

Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program (WIPA)

Non-Academic Program Review: Self-Study Report

Introduction

The Social Security Disability program authorized under Title 11 of the Social Security Act is currently the largest federal program providing cash payments for people with disabilities who are unable to work. The Social Security Administration (SSA) administers two programs under the Social Security Act that provides benefits to people with disabilities: (1) Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and (2) Supplemental Security Income (SSI). In recent years, one of the primary concerns for the Social Security Administration and disability policy makers is the expansion of the Social Security Disability program coupled with the low employment rates of adults with disabilities; in 2010, only 31.3% of adults with disabilities (ages 21 – 64) were employed in New York State, compared to 74.7% of adults without disabilities who were employed.¹ Additionally, poverty rates among individuals with disabilities are extremely high, with nearly 1 in 3 SSDI beneficiaries and 3 in 4 SSI beneficiaries living under the poverty thresholds.

Congress has taken several steps to attempt to address these obstacles to employment, during the past two decades. In 1999 congress enacted the Ticket to Work Law (TTW), which was intended to assist disability beneficiaries in obtaining and retaining employment and potentially bringing about significant savings to the Disability Insurance Trust Fund.

In 2006, as a component to the Ticket to Work Law, Congress appropriated \$23 million in funding to the SSA for the purpose of establishing and supporting the Work Incentives planning and Assistance (WIPA) program. When the WIPA program was launched in 2006, cooperative agreements were awarded to 99 organizations in 49 states²; one of the cooperative agreements was awarded to the City University of New York (CUNY), thus launching the WIPA program housed at Hostos Community College (part of CUNY). (For more detailed background information about the roots of the WIPA program, please see *Appendix A*).

Overview of the Current WIPA Program

In 2006, the Division of Continuing Education and Workforce Development, within Hostos Community College, was awarded a collaborative agreement, by the SSA, to implement the CUNY WIPA program.

However, congressional funding for the national WIPA programs expired on June 30, 2012 and Congress did not reauthorize funding to support the program. In May 2013, Congress reauthorized appropriations for the WIPA Program. Thus, the current WIPA program at Hostos Community College was re-established for FY2013-2015 and the program received funding to expand WIPA services beyond the borough of the Bronx (where services were previously

1 - Source: Calculations by Cornell University, Employment and Disability Institute, 2010 American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS).

2 - Source: Mathematica Policy Research Inc., 2009

focused) to the additional boroughs of Manhattan and Staten Island. As a result of this interruption to the WIPA program, the remainder of this self-study report will focus on the goals, outcomes, and structure of the WIPA program as it currently exists and not on the program that existed prior to its closing in June 2012.

WIPA Activities during Initial Intake:

The WIPA program exists to serve the population of persons with disabilities in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island and help them accomplish their goals to enter or re-enter the workforce, reduce their reliance on disabilities benefits, and become independent. The SSA has tasked WIPA with delivering 4 broad categories of services:

1. Work incentives planning, including written documentation for beneficiaries, outlining their employment options and developing long-term supports that may be needed to ensure a beneficiary's success;
2. Work incentives assistance;
3. Work incentives education, marketing, and recruitment of beneficiaries; and
4. Outreach services.

Beneficiaries learn about the WIPA program in several ways, including through the national Work Incentives Information and Referral Center (WIIRC)³, WIPA outreach, SSA field offices, social service agency referrals, and direct advertising. WIPA activities begin when the client calls requesting WIPA services. For WIPA services to be delivered in an efficient manner, all initial requests for services are documented in the Initial Contact and Demographic Form (see *Appendix B* for a copy of the form). In addition to collecting all the information necessary to determine beneficiary eligibility to receive WIPA services, the intake form also collects information to determine how the beneficiary learned about WIPA services so that the program may use this information to assess the effectiveness of its outreach activities.

Beneficiary inquiries and staff responses are collected by the data collection system that houses all beneficiary information, Efforts-to-Outcomes (ETO). The information collected is used to evaluate and monitor program activities; analyze staff counseling and program achievement; and track beneficiaries' employment outcomes.

Work Flow:

A centralized telephone intake system is established to screen all participant initial requests, to determine what level of WIPA services the beneficiary needs and to facilitate providing timely service to long distance beneficiaries. The initial intake determines the caller's eligibility to receive WIPA services, in which Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) collect responses to the following questions (See "Personnel, Facilities, and Resources" section for more information about CWICs):

- What is the caller's pressing need or concern?
- How closely do those needs align with the mission of the WIPA program?

³ WIIRC is an adjunct operation to the Ticket to Work call center that functions as an intermediary service, screening and refining referrals to WIPA projects to ensure that beneficiary referrals are appropriate.

