhance coordination and partnerships with local entities and supportive services for strength in service delivery. TEGL 19-14 encourages local and state leaders to engage in strategic planning and find new ways to align core and combined partner programs as well as required and optional One-Stop partners.

As you've heard, the proposed ICR is in the public comment process. As Heather mentioned, we are currently processing the comments we received, and the ICR will be published in the Federal Register again for a 30-day comment period before it becomes final. The ICR right now is our best thinking to date about the requirements for the state plan, and we encourage you to use the draft ICR that's available to you at regulations.gov to discuss planning elements and to draft your state plan.

This slide reinforces what Heather's already mentioned because we feel this is very, very important in your state planning. Part of the strong foundation of your plan is your economic and labor market analysis of your state and its regions. We recognize that this type of analysis is not usual for adult education or the vocational rehabilitative program, and this is an opportunity for you to bring your data to the table for inclusion. Your state plan must include an economic and workforce analysis.

For the economic analysis, the unified or combined state plan must include an analysis of the economic conditions and trends in the state, including sub-state regions and specific economic areas identified by the state, including existing demand industry sectors and occupations, emerging demand industry sectors and occupations, employers' employment needs.

There's also a workforce analysis, and the unified or combined state plan must include an analysis of the current workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment. This population must include individuals with disabilities among other groups in the state and across regions identified by the state, including employment and unemployment, labor market trends, education and skill levels of the workforce, and describing a parent's skill gaps.

Also included in the unified or combined state plan is a workforce development education and training activities analysis. The plan must include an analysis of the workforce development

activities, including education and training in the state, to address the education and skill needs of the workforce and the employment needs of employers.

At your joint stakeholder meetings you'll want to identify any program specific requirements and plans for implementing them in accordance with your state's timeline. For example, the vocational rehabilitation services portion of the combined – unified or combined state plan has its own public comment and hearing requirements.

Core programs, along with optional programs, and required and optional One-Stop partners should reassess the One-Stop delivery system and determine what is needed to achieve seamless service delivery models that place the customer in the center of the program design and delivery. WIOA requires a memorandum of understanding between the local board and the One-Stop partners to address One-Stop center infrastructure funding, physical and programmatic accessibility requirements, and division of WIOA and state-established goals, among other issues.

WIOA refocuses the youth formula program to serve disconnected youth by increasing the age range to age 24 and requiring a minimum of 75 percent of DOL youth program funds to be used for out-of-school youth ages 16 to 24. States and local programs should coordinate to identify productive approaches for reaching out and serving out-of-school youth and develop plans to strengthen educational services to them through partner programs.

The Departments of Education and Labor have adopted the new Office of Management and Budget uniform administrative requirements, also known as uniform guidance. Financial staff and other applicable staff must become familiar with the new requirements which govern such matters as standards for financial and program management, procurement, and allowable cost.

The departments have extensive information on their websites regarding uniform guidance separate from WIOA pages and resources since it applies across programs beyond those authorized by WIOA.

Also, the performance ICR is also in the public comment process at this time. Departments are currently analyzing the comments received during the initial 60-day comment period and will be publishing the ICR in the Federal Register again for another comment period that will last 30 days. We encourage you to become very familiar with the ICR, review the updated version when it is published, and participate in the 30-day comment period, if you have suggestions about the ICR.

Finally, we encourage you to identify any barriers your state may have with the implementation of WIOA so you can develop the necessary plans and strategies to overcome these barriers. These barriers could – this work could include looking at program legislation or policies that may need to be modified to be better aligned with WIOA, and other barriers could be a result of program administration practices that may need to be modified to better facilitate the implementation of WIOA.

And with that, we're back to Heather.

MS. FLECK: Great. Thank you, Karla. So we just want to say that some of you I know may be interested in submitting your plan earlier than some of our products are available to you. In fact Mississippi has already submitted a state plan.

So there's nothing precluding you from doing that. We just want to let you know what – keep in mind if you choose to do so. So if you do intend to submit prior to the release of the federal guidance, we talked about the Information Collection Request, the availability of the portal. Just make sure that at minimum you're doing the following, that you've conducted the planning with all of the required partners, certainly had conversations with everyone – every program you've included in the plan needs to be at the planning table, and that the state board is – one of the state board functions outlined in Section 101 is to assist the governor in the development of the state plan.

