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**Advancing Competitive Integrated Employment
for Persons with Disabilities:
Tips and Lessons Learned for State Government
Leaders Interested in Promoting Gainful
Employment as a Public Policy Goal**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Holding a leadership role in state government is not for the faint-hearted. Whether state officials assume their role on a short-term basis or intend to make a career as a leader in state government, the expectations are high, the challenges are many, and the ever-changing political and fiscal landscapes in every state create some of the most challenging circumstances in which to try to achieve success. The circumstances are further complicated if a state official expects his/her tenure may be limited by administration changes, reorganization, or other factors beyond their control.

Many state officials bring tremendous expertise, experience, and insights to their roles, which greatly benefits the state in which they serve. Yet, it is still often the case that, because the breadth and depth of the work done by state agencies is so vast, there are almost certainly areas of focus that may be considered important, but for which a typical state leader does not possess unique expertise and experience. Still, most state leaders recognize the importance of these key areas of focus, share the sense of commitment to state programs achieving quality outcomes, and simply lack deep knowledge on the most effective strategies that can be implemented to enable state systems to achieve the improved outcomes that are desired.

One such area of focus that often creates challenges for state officials is employment of people with disabilities served by state programs. Most state leaders are supportive of improving employment opportunities and outcomes for residents with disabilities. In principle, this policy goal is a laudable one, and there is increasing federal law, regulation, and guidance affirming the critical importance of employment in the eyes of their federal partners. However, leading in this particular policy arena can be very challenging, even when leaders are supportive of the importance of employment opportunities and the need for public programs to improve outcomes.

II. OPPORTUNITIES ARE OFTEN AVAILABLE

Periodically, there are federal grant programs, technical assistance initiatives and other similar opportunities for state governments interested in improving competitive integrated employment

The LEAD Center is a collaborative of disability, workforce and economic empowerment organizations dedicated to improving employment and economic advancement outcomes for all people with disabilities. The LEAD Center was fully funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, Grant #OD-23863-12-75-4-11.

outcomes for people with disabilities. Many state agencies seek and receive the benefit of these programs and initiatives. For those states, this can mean there is always at least one state agency with a grant, special project, or outside assistance focused on improving employment outcomes among people with disabilities. However, there is often an inadvertent lack of coordination at the state or federal level in carrying out these programs and initiatives, sometimes due to funding timeframes established by Congress or for other reasons. As a result, these initiatives may not always create the desired and/or intended impact.

Lack of coordination is a huge challenge for state systems. This has been well documented with regard to employment of people with disabilities, especially because multiple state programs have responsibility for serving people with disabilities and most of these have the ability to offer employment supports and services. Additionally, people with disabilities can be simultaneously enrolled in and receiving services from more than one state program that can assist with employment. This should force the need for coordination of resources and other efforts, to avoid duplication and ensure equitable cost sharing in serving common customers. Yet, while it seems like common sense to focus on maximizing coordination between state programs, funding and services, this is difficult for state governments to do well. Surprisingly, this is even the case when multiple state programs are co-located in the same state agency.

III. BRINGING LEAD CENTER EXPERIENCE TO BEAR

The **National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities (LEAD)** is a collaborative of disability, workforce, and economic empowerment organizations led by National Disability Institute (NDI) and fully funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). The LEAD Center began its work in 2012, initiating an array of innovative projects in multiple states. The LEAD Center, as its name suggests, is fundamentally focused on promoting *leadership* around the employment and economic advancement of people with disabilities. Consequently, the work of the LEAD Center has included a focus on supporting leadership by state governments. In particular, the LEAD Center has been able to offer technical assistance to state governments focused on state-level interagency collaboration around implementation of best practices for supporting competitive integrated employment of people with disabilities, with a priority on customized employment.

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

The concept of customized employment originated with ODEP and first appeared in the Federal Register a decade before the LEAD Center was established, defined as:

“Customized employment means individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in ways that meet the needs of both.”

Source: Federal Register, June 26, 2002, Vol. 67, No. 123 pp. 43154-43149

As the result of many years of demonstration projects and other initiatives demonstrating the value of customized employment in practice, customized employment was enshrined in federal law with the passage of the Workforce

Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014. WIOA calls for the national implementation of customized employment by state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies, and defines it as follows:

“Competitive integrated employment, for an individual with a significant disability, that is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual with a significant disability, designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer, and carried out through flexible strategies.”

Meanwhile, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), through technical guidance first published in 2011, paved the way for customized employment services to be provided as Medicaid-funded Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) in support of increasing competitive integrated employment among transition and working-age Medicaid beneficiaries with disabilities.