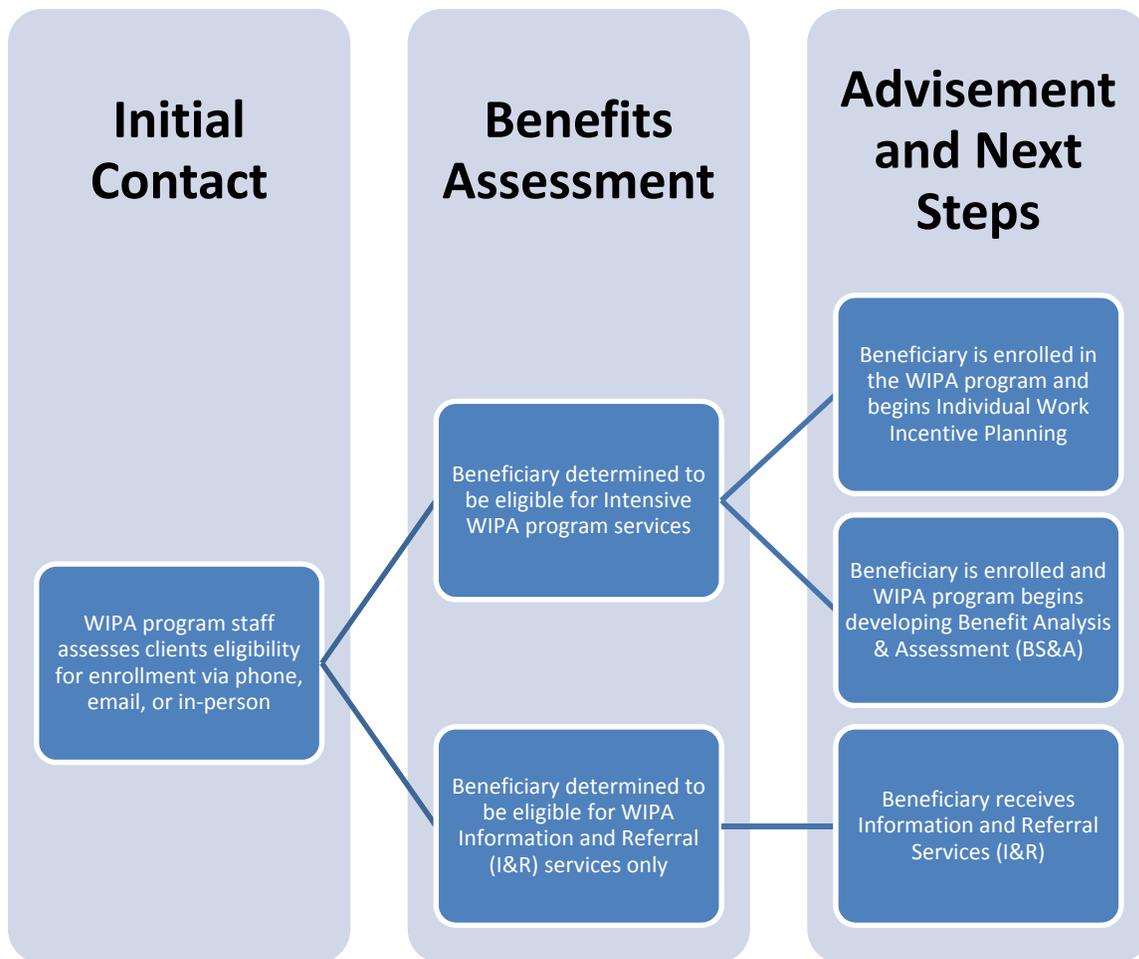
- What type of intensity and duration of WIPA services would best meet the caller’s presiding needs?

The answers to these questions provide guidance in terms of establishing the WIPA service(s) to be provided; short, interim, or long-term outcomes; and the priority level of the caller. The 2 primary services offered by the WIPA program are:

1. Information and Referral Services (I&R)
2. Individual Work Incentive Planning and Assistance

Figure 1, below, provides a visualization of the flow of services within the WIPA program from the clients’ point of initial contact.

Figure 1. WIPA Program Flow of Services



For those beneficiaries demonstrating basic need for *Information and Referral (I&R)*, the CWICs answer the clients’ questions and provide the appropriate referrals (if necessary); fill-out the WIPA Intake Form and collect basic information to be recorded in the ETO system; and follow-up by mailing beneficiaries WIPA’s general information. CWICs will create a Beneficiary record folder, which will include notes on the materials being mailed to the beneficiary (i.e. general WIPA information, WIPA program welcome letter, program Fact Sheet, and other supplemental

information). Short-term outcomes of this service include increased knowledge about SSA work incentives and other work supports; decreased fear and uncertainty about work; and increased interest in work by providing contact with employment supports.

In contrast to I&R services, eligible beneficiaries who require more individualized, in depth-services are enrolled to receive *Individual Work Incentive Planning and Assistance*. These services focus on the beneficiary work goals to obtain employment, increase income, and eventually decrease dependence upon SSA cash assistance. A longer-term work incentives planning and management process focuses on assisting beneficiaries to use work incentives to enter or increase employment and other incentives as they begin to work. The CWIC sends a package containing a welcome letter, highlighting information required to initiate individualized counseling.

A beneficiary record folder is created and the beneficiary is assigned a CWIC who must first verify the benefits received by the beneficiary from the local SSA field office. After this information has been obtained and verified a CWIC will schedule a face to face meeting with the beneficiary to provide them with an individualized work incentives analysis to include the potential impact of the beneficiary earnings on the SSA disability benefits and state, local, and federal benefits eligibility and on their overall economic wellbeing. The face to face meeting also serves to initiate WIPA long-term support, which incorporates the work incentives monitoring, management, and periodic reassessment and problem solving and advocacy, which encompasses assistance in resolving problems related to employment or making referrals to employment supports.

For eligible beneficiaries who are deemed in need of intensive counseling and work incentives planning, CWICs develop a *Benefit Analysis & Assessment (BS&A)*. The BS&A is a formal report intended to provide the beneficiary with a clear summary of current benefits and “case-specific” information about their benefits situation and provides advice about how to leverage work incentives to achieve their occupational goal that might be used either at the present time or in the future. Based on the findings in the BS&A report and discussions with the beneficiary, the CWIC may develop a work incentive plan that lays out specific actions for the beneficiary to follow.

WIPA Program Mission, Goal, and Objectives

The primary goal of the national WIPA program is to prepare SSA disability beneficiaries to join the workforce, increase employment and wages, and become financially independent members of society by proactively encouraging them to use work incentives and employment supports.

The WIPA Program has the following objectives that are intended to help guide the program in its operational capacity to fulfill its mission:

- To offer accurate information guidance and direct support to assist beneficiaries of Social Security Supplemental Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) residing in the Bronx, Manhattan, or Staten Island, age 14 to retirement age who are already working, ready to return to work or seeking employment;

- To assist SSA disability beneficiaries to develop employment and economic self-sufficiency goals that will enable them to successfully reduce or eliminate their need for disability benefits and lead their self-chosen lifestyle goal;
- To connect disabled beneficiaries with the specific services and supports they need to obtain and maintain paid employment; and
- To provide support and guidance in how to navigate the multiple systems involved in achieving their goal to obtain and maintain employment and self-sufficiency.