So the state board does need to be actively involved in this process as well as the right people need to be on that board. So as Karla mentioned earlier, Training and Employment Guidance Letter number 27-14, until the regulations are finalized anyway, that has the guidance about who needs to be on the board. So please make sure that your state is aware of that and that those appointments are being made at this time.

You do need to ensure that you post the state plan for public comment. We do expect that to take place. The plan needs to meet Section 508 accessibility requirements. We cannot accept a plan that does not meet those requirements. So please ensure that whatever format you send it in to us, that it does meet those requirements.

You need to identify the right signatory in the state that can submit the plan for all included partner programs. It's important – this is an important part of your coordination effort. I don't think we at the federal agencies have decided who that person might be, but of course the governor would be an obvious individual that could speak for all programs included or a designated individual.

The statute does require it go to the Department of Labor. So for Employment and Training Administration you may reach out to your regional administrators to get information on how to submit that plan to the Department of Labor. And please coordinate those communications and we'll let you know on a state-by-state basis of who to send that to.

And then if you do submit your plan earlier than the availability of the portal and the Information Collection Request – or rather, the Information Collection Request, you may be required to modify your plan if what you've submitted is not in conformity with the final Information Collection Request.

And then similarly you may be required to enter your plan into the online portal once that portal is available because we are intending to use that portal as the mechanism for making available all state plans to the public. So it will need to be on that system. Those are the minimum kind of things to keep in mind if you do intend to submit your plan earlier than the timeline we're able to do things here at the federal level.

And then on the next slide here are some resources, links to different information and technical assistance and guidances that our departments have released. The Innovation Opportunity Network is a good place for information in terms of good practices, practical things states are doing now. You should definitely be looking at that with your partners.

The Employment and Training Administration has a webpage dedicated to WIOA, doleta.gov/wioa, and that's where you can find all of our policy guidance. Department of Education, adult education has a page with some valuable information about their communications through the system, as well as the Rehabilitation Services Administration. So those are some places to look. We do intend also to provide additional resources and technical assistance in the coming weeks, but that's what's available now. So keep checking back.

And with that, that concludes our webinar, but we can now be available to take some questions. So we're going to start taking the questions now, and we've – we're dividing them up amongst ourselves.

So the first question we got is, "What will the window between the Information Collection Request finalization and state plan submission look like? How much time will you have in between?" We do not know, which is unfortunate because we obviously would like to give states as much time with that final document as possible. We know it's very difficult to do your planning with draft documents and we're working as hard and fast as we can but we do have to follow a number of requirements.

The Paperwork Reduction Act process itself is a time-consuming process. So unfortunately, we can't give you a better idea than winter for the ICR publication and March 3rd for the submission deadline, which we realize with some states requirements around public comment that that might not be a very large window.

The second question we got is, "Does the draft plan have to be approved by the state board before it is posted for public comment? Can that process be parallel to allow more time for comments?" The statute does not actually identify a sequence of events there. So presumably the state board has been involved in the development of the state plan itself.

And yes, it is fine to put it out for public comment before they officially approve it. We're hoping actually the public comments would affect whatever your final plan would be, that you're taking those into account and that the state board is actually engaged in that process as well. So that is up to the state how they want to sequence that.

And then the third question, "Is it accurate that if programs are outside of the Department of Labor and Education oversight that they are subject to the 120-day review period, but the programs under DOL and Education are still subject to the shorter time frame for federal review?" That is accurate. So any Department of Labor and Education program that is included in a combined state plan we must respond to it within 90 days.

So even though Perkins, for example, is outside of the core program, if it's included in the combined state plan, then a response must be within 90 days. And it's actually for those other programs, the USDA, HUD, and HHS programs, 120-day period is for their program-specific section. So it is fairly complicated.

Okay. Now, I'll turn it over to Jim to answer a few questions.

MR. DOYLE: Okay. One question is, "How will the portal handle states where there are – is both a blind and a general agency?" The act requires that each of the VR agencies submit the VR portion of a unified or a combined state plan. The portal will allow states that have multiple agencies or both a general and blind to submit the VR portion of a unified or a combined state plan. So these portions of the plan or the program-specific elements can be developed independent of each other. Of course it will all be part of the same unified or combined state plan.

Another person asked, "Do states have to submit their plans through the portal?" We strongly encourage states to issue and submit their plan through the portal. There's a number of reasons why, but looking at the benefits to the states, it will allow all the plans to be published and on the website and to ensure that they are accessible and 508 compliant. We also believe that by states submitting their plan through the portal, that the states will have a much easier time providing updates required at – prior to the third year or at the end of the second year.

