



Issue

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## **[New Resources for States in Assessing Implementation Progress on Employment First Systems Transformation and Most Integrated Employment Settings](#)**

If you haven't recently visited the [Employment First website](#), you may have missed three important new resources; this user-friendly website offers comprehensive information on state policies, publically available data on the employment of people with disabilities, technical assistance initiatives, systems change initiatives, enforcement actions, and more. The three newest resources are (1) an Employment First (E1st) Transformation Guide, (2) a Provider Transformation Manual, and (3) a Most Integrated Employment Setting Self-Assessment. All three resources are timely as we mark the anniversaries in June and July of the Olmstead decision and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which promote opportunities for integrated employment and community participation for people with disabilities.

The “[E1st State Transformation Guide](#)” is intended to help state government leaders, policy-makers, disability advocates, and other stakeholders to learn about what is working in areas that support Employment First. The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) identified 10 Critical Areas to Increase Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) based on the recommendations put forth in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities (ACICIED) Final Report. The 10 areas are Employment First Policy, Rate/Reimbursement, Capacity Building, Interagency Coordination, Provider Transformation, 14(c) Phase Out, Employer Engagement, Mental Health, Seamless Transition, and Data Collection Systems. The E1st State Transformation Guide is intended to help states make systems change plans and decisions by applying the ACICIED recommendations at the state and local level. The Guide also gives examples of how these changes have already been successfully achieved in other parts of the country.

The [Provider Transformation Manual](#) was created to capture learning from ODEP’s Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program (EFSLMP) and to support ongoing progress in participating states. Based on ODEP’s Criteria for Performance Excellence in Employment First Systems Change, the manual is intended to help guide and support organizational transformation using an Employment First approach. This new manual features eight modules written by Employment First Subject Matter Experts on the following topics: (1) Leadership and Setting the Tone for Change, (2) Strategic Planning, (3) Making It Happen (Operations Focus), (4) Funding, (5) Individualized Planning and Services (Customer Focus), (6) Reorganizing Staff for Transformative Change, (7) How Are We Doing? (Measuring Results), and (8) Beyond Transformation.

The [Most Integrated Employment Setting](#) (MIES) State Self-Assessment Tool is intended to help agencies assess existing policies, service delivery practices, and funding trends to determine their strengths and gaps in meeting the goal of serving people in the most integrated employment settings. States are encouraged to use this self-assessment tool for the dual purpose of (a) facilitating a cross-systems review of existing policies, enrollment and eligibility processes, capacities of providers and direct support professionals, and funding priorities across systems; and (b) initiating a thorough planning process across systems focused on collective action and mutual accountability. A collaborative approach to state planning can inform fiscal and budgetary priorities, align policies, and enable agencies to leverage resources across systems.

MIES is a voluntary self-assessment to assist in planning and decision-making across systems. Specifically, states are encouraged to utilize the results of the State self-assessment to answer the following questions:

- What steps should the state take to better align policy, practice, and funding?
- How can the state build and sustain capacity of front-line staff in serving individuals with

disabilities in the most integrated setting?

- What expectations should be placed on providers in order to assure greater access to multiple community-based day and employment services offered in the most integrated setting?
- How does the state measure progress in addressing existing gaps and challenges over time?

Information on the Employment First website has been compiled to inform state efforts to increase competitive integrated employment opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities, with information that is updated as new data and resources become available.

**LEAD Center will host a national webinar to provide an overview of the MIES tool as well as new resources on the Employment First site, and how these resources can be used to promote Employment First. Join the LEAD Center mailing list to get updates and announcements of upcoming webinars.**

Visit the E1st website today to access tools and other useful resources; [visit the LEAD Center website](#) for information and resources to support your Employment First systems change initiatives.

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## **Release of Guided Group Discovery Materials as a Universal Design to Promote Employment Outcomes**

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and the LEAD Center recently released materials and resources for use by workforce professionals to implement Guided Group Discovery (GGD), most effectively used through cross-system partnerships. Guided Group Discovery is a set of strategies that can benefit any job seeker who faces barriers to employment. GGD is a universal design approach used in public and private workforce development programs (e.g., American Job Centers, community rehabilitation providers, schools, etc.) to enable youth and adults with disabilities, and others, to secure and maintain employment. GGD is most effective when sessions are co-facilitated by multiple partners. These strategies serve as an alternative assessment tool that identifies the strengths and ideal conditions of employment for job seekers with and without disabilities, resulting in a “blueprint” to guide job development. Additionally, the GGD process assists job seekers in identifying employment that would be a good fit both for them and employers. Discovery is the cornerstone of customized employment, which increasingly is being used as a universal design approach by workforce development professionals and their partners.