Outcomes Assessment

As previously mentioned, data for the WIPA program are recorded in a web-based software system called ETO (Efforts-to Outcomes), which has an interface specially created for the WIPA program. The ETO system provides a common reporting mechanism for all WIPA programs across the United States. The system captures information about program participants⁴ such as:

- demographics;
- types of benefits received;
- recommendations of WIPA staff members regarding the use of work incentives and other employment supports;
- follow-up actions; and
- beneficiaries' education and employment outcomes.

All client information and client interactions (e.g. counseling session notes, employment follow-up, etc.) are stored in ETO. The data that are stored and tracked in the ETO system enables the WIPA program to keep client contact information updated; assess the efficacy of staff counseling services; generate program reports, which are used to monitor program activities quarterly and ensure that the program is on track to meeting outcomes; etc.

The anticipated outcomes for the WIPA program are based on national objectives set by the Social Security Administration and specific benchmarks SSA expects to be carried out by each program in order to maintain and improve services, as well as to document the amount and quality of assistance and support the program provides to beneficiaries.

The predetermined benchmarks for FY2013-2015 requires the WIPA program to accomplish the following things:

- Enroll a minimum of 100 eligible beneficiaries in the WIPA program (per CWIC) during the course of a 12 month period.
- 90% of the enrolled beneficiaries must receive information and referral (I&R) services.
- 70% of the beneficiaries receiving I&R information should receive comprehensive WIPA services.

4 - During the initial years of the WIPA program, the largest numbers of individuals participating in WIPA were participants of the CUNY Youth Transition Demonstration Project (CUNY YTDP)—a seven year national research and demonstration project funded by SSA to prepare Bronx youth with disabilities who receive disability benefits to achieve maximum independence and economic self-sufficiency. (For more information about the CUNY YTDP project and its outcomes see *Appendix C*).

- 60% of beneficiaries receiving comprehensive WIPA services should have a complete Benefits and Summary Analysis (BS&A).

To date, the WIPA program has enrolled 91 beneficiaries and has provided comprehensive WIPA services to 33 beneficiaries.

Several challenges directly related to re-establishing the new WIPA program have accounted for the programs current results.

Staffing was, and continues to be, the biggest challenge. Although the program was restarted in August 2013, and all program staff was hired by the end of September, the newly hired staff did not obtain SSA level five suitability clearance and the provisional CWIC certifications required to provide direct WIPA services until January 2014.

During the initial program period from August to December, the program director's main activities were concentrated on the following: developing the program implementation policies and procedure WIPA's Marketing Plan and the CWIC performance appraisal task and standards. CWIC's activities during this period were primarily concentrated on taking the necessary training and passing the requirements to receive provisional CWIC certification and on conducting program marketing and outreach activities.

Another challenge is that the ETO database, that is used to not only house beneficiary information but to also receive referrals, was not available for program use until the end of April 2014, making it difficult to receive referrals and conduct outreach to recruit beneficiaries in need of services. It should be noted that the SSA is fully aware of these and several other challenges and will take them into consideration as it reviews the outcomes of the WIPA program in its first year of operation (see "SWOT Analysis" section for more information about these challenges and potential future directions).

External Partnerships and Collaborations

In order to fulfill WIPA's mission to promote employment and enhance beneficiary opportunity for self-sufficiency, interagency collaboration is an essential component. WIPA's collaborations and partnerships support the implementation of outreach efforts to potential clients and the general operation of the program. In order to support WIPA's efforts to reach out to and provide services to individuals with disabilities, the program has successfully developed innovative partnerships with the following agencies that provide different types of employment services (see *Appendix E* for more information about each of WIPA's partners):

- ACCESS Vocational Rehabilitation Programs
- One Stop Workforce Center,
- The Goodwill,
- SSA regional and local field offices,
- NYS Mental Office for Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities,
- NYC Department of Education District 75,
- Bronx Independent Living Service,

- Justice Center for the Protection of People with Disabilities,
- local Human Resources Administration Field Offices, and
- Housing and Food Stamps Field Offices

Our various partners support the work of the WIPA program by referring beneficiaries to WIPA projects; providing office space to enable Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWICs) to meet with beneficiaries who reside in Manhattan and Staten Island (away from the WIPA program's main office); participating in trainings on work incentives provided by CWICs and imparting this knowledge to the agencies' clientele; and by expanding WIPA's capacity to screen potential WIPA beneficiaries, conduct intake, and provide basic benefits information before referring high-priority or complex cases to the CWICs.

Customer Analysis

WIPA's target population for FFY 2013-2015 is SSA disability beneficiaries age 14 to retirement age⁵, residing in the boroughs of the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island who are employed, seriously seeking employment, or participating in educational activities with a projected employment outcome.

During the initial administration of the WIPA program (until the program experienced a pause from June 2012 until May 2013), WIPA services were only targeted to the population of the county of the Bronx. The 15th congressional district of New York State (the South Bronx), where the Hostos WIPA program is located, is statistically characterized as the third most densely populated and poorest congressional district (as measured by median household income) in the nation. This area is also characterized with high poverty rates (37.4% of all families live below federal poverty level) and low level of educational attainment (17% of the population has any higher education degree).⁶

In the target boroughs that the WIPA program serves, persons with disabilities often experience high poverty rates and low level of educational attainment, which make it even more challenging for persons with disabilities to secure employment. In New York State only 16.1% of persons with disabilities hold a higher education degree compared to 36.1% of persons without disabilities. With regards to poverty, 28.3% of persons with disabilities live below the poverty level, which is higher than the 11.7% of persons without disabilities who live below poverty.⁷ Although data from the ETO system are still in the process of being accessed, a cursory examination of WIPA beneficiary data show that a majority of beneficiaries served (approximately 51.6%) are unemployed and seeking employment.