It will also allow the stakeholders to identify each of the elements that are required to be addressed for a unified or a combined state plan. There will be additional points discussed when we're able to present a webinar specific to the portal. I think it will help clarify some of the additional questions that people may have about it.

Another person asked, "Does every state plan have to follow the template exactly?" The template or the ICR, Information Collection Request, that instrument that's developed has been developed by the partners based on the statutory requirements for a state plan both for the common elements and the program-specific elements.

We strongly encourage the states to follow this template so not only can they be assured that they're addressing each of the elements required, but the reviewer will be able to identify how the state is addressing each of the elements so the plan could be approved in a timely fashion.

All right. I believe – oh, let me – one other question. "Will assurances section require links for assurances made?" The assurances will be included in the portal as checkboxes that are necessary for the state to include. The only link that we're currently planning to include are links that would be for the certification documents that are needed by each state. For example, the certification regarding lobbying form is required to be submitted for the vocational rehabilitation program. There will be a link to access this form, and it could be signed independently.

All right. I'm going to turn it over to Karla who has a few questions.

MS. VER BRYCK BLOCK: Sure. So we were asked to clarify if we are saying that a state plan may not be submitted before the guidance and portal are completed and released to states. We are not saying that. However, in order for the plan to be as complete as possible and to follow the most up-to-date requirements, waiting until the ICR is final and the portal is available does allow you to submit the plan following all of the finalized requirements.

If you do submit earlier than that, as Heather mentioned, on slide 34 there are a number of steps that you could be required to have to go back and take in order to adjust anything that isn't compliant with what the final ICR requires. And so our encouragement is that states wait until the final ICR is out and the guidance is issued in order to have to do the minimal amount of work in terms of the submission and not having to go back to redo or fix sections or address changes that come out of – that are a result of the ICR coming out in final format.

Another question is, "When the ICR is finalized and published, can labor and education also publish a track change version of the final state plan requirements so states can quickly and efficiently identify those sections that have been changed, if any?" We don't plan to publish a track changes version of the two documents.

However, when the ICR comes out next before it's final for the 30-day comment window, we will be providing text back answers to questions that were raised or comments that were made on the ICR and explaining whether or not we accepted what was proposed of the change or whether we didn't accept what was proposed and providing an explanation as to why and what our thinking was.

So that summary of the comments and the responses to the comments will be the information that will tell you where the changes have been made in the state plan requirements of ICR.

MS. FLECK: Thanks, Karla. I'll take the next couple of questions. We are getting a couple questions that we actually are not in a position to respond to. So one we got is, "What is the approach to populating the federal performance goals/targets on page 36 through 38 of the draft state plan requirements?" We are going to defer that because we're not the performance interagency work group, and they will be publishing guidance on those negotiations and how to populate that table.

And I can tell you that it should be a little clearer when we publish the final ICR, what's expected there as well. You can wait to kind of keep looking for more information on the performance side of things.

Jim, do you want to take that next question?

MR. DOYLE: Sure. "When using the portal, does the content have to be answered section by section, or is the flexibility to enter larger chunks of information into the plan?" The portal will be designed to address each of the elements independent.

This will make it much easier for states to ensure that they're addressing each of the required elements of the plan and for stakeholders to identify specifically how the state plans to proceed

with each of the required elements. I think this will become a little bit more clear when we're able to present the portal and provide an overview of how the portal will work and how it's going to look at the time we're able to present that webinar.

MS. FLECK: Thank you, Jim. Another question we got is, "In the program-specific sections where the requirements for combined plan programs such as unemployment insurance, jobs for veterans state grants, etc., do states need to actually attach those program plans or simply attach or acknowledge that they have been submitted to federal sponsors? Can you tell us what the portal will require?"

So the portal – so how the planning ICR is designed is that there are a common set of requirements up front. Most things in the strategic section of the plan and most things in the operational section of the plan apply to any program that's included. So the coordinate – the needs to be a coordinated response that includes those – any combined plan partner program. And then if you've chosen to include one of those programs, their planning requirements will pop up for you.

So for example, if you select jobs for veterans state grant on the menu, the first question on the portal, if you select that you've included that one in the plan, the portal will automatically provide you the program-specific requirements for the jobs for veterans state grant program. We realize some of these programs are on different cycles for planning and that you may have already, for example, recently submitted a plan for that program or are about to. If you include that program in your plan, the combined state plan, that's meeting the requirements of that program.