The process of Guided Group Discovery results in a positive written description of each job seeker that provides insight into the settings and circumstances in which he or she is most likely to be successful. This information becomes part of a person’s Blueprint for Employment, which guides their employment planning process to match people and businesses to meet the needs of both.

LEAD Center has supported pilot projects implementing Guided Group Discovery in American Job

Centers (also known as One-Stop Career Centers) in collaboration with a variety of partners, including vocational rehabilitation, developmental disabilities, behavioral health, Centers for Independent Living, homeless services providers, school systems, and others. By facilitating groups with partners, job seekers can get support from multiple systems, and agencies can leverage each other's resources.

To support these efforts, LEAD Center developed a [Guided Group Discovery Facilitator Guide](#), which is designed to train people to facilitate Guided Group Discovery sessions with youth and/or adults with disabilities, and/or others who experience barriers to employment, as well as a [Participant Workbook](#) and a [PowerPoint presentation](#), which can be used to train additional facilitators.

A recorded webinar, [Guided Group Discovery: Paving the Way to Employment](#), has also been archived, including a transcript of the webinar. The webinar includes information about the many pilot projects in which Guided Group Discovery has been used and information directly from implementers from the public workforce system and a variety of partners.

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## **LEAD Focuses on the Connection between the ABLE Act and Employment**

This past quarter, the [LEAD Center](#) conducted substantial work to educate disability-related stakeholders about how having an ABLE account can assist a person with obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment.

These efforts began with the release of the brief: [The ABLE Act and Employment: Strategies for Maximizing the Effectiveness of the Achieving a Better Life Experience \(ABLE\) Act as a Tool for Financial Stability and Employment Outcomes of People with Disabilities](#). The brief demonstrates how provisions in the ABLE Act can be combined with federal benefit services and other federal programs and initiatives to further competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities. The brief contains a list of the provisions of the ABLE Act, their impact on the financial self-sufficiency and employment opportunities of persons with disabilities, and recommendations on how to best utilize the ABLE Act to maximize these outcomes.

Some examples included in the brief of how an ABLE account can be combined with other supports to increase financial self-sufficiency and/or employment opportunities, include:

- Utilizing the [PASS](#) (Plan for Achieving Self-Support) program in conjunction with ABLE account savings to maintain supported employment services.
- Using the ABLE accounts to pay for Medicaid Buy-In Program premiums rather than limiting earned income to stay below Medicaid's income limits. This enables people to continue to be eligible for Medicaid-funded supported employment services while steadily improving their financial status.
- Having state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and other programs providing assistance that

links people to support for setting up ABLE accounts.

Additionally, the LEAD Center, in collaboration with the [ABLE National Resource Center](#), hosted the webinar, “[The ABLE Act: A Tool for Financial Stability and Employment Outcomes](#),” which garnered more than 1,200 registrants. The webinar shared both general information about the ABLE Act and being an ABLE account owner, and focused on how being an ABLE account owner can assist people with disabilities in building a stronger economic future and result in more positive employment outcomes.

Lastly, the LEAD Center held a three-week [ABLE National Dialogue](#) that created a robust conversations on how ABLE accounts can be used to support employment or self-employment/entrepreneurship and increase economic empowerment and financial self-sufficiency.

The LEAD Center strongly encourages you to take advantage of the archived materials provided through the links in this article in order to learn more about how ABLE can help people with disabilities thrive economically.