Personnel, Facilities, and Resources

5 - Full retirement age in the United States had been 65 for many years. However, beginning with people born in 1938 or later, that age gradually increases until it reaches 67 for people born after 1959. (source: <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/ageincrease.htm>).

6 - Data are from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-12 American Community Survey 3-year estimate.

7 - Source: Calculations by Cornell University, Employment and Disability Institute, 2010 American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS).

Personnel:

The WIPA program—housed within the Continuing Education and Workforce Development (CEWD) Division in Hostos Community College—is overseen by the Assistant Dean of the Division. The Assistant Dean of CEWD acts as In-Kind Principal Investigator for the program. The program is directly run by the Program Director (who provides leadership, coordination of efforts, management, and supervision) and supported by 2 Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs).

The CWICs are SSA nationally certified service providers that deliver accurate and comprehensive information on disability benefit programs and current work incentives. They educate beneficiaries about SSA work incentives, work closely with SSA Local Field Offices and beneficiaries to utilize work incentives and make referrals to employment networks and other community partners. CWICs are the frontline staff members that deliver services to WIPA’s target population and are, thus, the foundation of the WIPA program.

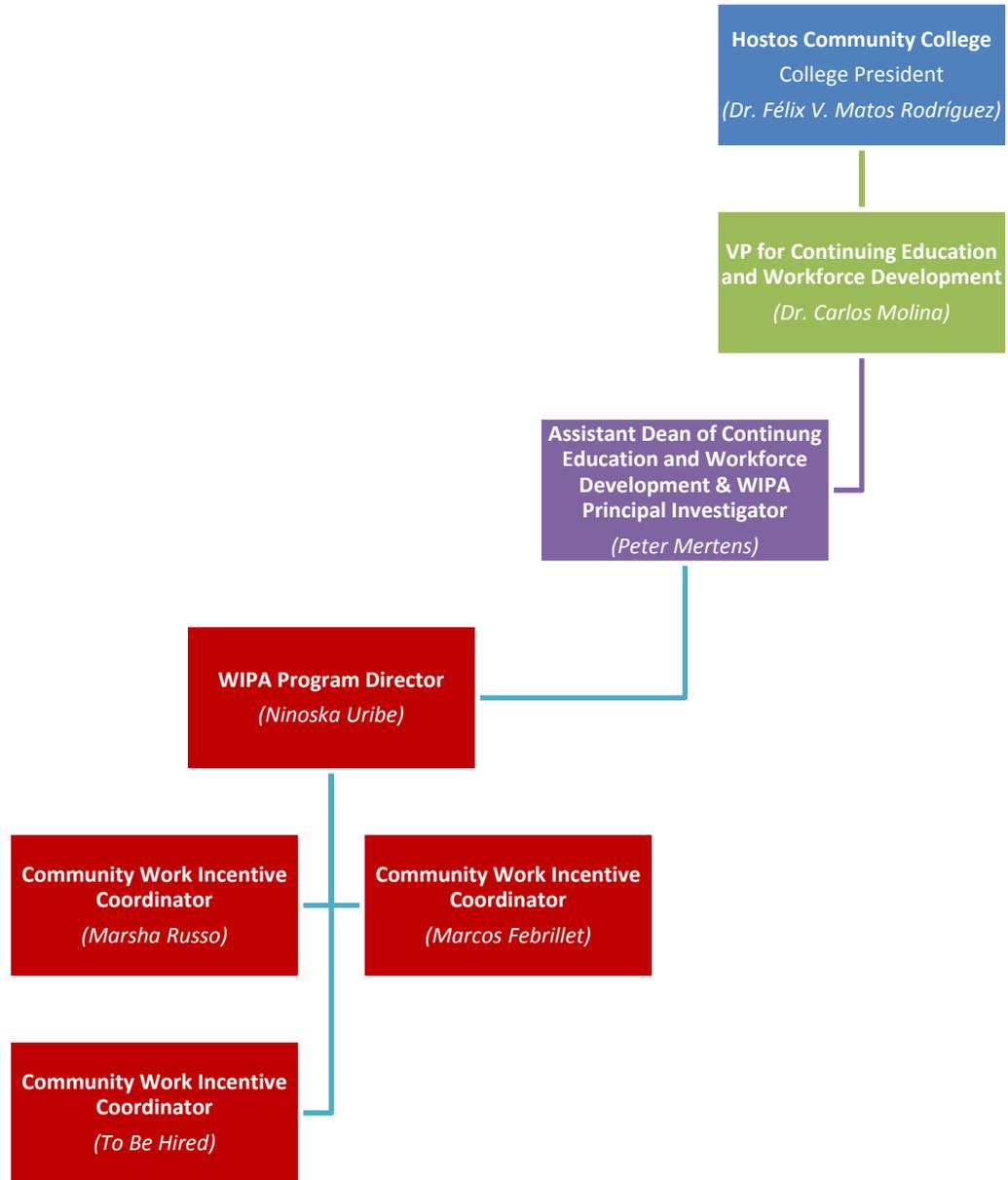
To ensure that services are equitably provided throughout the 3 target boroughs (Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island), CWICs are assigned to provide services as follows⁸:

- 1 CWIC is assigned to lower Manhattan and Staten Island and
- 1 CWICs are assigned to the Bronx and upper Manhattan.

Additionally, all WIPA staff members are bilingual in order to ensure that work incentives planning and assistance and outreach services are accessible to the large Spanish-speaking population in the Bronx and upper Manhattan. (For more information about the roles and responsibilities of the Principal Investigator, Program Director, and CWICs, please see *Appendix F*). Figure 2, below, illustrates the organizational structure of the WIPA program as it relates to the structure of the college and the division of CEWD.