So you'll be expected to fill out those requirements, and that will be for some of them like UI, I know they have special instructions about some unique pieces of their plan that might be submitted a little bit differently because we realize not all aspects of the unemployment insurance program make sense to submit through this mechanism.

So that's how that will work, and it will be a lot clearer I think when the portal is available. But you might also send a question by e-mail that I can share with the unemployment insurance program. Unfortunately, they're not available here.

MR. DOYLE: Yeah. I will just add to that that, in the example of unemployment insurance program, that we have been working with that federal agency, and the combined state plan through the portal will include the planning elements for the unemployment insurance while there will be other elements such as the corrective actions portion of their state plan will be submitted directly to the agency.

MS. FLECK: Thank you. Okay. So another question we've gotten is, "Can you please provide a link to the Information Collection Request draft you indicated is available at regulations.gov?" We can, and it is actually, I agree, hard to find on regulations.gov. But if you enter in – if you go to regulations.gov, you can actually enter in the search box ETA-2015-0006. It's either – I can't remember how many zeros it is.

MS. VER BRYCK BLOCK: That's it.

MS. FLECK: Okay. So ETA-2015-0006. That will take you to the docket where we posted it for public comment. You'll want to click on an icon that looks like a folder. I believe it's in the upper right, and then that will take you to all the documents that we posted for public comment.

MS. VER BRYCK BLOCK: And if you go to ETA-2015-0005, you'll find the performance ICR as well. Take a look at that information.

MS. FLECK: Yes. Okay. Sorry. We're just reading the questions right now.

Want to take that one, Jim?

MR. DOYLE: Yeah. "Since the new plan is essentially the governor's plan, do we still need to secure the state approval from the Office of Policy and Management who previously approved the VR state plan for the governor?" The approval process for the VR portion of the state plan will be – will continue to be the same process. There will be identification once the plan is completed that the appropriate official is attesting to the necessary assurances and what we previously called the attachments.

So that authorized official, the signatory, would have to indicate that they had approved that plan. Once again, this is just the VR portion of the plan.

Another question is, "Does the ICR portal require electronic signatures?" Yes. The process for the approval will be highlighted and shown when we conduct the webinar. So we want to make sure that it's understood that this will be – essentially has to be approved by the identified and authorized official within the state.

MS. FLECK: Thank you, Jim.

MR. DOYLE: We'll cover more of that of course during the guidance – through guidance and the webinar.

MS. FLECK: Yes. And we're getting some very technical questions that I'm not sure we've totally worked through yet. And, Karla, are we able to answer the question I just gave you?

MS. VER BRYCK BLOCK: So we have a question, "If our economic and workforce analysis is blended into one narrative, will this need to be disaggregated for submission into the portal?" So the portal is going to have a question followed by a text box where the answer is provided.

So if your economic and workforce analysis is blended into one but it's asked with two questions or questions with subparts in the portal, then we would encourage you to follow the way the portal has it laid out. That way we find the same information and the same plans when we start to review them and look across all 57 entities.

However, if it's written in a way that it's integrated and not easily disaggregated, there's nothing that stops you from putting it into one of the boxes. But our preference would be that the question that's asked followed by the text box, the text in that box does respond to the immediately preceding question.

MS. FLECK: Thank you, Karla. All right. I'm giving some of these technical ones to Jim because there's a lot of portal questions here.

MR. DOYLE: So the question here is, "Is there a character limit for the text submission components in the portal?" We showed in this PowerPoint a text box, and of course Karla just mentioned the text box. There's a limit to everything, but during the demonstration we provided to the departments, our IT person copied the complete works of Shakespeare and pasted it into just one of the edit boxes and all that information fit. So we hope that a state's response would not be longer than that. So there is of course a limit at some point, but it's very unlikely that any agency will reach that limit for any given text box.

MS. FLECK: We hope that it's – (inaudible).

MR. DOYLE: Yeah. We definitely hope.

MS. FLECK: Okay. So we have a question here. "Are these resources linked on the Employment and Training Administration website? If not, can they be linked?" The last time I checked they were linked to the regulations.gov, which in my opinion is a little harder to navigate. So I will follow up on that and make sure that they're more easily accessible through the doleta.gov/wioa webpage, and we'll label them as draft.