IV. THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF STATE GOVERNMENT LEADERS

Based on experience in working with many states on interagency collaboration, it is very clear that state agency leaders have a critical role to play with regard to improving employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities served by state programs. It is not clear, however, that all state government leaders consistently recognize the tremendous importance of their individual roles, the significant influence they can have on how they exercise their role, and the key ways they can (as they often must) remain at a 10,000 foot level while still effectively impacting progress and outcomes associated with employment of people with disabilities.

What follows here is not designed to “preach” to state government leaders about the importance of their role in improving employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities. Rather, what follows is a set of simple, yet impactful guideposts that state government leaders can consider as they make decisions about how to use their role, their influence and their agency’s resources to improve employment prospects and outcomes for those individuals with disabilities their state agency touches in some way. These guideposts are based on 12 years of experience working with more than 20 different states, including five years of LEAD Center-sponsored work with states that included Kansas and Illinois. Indeed, recent work with states through the LEAD Center has proven highly instructive in understanding and identifying the guideposts that follow here, and verifying those through direct experience.

What follows here assumes that state government leaders do not need to be convinced of the benefits of more citizens with disabilities being gainfully employed in their state’s communities and workforce. State government leaders realize the circumstances that employers (including state governments and its many contractors) are currently facing with regard to the workforce shortage. This shortage is magnified by exceedingly low unemployment rates and the projected shrinkage

of the available workforce in the coming decades as a result of baby boomers more completely exiting the workforce. At the same time, the next generation may face reduced ability to remain in the full-time workforce as their baby boomer parents experience the challenges of aging, with a reduced direct support professional workforce.

The solutions for the workforce shortage will need to involve more than figuring out how to attract and retain millennials. It will require strategies that bring other population segments, currently underrepresented or largely absent from the labor force, into a way of life that assumes employment. This will require addressing the very real and pervasive challenges that have kept these groups out of the mainstream workforce up to this point. Not surprisingly, one such group is people with disabilities.

V. 10 KEY GUIDEPOSTS FOR STATE AGENCY LEADERS

With the above assumptions in mind, the following guideposts are offered to state government leaders who may be seeking useful and practical recommendations for how to effectively impact employment of people with disabilities. This is a highly challenging, but immensely worthwhile policy goal that never seems to fade from view, even though sustained progress up to this point has remained elusive in many states.

Every state leader administering programs that in some way serve their state's residents with disabilities can leave his/her unique and indelible mark on the opportunity of employment (sometimes referred to as the problem of unemployment) for people with disabilities. The following guideposts can aid state leaders in making real impact during their tenure.

1. *Establish at least one position dedicated to the employment of people with disabilities that reports directly to you as a state government leader.*

When state agencies don't have a dedicated position focused on the employment of people with disabilities, it is often the case that employment staff (e.g., job coaches, job developers, etc.), if they exist, are "too far down the totem pole" to convey a strong message about the importance the agency places on the employment of people with disabilities. Creating a position, or moving an existing position up in the organizational chart, will send a strong and meaningful message about the importance of employment for people with disabilities as a priority policy goal in your agency.

Furthermore, embedding someone with expertise in employment close to you in the organizational chart will enable you to more easily gain additional knowledge about employment of people with disabilities and will best ensure this policy agenda does not fall off the radar when so many other competing priorities demand your attention and response every day. In fact, with an employment 'czar' reporting directly to you, there will be an opportunity for you to see how employment can be a tool to address other pressing issues and problems your agency faces, not just a desirable policy and program outcome. Employment is a *means to many ends* that state agencies pursue, including improved physical health and mental health, reduced social isolation, reduced poverty, more stable families, and an adequate workforce to support the state's economy, to name a few examples. While employment of people with disabilities is a challenging policy agenda, the

significant benefits – once recognized – can justify the prioritization and focus on this by state agency leaders.

2. *If your state agency is one that is exclusively focused on employment of people with disabilities, loan staff on a temporary basis to consult with other partner agencies.*

ILLINOIS GOVERNOR CREATES EMPLOYMENT FIRST POSITION HOUSE IN THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

When the LEAD Center provided state-level technical assistance to Illinois, the Governor at the time (Governor Pat Quinn) took an unprecedented step and established, through Executive Order, a liaison position within his office focused exclusively on increasing competitive integrated employment for Illinois residents with disabilities and advancing the state's Employment First law. The liaison acted as the Governor's chief policy advisor on disability employment efforts.