8 - The Program Director also provides direct service to beneficiaries as needed.

Figure 2. Organizational Chart



Facilities:

The WIPA program is located in the Continuing Education and Workforce Development building located at 560 Exterior Street. WIPA's new location in the CEWD building provides the program with a significant amount of personnel and other resources/supports that were not available to the program in its former location. Within the new location the program now has access to a specialized team of professionals available to refer WIPA beneficiaries, when needed, to professionals such as a Social Worker. In addition, beneficiaries have direct access to the Workforce Development and Continuing Education Coordinators of the myriad vocational training and educational programs offered by the Division.

One primary challenge of the current facilities is the lack of private meeting space for the CWICs. To effectively deliver services, the WIPA program is mandated to offer a great level of privacy to ensure confidentiality during beneficiaries' interviews; this is more easily achieved when interviews are conducted in private offices. Until the closing of the program in 2012, WIPA staff implemented services in two private offices within CEWD, which were assigned to the program. However, the program's new location has a limited number of private offices available within the new building. The new physical setting of the CEWD division replaced the private offices used by staff with cubicles, which are not conducive to conducting confidential interviews.

The division plans to expand the physical facility to give serious considerations to the need for private offices for the WIPA program. Currently, to respond to this challenge, the program has made arrangements with collaborative agencies to conduct some of the counseling activities in offices provided to the program by the partner agencies. Thus, interviews are conducted through scheduled appointments, utilizing the space made available to WIPA by collaborating organizations, such as ACCESS-VR (See the "Future Directions and Recommendations" section of this report for more information about how WIPA plans to address this challenge).

Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

Strengths

One of the program's greatest strengths lies with the core of its professional staff: The Community Work Incentives Coordinators. The CWICs are nationally certified (by Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), under contract with SSA) service providers who have the extensive knowledge and expertise needed to assist beneficiaries to use SSA work incentives. As previously mentioned, the fact that all CWICs are bilingual (Spanish and English) is a great asset that allows the program to support the large Spanish-speaking demographic in the Bronx and Upper Manhattan.

Another strength of the program is that WIPA is housed in the Division of CEWD within Hostos Community College. Housing the program at the college provides program beneficiaries with the unique advantage of having direct access to an educational institution offering career, continuing education, technical training, and workforce development programs where they can acquire the skills to enhance their opportunity to obtain and maintain employment. This is beneficial because

many WIPA beneficiaries have the abilities and long term aspirations for working and learning as adults and the majority of these beneficiaries (young adults and adults alike) are seeking opportunities to participate in educational or training activities that could enhance their opportunities for employment. Thus, beneficiaries who seek educational resources as a means for economic improvement can be easily referred by the WIPA program to the myriad programs that the college offers.

Barriers to the Fulfillment of Program Objectives:

Social Security beneficiaries seeking employment for the first time are faced with multiple barriers and ongoing challenges. One of the greatest challenges for beneficiaries is that many of them have minimal work histories due to prior or current severe health conditions. Furthermore, a large number of beneficiaries do not have the basic work skills or even possess a high school diploma that are often required for the majority of entry level positions. This situation is exacerbated by the limited opportunities available to beneficiaries with disabilities to access vocational training and on-the-job training opportunities that could prepare them to re-enter the work force or sustain employment. Additionally, most of the existing education and skills development programs require payment of tuition and registration fees, which most of the time beneficiaries do not have the income or financial support to pay. To help mitigate this barrier WIPA program staff constantly seek free or low-cost opportunities in which beneficiaries may be able to engage.

As mentioned earlier, one of the primary challenges for fulfilling the objectives of the program are related to re-establishing the program. Staffing challenge although, all program staff had been hired by the end of September. The newly hired staff attended the VCU initial training, during the month of September. WIPA direct services to beneficiaries began by the January 2014, after two of the program staff obtained level five suitability clearance and the VCU provisional CWIC certifications.

Having one CWIC resign soon thereafter completing provisional certification made it difficult to administer services to the target number of beneficiaries. This is compounded by the fact that the CWICs are still in the process of being nationally certified, which means time that could be used serving clients still needs to be spent in training.

Another challenge is that the ETO database, which is used to not only house beneficiary information but to also receive referrals, was not available for program use until the end of April 2014; thus, staff has only been able to use the system since May 2014 and no staff has yet received the proper training in how to utilize the database particularly to assess program outcomes by extracting crucial reports. This has made it difficult to assess the progress of the WIPA program until recently.

During the initial program period from, August to December, the program director's main activities were concentrated on the following: developing the program implementation policies and procedure WIPA's Marketing Plan and the CWIC performance appraisal task and standards. CWIC's activities during this period were basically concentrated on the VCU training and passing requirements; to receive provisional CWIC certification, and conducting program marketing and outreach activities.

However, the vision for the WIPA program is to have the program infrastructure in place by having hired a new CWIC/administrative assistant to support the program, having all staff receive training in utilizing ETO, etc. by the end of summer 2014. This will allow the WIPA program to move toward meeting the program objectives and better serving the population of persons with disabilities to make their way into employment.

Opportunities

Through analyzing the various strengths and challenges of the WIPA program, several opportunities for program growth and amelioration have presented themselves.

Having WIPA housed within Hostos Community College—and thus part of CUNY’s network of colleges—offers the program the unique opportunity to potentially serve students with disabilities not just at Hostos Community College, but throughout CUNY. There are myriad students with disabilities across all of CUNY’s colleges who could benefit from the services and information provided by WIPA. This potential opportunity to better serve students manifested from an analysis of the demographics of the clients that WIPA currently serve, many of whom are young SSA disability beneficiaries and transition-aged youth.