And I do know when we did the – a webinar back in August when the Information Collection Request was first made available for public comment, we posted all the resources on that webpage as well, the webcast page. And that's available on the Workforce3One site, the site that you're on right now. So I think you would have to do a search on state plan Information Collection Request or something like that, but we'll – I'll certainly follow up on this to make sure you can have easier access to these documents.

Okay. Do we have other questions we can answer? I think we got one question that we are not in a position to answer yet. So we won't do that one. The end of the day – here's a question. "At the end of the day if a state's combined plan is received by Department of Labor and Department of Education and found to be missing required content or otherwise not approvable, then what will happen?" It depends. The answer is it depends, and we don't know for sure.

Depending on what the content is and the timing of things, we would certainly reach out to the state if we found – we intend to do a first sort of completion check. So if content is obviously missing, we would reach back out to the state very quickly to try to work out something so that you can get that content in in time. So we will try to work with the state on that, but I cannot give a definitive answer on decisions related to approval or disapproval at this time.

MS. VER BRYCK BLOCK: I would just add we're creating a matrix here across all six core programs plus the up to 11 partner programs of staff and management who will be involved in the review of the plan so that we can be as efficient as possible in the window that we have to review the plans.

And it would be a good idea on the state side to make sure that, after you submit the plan or as you're developing your plan, you have the same kind of coordination of who the key people are so that at the time we reach back out, if something is missing or needs clarification, it can be handled as efficiently as possible in the limited window that we have to review the plan.

MS. FLECK: Great. Thank you. I just want to say this webinar was scheduled until 11:30. We'll take the questions that are up there right now, and then we are going to need to end the webinar for time. So question is, "The departments are making all of the plans available to the public through the portals. Shouldn't states be able to make their plans public in the format they choose?"

States certainly can make their plans available in any format they choose. We are not limiting your ability to do that. However, we are asking if you use the portal for submission of the state plan to the federal departments, and they will be made available. However, you can do fancy graphics or make it a document that you might use for marketing or something like that as well. That is your choice.

And can the portal – Jim, this is for you. "Can the portal be used for the state's public comment period prior to submission requirements?"

MR. DOYLE: The answer is no. We're not allowed to do that, and as much as we'd like to, even for testing purposes we are just simply not allowed to do that. And so that's why we're targeting the portal to go live once the final ICR has been published.

MS. FLECK: I guess if the public comment is occurring after the publication of the final ICR and the portal is available, would that – could states direct people to see the plan for public comment at the portal website?

MR. DOYLE: I see. For the plan –

(Crosstalk.)

MR. DOYLE: Yeah. The problem is is that until the plan has been submitted and approved by the different departments, the plan is not public. And so therefore, the – anybody who's viewing the plan while it's under development would have to have a password access to the plan. This is obviously to protect the states from having the information available to any user while they're developing the plan.

Of course the plans can be downloaded to a Word or a PDF version, and we'll talk about that more later on. So the state, if they choose to, while it's being developed prior to being approved

or submitted, they can download it and then post it in their own websites to make sure that they get some feedback from the public.

MS. FLECK: So thank you, Jim. Question here, "Since there is a delay in guidance and submission of state plans, will additional time be given to local plan submission requirements?" So I can answer this question only for the Title I part of the plan because I'm not familiar – as familiar with what's required for the other programs locally. But I just want to point out that the statute requires that local plans be aligned to the state plan, and otherwise there is no actual statutory deadline for when local plans need to be submitted to the state.

So Department of Labor does intend to put out guidance on local planning. However, we don't expect that too soon, just given our capacity to work on various things at the same time. But you – I just want to say this deadline is really mostly up to the state. We certainly wouldn't want it to be years into the future, but it can be reasonable, given the sequence of events that's going to happen.

And we are still getting a lot of questions in. We'll try to follow up later, to the extent possible, on these questions and get back to you on them. But we are out of time. And we want to thank my colleagues, Karla and Jim, at the Department of Education for joining us on this webinar today.

And thank you all for participating. Should you have further questions or comments or concerns, please reach out to your federal contacts for Department of Labor. That would be your regional office, and for Department of Education do we have contacts?

MR. DOYLE: For the VR program, please contact your state liaison assigned to RSA.

MS. VER BRYCK BLOCK: And if you have questions for adult ed, please contact your area coordinators or myself.

MS. FLECK: And if you have questions for other programs not represented, please use your normal channels of communication, and we're coordinating closely with all of those programs. So we will hopefully be able to get an answer back to you. All right. Thank you all very much, and this will be archived within a couple of days.

(END)