

This brief is the third in a series focusing on Employment First implementation as it relates to one of the seven elements within the High-Performing States in Integrated Employment model¹. It examines the background of circumstances under which Employment First efforts began in seven states, and introduces each state's values, mission, and goals around increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. States may use the lessons in this brief to develop an Employment First policy, or to evolve existing efforts.

Introduction

For more than a decade, many states have been developing policies that prioritize integrated employment as the first choice and preferred outcome for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD). Collectively, these actions have been united under the framework of Employment First, a commitment by states and state IDD agencies to the propositions that all individuals with IDD (a) are capable of performing work in typical integrated employment settings, (b) should receive as a matter of state policy employment-related services and supports as a priority over other facility-based and non-work day services, and (c) should be paid at minimum or prevailing wage rates^{2, 3}.

Each state has determined the priorities and scope of its Employment First policy. As states undergo implementation, it is important to understand how state agencies have built employment knowledge and capacity, and how state-level actions contribute to the success of both state and federal employment efforts.

Where the findings came from

The Institute for Community Inclusion framed the data collected on states' efforts to implement Employment First according to the High-Performing States in Integrated Employment Model, which sets out the key elements to effective employment systems change. While the model is comprised of seven individual elements (see Table 1), a change in one of the elements should influence and impact changes in each of the other elements. In this way, the model helps to explain the overall depth and scope of states' integrated employment improvement efforts. This brief looks at the training and technical assistance element in more depth.

Case study data was collected for a subsample of seven states: Connecticut (CT), Delaware (DE), Kansas (KS), Minnesota (MN), Missouri (MO), Tennessee (TN), and Washington (WA). These states were selected because they represent a wide range of implementation strategies, not necessarily because they were experiencing high rates of integrated employment.

¹Hall, A. C., Butterworth, J., Winsor, J., Gilmore, D., & Metzler, D. (2007). Pushing the employment agenda: Case study research of high performing states in integrated employment. *Intellectual and developmental disabilities*, 45, 182–198.

²Kiernan, W. E., Hoff, D., Freeze, S., & Mank, D. M. (2011). Employment first: A beginning not an end. *Intellectual and developmental disabilities*, 49, 300–304.

³Rogan, P., & Rinne, S. (2011). National call for organizational change from sheltered to integrated employment. *Intellectual and developmental disabilities*, 49, 248–260.

TABLE 1: ELEMENTS OF HIGH-PERFORMING STATES IN INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT MODEL

Leadership	Local and state level administrators are clearly identifiable as “champions” for employment.
Strategic goals and operating policy	State mission, goals and operating policies emphasize employment as a preferred outcome.
Financing and contracting methods	Funding mechanisms and contracts with providers emphasize employment as the preferred outcome.
Training and technical assistance	There is a sustained and significant investment in employment-related training and technical assistance.
Interagency collaboration and partnership	Through interagency agreements and relationships, provider collaboration, and outreach to stakeholders, employment is shared as a common goal.
Services and service innovation	The state IDD agency works to create opportunities for providers, individuals, and families to make optimum use of the resources available for employment; includes disseminating information related to creative strategies to support individuals in employment.
Performance measurement and data management	Comprehensive data systems that are used as a strategic planning tool to further the state’s goals of increasing employment.

Findings

Findings showed a range of state strategies for building capacity:

- Offering training on service definitions, guidelines, and related legislation
- Developing statewide infrastructures to support integrated employment
- Offering training on best practices in the provision of integrated employment supports
- Investing in professional credentialing for employment support professionals
- Building employment-related advocacy skills of individuals with IDD
- Providing opportunities for conference participation

Offering training on service definitions, guidelines, and related legislation.

Missouri’s IDD agency conducted statewide training on service definitions and individualized support plan guidelines for employment. MO also trained staff on the impact of the Center for Medicare and Medicaid’s Home and Community-Based Services community settings rule and pre-vocational guidance on employment, and national trends related to federal Department of Justice efforts to enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act and Olmstead ruling on employment services.

Developing statewide infrastructures to support integrated employment.

Beginning in 2011, the KS VR agency funded the Great Expectations Employment Initiative. Working with 12 employment providers in two areas of the state, the project looked at what interventions were needed at the individual, provider, and systems levels to improve integrated employment outcomes. The goal was to collect data on the challenges to employment at all three levels, and to use the data to make systematic changes to the service system.