Being housed within a higher education institution Hostos Community College within the City University of New York, the WIPA program has identified the unique opportunity to expand service delivery to college students and transition-aged youth who are SSA disability beneficiaries. There is a great opportunity to education and serve college students with disabilities about the incentives that are available to them as they begin to think about their post-college job and career prospects.

Future Directions and Recommendations

Based on WIPA’s SWOT analysis, the program’s future direction will undertake two major efforts:

1. Focus on securing space/resources to deliver individual “face-to-face” services to the new target population in the newly designated boroughs
2. Provide WIPA services to young SSA disabilities beneficiaries, specifically college students and transition-aged youth

Efforts to Deliver WIPA Services within the Newly Designated Boroughs of Manhattan and Staten Island

WIPA’s strategic planning for years 2013-2015 and the continuation of the program will focus on further expanding the scope of work and planned activities needed to respond to the identified challenges of delivering WIPA appropriate services to the new target population—SSA disability beneficiaries residing in the boroughs of Manhattan and Staten Island—in addition to continuing to provide services to the Bronx target population.

To respond to the challenge of this expansion, WIPA's method of service delivery has been reviewed and the new program delivery procedures now incorporate a toll-free 800 telephone line to receive all initial calls from beneficiaries requesting WIPA services. The new procedure also includes long distance counseling services using the telephone, internet, and email to eliminate privacy challenges. Participant face-to-face contact will continue to be performed through scheduled appointments, using the space provided to WIPA by collaborating organizations, such as ACCESS-VR and CUNY in the Heights.

In the coming year WIPA will expand the program's outreach and marketing activities to enhance WIPA's partnerships and collaborations with agencies, organizations, and community based organizations (CBOs) serving people with disabilities within Manhattan and Staten Island. Currently, the program is in the process of developing a comprehensive marketing and outreach initiative to better coordinate WIPA outreach activities in the target boroughs. WIPA has established internal guidelines for the selection of agencies and organizations to conduct WIPA presentations, giving priority to agencies providing training and employment activities to people with disabilities.

By a collaborative agreement with ACCESS-Rehabilitation State agencies, WIPA will conduct monthly presentations to SSA disabilities beneficiaries participating in ACCESS Rehabilitation, job training, and employments activities; in exchange ACCESS-VR will allocate space for WIPA to provide face-to-face counseling services at ACCESS-VR centers in East Harlem, Lower Manhattan and Staten Island.

Providing WIPA Services to Young SSA Disabilities Beneficiaries, Specifically College Students and Transition-Aged Youth

WIPA's future directions give significant emphasis to improving the level of participation of CUNY students with disabilities in WIPA. To start this initiative WIPA will seek to establish collaboration with CUNY's department for students with disabilities, specifically within WIPA's target boroughs. WIPA plans to provide program presentations to the department heads in order to develop collaborative partnerships; it is the hope that through these partnerships departments may provide crucial and beneficial information about work incentives and the services that WIPA provides to students with disabilities e.g. information about WIPA services could potentially be included in initial orientations provided to new students with disabilities at the beginning of the school year.

WIPA will develop an intensive marketing and outreach campaign to introduce the WIPA program to Hostos Community Colleges and other CUNY community colleges that have a large number of registered students with disabilities.

One of the primary efforts to provide WIPA services to young SSA disability beneficiaries will entail working with the LEADS program at Hostos Community College in order to improve coordination of services to students with disabilities within the college. The LEADS program at Hostos (and at each CUNY school) provides students with disabilities registered in the program with individualized counseling, support, and guidance services in very specific areas such as: academic advisement, career counseling, résumé preparation, internship assistance, interview preparation and job seeking assistance.

Although both WIPA and the LEADS program offer essential services to people with disabilities registered at the college, there is currently no coordination of services between the two programs. Studies of programs and policies have demonstrated that regardless of improved access for people with disabilities to employment, and despite increasing their educational attainment, the employment rate of and education levels of young adults with disabilities lags behind their peers without disabilities.⁹ It is the hope of WIPA that through better coordination of services between WIPA and the LEADS program, students with disabilities will experience greater outcomes.

WIPA anticipates that better coordination with the LEADS program and with other CUNY schools could have several benefits for students with disabilities, including:

- Continuity of support for students with disabilities post-graduation,
- Increased capacity to mitigate barriers to self-sufficiency such as delayed personal/professional development and lack of understanding of rules and regulations surrounding employment activities of beneficiaries¹⁰, and
- An increase in the rates of entry into the workforce of students with disabilities.

9 - Source: Lessons for Programs Serving Transition-Aged Youth, 2013.

10 - Young people with disabilities face multiple barriers accessing often fragmented adults services. Upon graduation from college or vocational training, people with disabilities encounter additional barriers seeking employment due to their health conditions and (often) delayed personal development. In addition, many people with disabilities may find out that they do not have the skills or background to find employment on their own. Those who obtain employment may require additional support to help them transition to self-independence and maintain employment.

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Appendix A

Background History Leading up to the Social Security Administration Launching the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program (WIPA)

The Social Security Disability program authorized under Title 11 of the Social Security Act is currently the largest federal program providing cash payments for people with disabilities. The Social Security Administration (SSA) administers two programs under the Social Security Act that provides benefits to people with disabilities: (1) Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and (2) Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Established in 1956, Disability Insurance (SSDI) is an insurance program that provides benefits to workers who become unable to work because of a long-term disability. Workers who have paid into the Social Security Trust Fund are insured under this program.

Created in 1972, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is an income assistance program that provides cash benefits for disabled, blind, or aged people who have low income. SSI serves people with disabilities on the basis of need, regardless of whether they have paid into the Social Security Trust Fund. Some disability recipients receive both SSDI and SSI benefits because of the low level of their income and resources.