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## **[LEAD Partners with U.S. DOL’s Civil Rights Center, Office of Disability Employment Policy and Missouri State Equal Opportunity at 2017 WIOA National Convenings](#)**

This spring, the U.S. Department of Labor (US DOL), in collaboration with its Education and Health and Human Services partners, hosted three Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) National Convenings. The convenings were held at different regional locations on the West Coast, East Coast, and in the Midwest, and had one agenda with closely aligned content. The purpose of the convenings was to provide support and information to state and local workforce development professionals and partners on effectively implementing WIOA. Six different tracks were offered at each convening, including the following key topic areas: Business Engagement, Financial/Grants Management, Integrated Services, One-Stop Operations, Performance Accountability, and Strategic Governance. In addition, this year marked the first time in which an additional session on civil rights and disability was offered at all three convenings.

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Civil Rights Center (CRC) and Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) partnered with Missouri’s State Equal Opportunity Officer (EOO) and the LEAD Center to offer a joint presentation on What You Need to Know about Section 188: Individuals with Disabilities. The U.S. DOL CRC took the lead in providing an overview of WIOA’s Section 188 Equal Opportunity Provisions. Section 188 prohibits discrimination against individuals in any WIOA Title I financially assisted program or activity, which includes job training for adults and youth, and other programs or activities provided to recipients at American Job Centers or

through its partners.

Specific requirements were shared around Section 188 regulations related to disability including: Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications, Auxiliary Aids and Services, Accessible Electronic and Information Technology, Physical Accessibility, and Programmatic Accessibility. Following CRC, the LEAD Center introduced a resource developed for the national workforce system, *Promising Practices in Achieving Universal Access & Equal Opportunity: A Section 188 Disability Reference Guide*. The *Guide* was jointly developed by CRC, ODEP, and Employment and Training Administration (ETA), with support and assistance from the LEAD Center. It includes a wide variety of strategies collected nationwide that expand physical, programmatic, and communication access to people with disabilities in the workforce system. The LEAD Center emphasized recurring themes and strategies from the *Guide* such as collaboration with diverse disability groups, building disability knowledge of staff, and implementing an interactive process for reasonable accommodations.

Finally, Missouri's EOO provided a state perspective on how they applied the Section 188 Disability Reference Guide as a blueprint for improving their state's equal opportunity provision, with an emphasis on individuals with disabilities. Missouri's EOO highlighted lessons learned, including the critical importance of collaboration between workforce staff, partners and EOOs; surveying staff, customers and employers on areas of disability; and developing hands-on staff training and practice opportunities with added support and go-to resources.

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## **2017 WIOA National Convening Resources: WorkforceGPS Innovation and Opportunity Network Community of Practice**

Following the [2017 WIOA National Convenings](#), the WorkforceGPS team compiled additional technical assistance materials and resources, including relevant webinars, policy guidance, and toolkits, organized around the six tracks mentioned above.

The presentation materials for all of the National Convening tracks are available on the Innovation and Opportunity Network Community of Practice. This information is available in the [Related Content](#) sidebar on the left-hand side of the screen; materials are organized by track.

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## **Virginia's Accessibility and One-Stop Taskforce Models Cross Agency Collaboration to Address Equal Opportunity and Access for People with Disabilities**

Last year, the LEAD Center was invited to join a Virginia Statewide WIOA cross-agency partner meeting to address accessibility of the one-stop service delivery system. LEAD Center staff presented on *WIOA from a Disability Perspective: Implementing Section 188's Equal Opportunity*

*Provisions*, which provided a snapshot of strategies collected nationally within a reference tool available to workforce partners nationwide. The tool, *Promising Practices in Achieving Universal Access & Equal Opportunity: A Section 188 Disability Reference Guide*, mentioned above, was jointly developed by the Civil Rights Center, Office of Disability Employment Policy, and Employment and Training Administration, with support and assistance from the LEAD Center.

One of the major outcomes of this meeting, which focused on Virginia's WIOA Combined State Plan, was the establishment of an Accessibility and One-Stop Service Delivery System Taskforce, led by the Virginia Community College System as the designated WIOA Administrator. The Taskforce was charged with developing recommendations for ensuring physical, communication and programmatic accessibility of the one-stop service delivery system in Virginia. During deliberations, the state's Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) staff played a critical role in providing guidance and expertise, in addition to implementing DEI promising practices in American Job Centers (AJCs) across the state.

The LEAD Center was enlisted to provide technical assistance to the Taskforce on WIOA's Section 188 Equal Opportunity provisions. During the past year, LEAD staff have provided on-site and virtual support in the planning and facilitation of an implementation plan with specific strategies and action steps. LEAD staff have worked with the Taskforce supporting the process of partner development and engagement, collaborative decision-making, defining of partner roles, and collective implementation towards the state's overall vision and goals.