The Minnesota Employment Learning Community (<https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/long-term-services-and-supports/minnesota-employment-learning-community/>), begun in 2014, is a partnership between the MN departments of Human Services, Employment and Economic Development and Education. The statewide initiative works to share knowledge and build support for Employment First in communities across the state.

MO’s Show-Me-Careers project (<https://ihd.umkc.edu/show-me-careers-missouris-transition-to-employment-collaborative/>), part of the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Partnerships in Employment grant, developed a framework to identify, expand, and share effective

school-to-work practices and guide local consortium efforts. The framework was also used to review and identify funding, policy, and other changes to expand these practices on a community and statewide basis. The practices are based on the guiding principles of the High-Performing States in Integrated Employment Model.

Offering training on best practices in providing integrated employment supports.

TN's state IDD agency requires training for employment support professionals on job development, job coaching, best practices in employment supports, customized employment, and Discovery. Regional employment and day service coordinators are also available to provide technical assistance to employment support professionals with billing, documentation, and customized employment, and with the Discovery process.

In CT, a one-time state-level allocation was offered to community rehabilitation providers to cover the costs of sending employment support professionals to training and pay for substitute staff. With assistance from the State Employment Leadership Network (www.selnhub.org/home), MO's IDD agency set requirements for mandatory training for vendor agencies providing employment services. MO has regional employment coordinators throughout the state who currently provide this training.

Investing in professional credentialing for employment support professionals.

In MO, the IDD agency and key partners such as the Show-Me-Careers project (described above) invested in increasing the competency of employment support professionals by offering free access to the web-based College of Employment Services (CES). CES is an accredited, self-directed suite of courses for employment support professionals (<http://directcourseonline.com/employment-services/>). All employment support professionals in the state have completed the CES training, and a quality enhancement process is in place to track compliance and ensure additional training in areas of challenge.

In WA, the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment (WISE) brokers most of the state's training and technical assistance. Their work is funded in part by the Washington State Developmental Disabilities Administration, counties and other partners. Through a partnership with the Washington Developmental Disabilities Administration, WISE offers online training to meet state certification requirements for employment professionals (www.gowise.org/training/wa-state-dda-online-courses/). WISE also has partnered with Highline Community College to develop and provide a certification program for employment support professionals. (www.gowise.org/what-we-do/highline-college/).

Building employment-related advocacy skills of people with IDD.

In CT, the IDD agency focused resources and attention on supporting the efforts of people with IDD. They are involved in the Youth Leadership Forum (www.ctyfp.org/), which provides training on self-advocacy and leadership skills to youth with IDD. In addition, the state IDD agency has collaborated with People First of CT to develop Employment Idol, a video series highlighting the experiences of people in integrated employment. The state IDD agency also supports ten self-advocacy coordinators, peer advocates working regionally with employment staff and service providers to promote employment.

Providing opportunities for conference participation.

In 2013, the Delaware IDD agency partnered with the Department of Education to attend the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center's Annual Capacity-Building Institute. Connecticut's IDD, vocational rehabilitation, and education agencies partnered to bring together providers, self-advocates and families for conferences that covered customized employment and benefits planning. During 2014 and 2015, MO developed and implemented a statewide Transition Training Institute, bringing together special education directors and teachers, general education administrators, counselors, and staff from the local VR and IDD agencies to learn evidence-based practices that improve transition services.

Lessons Learned

Focusing on improving a state IDD system's capacity related to implementing employment services can positively impact not only the quality of supports, but also the employment outcomes of individuals with IDD. The process of building a system's capacity to implement Employment First cannot be accomplished in one modality, at one time, or with one group of people; it requires a robust time, attention, and resource commitment.

Training on service definitions, guidelines, and related legislation as well as opportunities to participate in efforts to develop statewide infrastructures can take on many forms. This builds the knowledge of community stakeholders and providing stakeholders with the opportunity to be an active part of implementing Employment First.

Training for employment support professionals has been the focus of a number of states' efforts. Offering training on best practices in the provision of integrated employment supports and investing in professional credentialing for employment support professionals are strategies to improve the quality of employment services and supports.

People with IDD are directly impacted by Employment First, and therefore should be a focus of capacity-building efforts. States have engaged people with IDD through training on self-advocacy skills, developing peer-to-peer supports, and supporting participation in conferences.

Conclusion

Employment First paves the way for expanded employment opportunities for people with IDD. Training and technical assistance activities are an important secondary step towards improving the system's ability to provide high-quality employment services. As states implement Employment First, they must make and sustain investments in training and technical assistance in order to support statewide, integrated employment goals and facilitate long-term systems change.

ACCESS TO INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT

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