The Social Security disability programs SSDI and SSI are currently the largest federal programs currently providing cash payments to people with disabilities. For several years the SSA, has been evaluating the rapid growth of Social Security disability benefits and the increased cost for SSA to support these programs. From 2006 to December 2008 benefits payments from Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI increased from \$99.1 billion in 2006 to \$106.3 billion in 2008, and SSI total disability payments were in excess of \$43 billion during the same period (SSA Annual Statistical Supplement, 2009).

Expansion of the disability program coupled with the poor employment rates of adults with disabilities have become major concerns for Social Security and disability policy makers across the country. Although about 40% of all SSA disability beneficiaries are "work oriented", beneficiaries who have a clear goal to enter or re-enter the workforce and become self-sufficient despite their health conditions face significant obstacles when attempting to secure employment. It is estimated that 2.7 million beneficiaries have work goals; an additional 2.6 million beneficiaries generally SSI beneficiaries are employed or are looking for work, attempting to obtain employment for the first time. This also includes those who are attempting to work after acquiring a severe injury or debilitating illness (usually SSDI beneficiaries) (Kregel, 2001).

Many of these individuals are currently employed, receiving vocational training, or have recently engaged in job seeking activities. However, many beneficiaries who are capable and desire to work are far too often choosing not to work (or are leaving employment) due to fear of losing their benefits. They restrict their earnings in the face of disruptive overpayments or termination of benefits in addition to the perceived risk of losing health care benefits and other federal supports, which are essential to meeting their basic needs.

Poverty rates among individuals with disabilities are extremely high, with nearly one in three SSDI beneficiaries and three in four SSI beneficiaries living under the poverty thresholds. In an attempt to address these obstacles to employment, during the past two decades, congress has taken several steps. In 1999 congress enacted the Ticket to Work Law. The Ticket to Work Law (TTW) was intended to assist disability beneficiaries in obtaining and retaining employment and potentially bringing about significant savings to the Disability Insurance Trust Fund by reducing or eliminating their benefits.

The TTW objectives focus on:

- (1) Eliminating a number of the major statutory and regulatory disincentives to employment in the SSA legislation and regulations
- (2) Supporting beneficiaries as they prepare for work, enter employment, and increase their earnings to levels that trigger reductions in benefit payments
- (3) Enabling access to alternative sources of vocational training, job placement, and employment support services
- (4) Allowing beneficiaries to maintain health care coverage while they transition off of federal cash benefits.

As a component to the Ticket to Work Law, Social Security Administration (SSA) received \$23 million in congressional funding to support the WIPA program. SSA launched the WIPA program on September 30, 2006 by awarding cooperative agreements to 99 organizations in 49 states. Five additional agreements were awarded in early 2007, increasing the total number of WIPA projects to 104 and enabling the program to cover every state and territory of the U.S. (Mathematic Policy Research Inc., 2009).

Appendix C

Outcomes Assessment – CUNY Youth Transition Demonstration Project

The CUNY YTDP was a seven year national research and demonstration project funded by SSA. The purpose of the project was to prepare Bronx youth with disabilities who receive SSA disability benefits to achieve maximum independence and economic self-sufficiency. WIPA was one of the key elements in the implementation of the project by providing benefits counseling and planning to the youth who participated in the project.

Collaboration with the CUNY Youth Transition Demonstration Project offered WIPA access to CUNY's resources and public and private partners participating in the project and, in return, the collaboration allowed CUNY YTDP to expand its benefits planning expertise by significantly increasing the project's access to SSA-funded training resources, additional staff, and greater visibility in the community. In addition, the on-going benefits counseling and management services provided by WIPA to youth, as they began to increase their employment activities were strategically essential for the CUNY YTDP. By the end of YTDP in May 2010 the following outcomes were achieved:

- 403 youth in transition (15 -18 years old) were enrolled in WIPA
- 322 transition-age youth received intensive WIPA counseling, information referral and financial counseling
- 232 youth worked in paid employment (58 % of students served), part-time or after school employment
- 20 youth in the project enrolled in college
 - 13 youth enrolled in CUNY Community College; 7 enrolled in four year Colleges
- CUNY leveraged more than \$373,093 in earnings for YTDP youth engaged in summer work experiences.

In addition to experiences and the remuneration and benefits of employment, by participating in WIPA youth in transition and their parents received intensive counseling to help them understand the SSA policy and procedures for the SSI Age 18 Re-determination process, applicable to youth as they transition to SSA adult classification. Most importantly, beneficiary and their parents learn about the many work incentives SSA offers to disabled beneficiaries working, pursuing career options, and/or attending school or educational training programs leading to self-sufficiency (Thompson A. 2011). Youth with disabilities also learned about some SSA work incentives available to them (see *Appendix D*).

Appendix D

SSA Work Incentives for Transitional Youth with Disabilities

Incentive	Description
Students Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE)	Allows SSI beneficiaries under the age 22 and regularly attending school to exclude a specific amount of their gross income earned per month to a maximum annual exclusion, in a way such that the amount of countable income that SSA consider while calculating SSI beneficiary monthly check is reduced, therefore, permitting SSI recipients to keep more money when they work. This benefit allows students with disabilities to test their ability to work without experiencing reduction in SSI check at all.
Participation in a Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)	Allows beneficiaries to set aside money, countable income or resources to pay for goods or services needs in order to achieve their work goal. In turn, SSA replaces the PASS expenditure by increasing the individual's SSI benefits payment.
Wavier of Continued Disability Review (CDR)	An SSA provision that allows benefit payments and waives the Continuation Medical Review to SSA disability beneficiary while they are participating in an appropriate training program or vocational services, employment services or other support services.
Age 18- SSI Redetermination	The SSA Age-18 Redetermination Policy applies only to youth who receive SSI as they transition to SSA adult classification. SSA Policy for the re-determination process is applicable when the beneficiary reaches the 18 th birthday; SSI eligibility is reviewed as if the person is applying for the first time as an adult.