The foundation of the Virginia Taskforce is its diverse representation, shared leadership, and determined commitment of its members. The group represents key state level workforce partners, including Vocational Rehabilitation, the Governor's Office for Workforce Development, the Community College's Workforce Development Services, the Virginia Association of Workforce Directors, Equal Opportunity Officers, the Virginia Departments for Deaf & Hard of Hearing and Blind & Vision Impaired, and Centers for Independent Living. All members have proven integral to developing solutions that expand equal access and opportunities to people across the spectrum of disabilities in the public workforce system.

The varying perspectives and vast subject matter expertise of Virginia's Accessibility and One-Stop Service System Taskforce has led to increased awareness of cross-agency coordination of services and roles. The differing viewpoints and experiences shared by the Taskforce members about their constituents have led the group to take on challenging areas of access in the state workforce system. This includes a thorough review and update of all language within policies across workforce programs and partners to support compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 188 i at both the state and local levels. They also are focusing on improvement of the processes used by ADA surveying teams in reviewing physical accessibility as part of AJC Certification, and on the development of an assessment process to review and improve programmatic and communication access.

The LEAD Center will continue to support and highlight the exemplary work of Virginia's

Taskforce as they model diverse cross-agency collaboration towards implementation of WIOA's Section 188 equal opportunity provisions.

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## **LEAD PARTNER: ABLE National Resource Center**

The ABLE National Resource Center (ANRC) is a collaborative that brings together the investment, support, and resources of some of the country's most influential national disability organizations to accelerate the design and availability of ABLE accounts. Founded and managed by [National Disability Institute](#) (NDI), ANRC's goal is to provide consistent, reliable information concerning the benefits of an ABLE account. ABLE accounts, created as a result of the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act of 2014 (ABLE Act), are tax-advantaged savings accounts for eligible individuals with disabilities.

Millions of individuals with disabilities and their families depend on public benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid for income, food, healthcare and services. Eligibility for these programs require individuals to meet a means-test and report assets of value in cash, savings, and retirement funds.

The ABLE Act recognizes the significant costs of living with a disability. ABLE accounts allow an individual and his/her family to establish a savings account that does not affect eligibility for public benefits. Total annual contributions by all participating individuals, including family and friends, for a single tax year is \$14,000 and the first \$100,000 of savings in ABLE accounts are not counted toward the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) \$2,000 individual asset limit.

Currently, 22 states have launched ABLE programs and most of these ABLE programs are open for enrollment by eligible individuals nationwide; the exceptions are Florida and Kentucky, which only accept residents from their states. Please visit the [ABLE National Resource Center website](#) for more information and details about ABLE account programs.

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## **LEAD PEOPLE: Matthew Shapiro**





Matthew Shapiro, a young and motivated entrepreneur, established 6 Wheels Consulting in 2014. Based in Virginia, the goal of 6 Wheels Consulting is to work with a variety of businesses to help advance their knowledge of disability culture. Shapiro, who was born with cerebral palsy, wants to help those with no connection to disability understand that the disability community is an untapped resource. Shapiro also serves as an ABL Ambassador with Virginia529 and [ABLEnow](#), for which he helps promote the rollout of ABL accounts in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

As a well-versed and politically savvy disability expert, Shapiro has represented the disability community on state boards such as the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities and the Virginia Business Leadership Network. He also travels the country giving presentations on disability awareness and education.

A graduate of the Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Shapiro created his own course of study through the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies program. He integrated Sociology, Public Policy and Special Education classes to create his Advocacy for Social Justice Degree.

For more information, visit the [6 Wheels Consulting website](#).

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## **Important New Resources**

[The ABL Act and Employment: Strategies for Maximizing the Effectiveness of the Achieving a Better Life Experience \(ABLE\) Act as a Tool for Financial Stability and Employment Outcomes of People with Disabilities](#)

[Employment, Health Care and Disability Policy Update: May 2017](#)

[Guided Group Discovery Introduction and Course](#)

[Guided Group Discovery Participant Workbook](#)

[Guided Group Discovery Facilitator Guide](#)

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