

State Agency Promising Practice

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Using Employment Data to Create Area-specific Employment Goals in Massachusetts

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Background

In 2002, the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) developed a contractual requirement that employment service provider performance be tracked through outcome measures. As a result, DDS shaped its employment data collection system to focus on what it viewed as key outcomes for measuring success around employment. A confluence of factors including participation in the National Core Indicator project, a new Request for Responses (RFR) for Employment Support Services that emphasized performance measurement, and DDS's intrinsic commitment to greater community employment supported the development of an employment data system that focused on individual outcomes. Data from this effort is now being used to help each area office create employment goals with their employment providers.

A confluence of factors including participation in the National Core Indicator project (a collaboration among participating National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disability Services member state agencies and the Human Services Research Institute that work to develop a systematic approach to performance and outcome measurement), a new Request for Responses (RFR) for Employment Support Services that emphasized performance measurement, and DDS's intrinsic commitment to greater community employment supported the development of an employment data system that focused on individual outcomes.

Implementation

In Massachusetts, individual-level employment data are reported for a 4-week period once per year in April. Providers are required to submit this annual data as part of their provider contracts. Data are collected on all individuals supported in DDS employment contracts (roughly 5,600-5,700 individuals served by approximately 100 providers), and include the number of hours worked and wages earned in individual community employment, group supported employment, and sheltered employment. Providers also report on the job retention of individuals in individual community and group supported employment (whether the person worked 10 of the past 12 months) and whether the individual entered a new individual community job during the year. Employment contracts fund both supported employment and sheltered employment services.

Since 2007, providers have received an annual report that provides a summary of data for their organization and comparison data for the region and the state as a whole. This feedback provides a management tool for providers. In at least one case this feedback led to the provider reevaluating its commitment to integrated employment and restructuring to focus resources on improving employment outcomes. Data has also been shared with DDS's regional quality councils, and has led to regional initiatives to improve employment outcomes.

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When DDS engages in its contract renewals at the area or regional level, the expectation is that data be used to assess outcomes and progress towards identified goals and to set goals for the upcoming contract year. In one DDS area, data has been used to develop criterion-based goals around the transition from school to work. One stakeholder from Massachusetts noted that the data encouraged the development of more concrete goals than had been developed previously. This suggests that the state is making use of its data to create measurable outcomes.

For FY 2009, each DDS area office established a measurable goal for improving employment outcomes, based on their area's previous data. Each area was required to identify and implement at least one strategy to support change. Strategies were varied and included focusing on transition age young adults, engaging families and residential staff, collaborating with other agencies and resources, building local capacity through training and technical assistance, strategic planning, and working with employers.

Impact

The data is important from both a strategic and program planning point of view in that it has been extremely helpful in informing and promoting conversation about employment. The data has not only been used at area and regional office levels to establish priorities and goals, but it has also supported decision making at the provider level as they receive current data about performance in relationship to the region and state.

Suggestions for Replication

- » Be clear about the goals of data collection initiatives.
- » Ensure that different areas and regions have opportunities to share one another's priorities and activities around employment.
- » Share the data with providers and key stakeholders. States may also want to consider making provider performance available to individuals and family members to support the selection of providers.
- » Be consistent across the state with respect to how area offices are using data for goal setting with providers.

**For more information on this practice
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