

State Agency Promising Practice

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TOPIC:
Training and
Technical Assistance

Washington's Investment in Robust Training and Technical Assistance

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Background

In the mid-1980s, the state of Washington was awarded a five-year federal systems change grant to kick-start their supported employment efforts via the Washington State Employment Initiative. Funding from this grant was used to develop training on best practices and to generate high-quality integrated employment supports among agencies.

At the end of this five-year period, with state funding and support from state leadership, the Washington State Employment Initiative re-formed as WISE, an independent training and technical assistance (TA) organization. WISE now contracts with the Washington Developmental Disabilities Administration to provide ongoing, high-quality training and TA across the state and to prioritize an investment in innovation.

Implementation

Through a competitive bidding process, WISE contracts with the Washington Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). This funding goes primarily towards planning and training with the counties to support high-quality individual employment outcomes.

In addition to this funding, counties contract for additional training and technical support using county millage dollars, flexible funds dedicated to county disability services that are collected as part of county taxation. WISE uses a combination of millage dollars and state DDA funding towards developing customized county-level and regional-level TA plans.

Washington has created a technical assistance infrastructure to support and sustain the capacity they have built through their regular trainings. For example, WISE employs six staff members to serve as TA coordinators, one for each territory (or cluster of counties) across the state of Washington.

These TA coordinators function as managers for the counties in their region. They act as a TA portal, responding to questions and directing inquiries to appropriate resources. Employment providers or other stakeholders in a given region can contact their WISE TA coordinator with questions or for resource recommendations.

The TA coordinators are also responsible for developing a local TA plan, coordinating funding, and meeting the unique training and technical assistance needs in that county or region. WISE's team of TA coordinators meets monthly to review and discuss policy, data, planning, and funding opportunities.

WISE's training efforts are focused on two primary content areas: fundamentals and specialty topics. Training in fundamentals is offered regularly, and content remains fairly consistent. Training in specialty topics, on the other hand, is more on-demand and focuses on different areas of interest based on state and community needs. This allows for innovation and prevents rigidity in training topics.

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New concerns and opportunities are incorporated into training and TA as they arise. For example, recent demographic data in King County showed an increasing number of students with autism graduating from high school. In response, WISE is working with King County to develop targeted training and specialized employment services to build the capacity of the employment organization to meet these students' needs.

Training and TA efforts are aimed at employment service delivery providers, families, self-advocates, schools, and the business community. WISE emphasizes shared knowledge-building and co-learning. As a result, it builds community and employment-focused coalitions as its staff deliver training and technical assistance.

Impact

Washington's investment in training and TA has had a strong impact on coalition building and engagement. A broader range of trainees, such as leaders in state government and in business, have been increasingly taking on a role in integrated employment efforts, thanks to efforts to reach beyond employment specialists and other providers.

The state's TA infrastructure creates a clear path to resources, and sustains the capacity built by stakeholders.

Highlights

- » Washington has created a technical assistance (TA) infrastructure to support and sustain the capacity they have built through their regular trainings.
- » Training and TA efforts emphasize shared knowledge-building and co-learning, which has built an employment-focused coalition across the state.
- » Training efforts incorporate not only fundamentals, but also specialty topics. This allows innovation to be realized and prevents rigidity in training topics.

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