Appendix E

Collaborative Partner Agencies and Community Based Organizations

ACCESS Vocational Rehabilitation Centers	ACCESS-VR starts with the presumption that all persons with disabilities can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services and should have opportunities to work in jobs integrated within their communities. VR Counselors guide individuals through service programs they need to reach their employment goals
One Stop Workforce1 Center	Assists beneficiaries in their early job search stages and who need a good and reliable job/resource.
Goodwill Industries Inc.	WIPA and Goodwill have a long history of strong collaboration and mutual referrals. Goodwill empowers individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment to gain independence through the power of work. Provide innovative support services that allow people to overcome barriers to full employment and achieve self-sufficiency
Social Security Regional and Local Field Offices Staff	SSA Area Work Incentives Coordinators and Work Incentives Liaison9 WIL) are the strongest collaborators with all WIPA programs. They are WIPAs direct liaison to SSA, providing assistance with field offices personnel on beneficiaries work-relates issues and processing of WIPA requested information to local SSA field offices.
NYS Mental Office for Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD)	The New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) is responsible for coordinating services for more than 126,000 New Yorkers with developmental disabilities. It provides services directly and through a network of approximately 700 nonprofit service providing agencies, with about 80 percent of services provided by the private nonprofits and 20 percent provided by state-run services.
NYC Department of Education District 75 School	WIPA’s strongest ally when serving Transition–age youths. District 75 school is a NYC Board of Education school system that provides citywide educational, vocational, and behavior support programs for students who have significant cognitive delays, or multiply disabilities. District 75 consists of 56 school organizations located at more than 310 sites in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, Staten Island and Syosset, New York.
Bronx Independent Living Service (BILS)	Bronx Independent Living Services (BILS) is a non-profit, community based organization dedicated to empowering, all people with disabilities to understand and exercise their civil and human rights in order to live fully integrated lives in mainstream society. BILS assists individuals by providing them the necessary tools to make informed decisions about their own lives through access to education, skills development, and access to the appropriate resources. BILS is also a Ticket to Work Employment Network, allowing WIPA to greatly refer Ticket holders to BILS
Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs	New York (Disability Advocates, Inc. (DRNY) is New York State’s designated agency providing protection of the rights of people with disabilities through legally based advocacy. Protection and Advocacy System and Client Assistance Program (P&A/CAP).
New York City Human Resources Administration/ Department of Social Services (HRA/DSS)	WIPA depends greatly on the information provided by HRA on benefits eligibilities for people with disabilities such as Food Stamps, established guidelines and changes and income levels for the different programs managed by programs

Appendix F

Roles and Responsibilities of WIPA Program Staff

The **Principal Investigator** is responsible for promoting organizational development in support of effective program delivery; overseeing organizational operations management; allocating resources; creating and fostering linkages with campus, staff and external groups; and facilitating and overseeing the submission and management of grants and contracts for the unit.

The **Program Director** is responsible for providing leadership, coordinating, managing, supervising and evaluating the implementation of the program; developing program priorities, objectives and staff plan of work; recruiting, hiring, and supervising the program staff; managing program documents and activities to meet reporting requirements; developing working relationships with SSA regional administrators and community collaborators; identifying and involving CEWD and Hostos faculty, and other external resources to support and sustain program efforts.

The foundation of the WIPA program is the **Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWIC)**: SSA nationally certified service providers that deliver accurate and comprehensive information on disability benefit programs and current work incentives. CWICs educate beneficiaries about SSA work incentives, work closely with SSA Local Field Offices and beneficiaries to implement work incentives and make referrals to Employment Networks and other community partners.

CWICs are required to actively partner with local service providers and employment support organizations, serving as a resource to a beneficiary's key stakeholders and support teams throughout the employment process. In addition to benefits planning, CWIC responsibilities include:

- Targeting services to beneficiaries who are employed or actively seeking work by prioritizing requests for service
- Providing long-term case management services to insure maximum use of work incentives throughout the course of a beneficiary's employment
- Conducting ongoing quality assurance to insure the program's success
- Working in close collaboration with community partners who provide employment assistance and supports

Appendix G

Program Outcomes for WIPA Program Prior to Program Closing in 2011

The predetermined benchmarks for FY2011-2012 required the WIPA program to do the following five things:

1. Enroll 35 new beneficiaries per quarter ¹¹
2. Provide individualized intensive WIPA services to 80% of the beneficiaries served by the program
3. Develop a Beneficiary Summary & Analysis (BS&A) for 60% of beneficiaries enrolled in the program
4. Provide follow-up services to beneficiaries after the initial intake
5. Serve a minimum of 110 beneficiaries for each funded staff member

Table 1, below, illustrates that in FY2011-2012 the WIPA program met (and in some cases exceeded) the program benchmarks set by SSA.

Table 1. WIPA Program Outcomes for FY2011-2012	
<i>Expected Outcomes</i>	<i>Actual Outcomes</i>
1. Enroll 35 new beneficiaries per quarter	1. 300 beneficiaries (total) were enrolled in the program.
2. Provide individualized intensive WIPA services to 80% of the beneficiaries served by the program	2. 238 beneficiaries received individualized intensive WIPA services (79.3% of total beneficiaries served)
3. Develop a Beneficiary Summary & Analysis (BS&A) for 60% of beneficiaries enrolled in the program	3. 185 beneficiaries received, Benefits Summary Analysis (BS&A) (61.6% of total beneficiaries served)
4. Provide follow-up services to beneficiaries after the initial intake	4. 581 Follow-up services were provided to beneficiaries after initial intake
5. Serve a minimum of 110 beneficiaries for each funded staff member	5. 150 beneficiaries, on average, were served by each funded staff member

¹¹ - SSA established the number of beneficiaries that must be newly enrolled into WIPA services each quarter by using a formula that calculates the cost of services by dividing 80% of the cost of the program by the number of beneficiaries served.