There is no advantage for a state in concentrating all employment expertise in one or two state agencies. Oftentimes, state agencies focused on employment of people with disabilities, or employment in general, find that other state agencies that they need to be strong partners may not be well-positioned to do this because they lack sufficient internal expertise. Agencies with an exclusive or significant focus on the employment of people with disabilities are likely to find that a high return on investment can come from loaning staff to partner agencies on a time-limited or project-specific basis. This will allow the partner state agency to develop its internal policies, processes and program modifications with the benefit of deep expertise from a partner agency.

Additionally, loaned staff will return to your agency with a much greater understanding of the partner agency's policies and program operations. This will benefit your agency's internal efforts to fully leverage the partnership with this other agency. Further, loaned staff will return to your agency having developed strong relationships with partner agency staff. This will also benefit your agency's internal efforts to leverage the partnership, given the impact that positive relationships between agency personnel can have on the fruitfulness and effectiveness of ongoing collaboration efforts.

3. *Creating cost-shared positions with other agencies.*

One of the most effective ways to maximize constructive, interagency collaboration on a sustained basis is to cost-share with other state agencies, creating positions focused on areas of work where coordination and collaboration is vital for the success of each agency's respective programs. To the extent these positions are dedicated (or even partially dedicated) to the outcome of employment for people with disabilities, the possibilities for exceptional return on investment are very high. People who fill positions that are cost-shared are considered to be bona fide staff members in both agencies. As such, their ability to get cooperation and responsiveness from both agencies' personnel is greatly increased. This results in the kind of ability to orchestrate successful collaborative efforts in ways that otherwise are often a struggle to achieve when those involved in collaborative efforts each belong to one agency or the other.

Cost-sharing a position also brings the same benefits as loaning a staff person to a partner agency on a temporary basis, in that your agency has a staff person who will develop firsthand knowledge about, and positive working relationships with, a key partner agency.

KANSAS EXPERIENCE WITH COST-SHARED POSITIONS AT STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS

Cost-sharing key positions at a state or local level has proven to be a very effective strategy for enhancing interagency coordination and collaboration in Kansas. There is further benefit from co-locating the cost-shared staff person in the various agencies that are co-funding him/her for a certain number of days each week. Experience in Kansas demonstrates that this helps break down siloes and foster positive working relationships.

In Kansas, the Departments of Corrections and Commerce have co-funded a shared “Alternative Workforce Specialist” position at the state level focused on developing partnerships in communities across Kansas to integrate offenders from across the Criminal Justice System, including offenders with disabilities, into the competitive integrated workforce. The cost-shared position works with community and criminal justice partners to identify best practices and resources to facilitate these goals.

The Departments of Corrections and Commerce have also cost-shared positions in local Workforce Development Areas. These positions do ‘in-reach’ and ensure enrollment into workforce services (KansasWORKS) while an individual is still incarcerated. People filling these positions are also able to braid services from multiple programs to develop effective case plans for individuals, due to their status as staff working for multiple agencies. They can collaborate more easily with other staff in multiple agencies to ensure coordination of resources and services.

Local Workforce Development Areas affiliated with the Kansas Department of Commerce have also cost-shared staff with post-secondary education entities, ensuring stronger collaboration in the seamless transition of post-secondary graduates to employment in their field.

4. Make time because it sends a message that creates a powerful ripple effect; mobilizing others to be more focused on and committed to this policy goal in their day-to-day work.

Nothing sends a stronger message to state agency staff about priorities and valued outcomes than how a leader chooses to spend his/her time. Despite the fact that state agency leaders have tremendous responsibilities, which often means much of their time is not their own, the reality remains that state agency leaders still have some ability to choose how they prioritize their time. While it can often feel like nothing optional can possibly find its way onto the calendars of state agency leaders, this is not universally the case. Making the decision to include a regular meeting on employment of people with disabilities sends a message to agency staff about how much their leaders truly value this policy goal.

To the extent possible, and to maximize the impact your time commitment will have, choose to meet with key counterparts in other state agencies, external stakeholders that are most committed to employment of people with disabilities, and/or members of the business/employer community committed to employment of people with disabilities. Involve your staff in these meetings and engage your agency's public relations staff to document the meetings through web postings, social media, or other methods that expand the impact of these targeted time commitments.

KANSAS GOVERNOR'S SUBCABINET ON DISABILITY

In Kansas, a formal Subcabinet on disability was established by the Governor, bringing together cabinet-level Secretaries from key state agencies with a role to play in serving Kansans with disabilities. This Subcabinet shared a commitment to increasing competitive integrated employment among Kansans with disabilities. To demonstrate their leadership commitment, the Subcabinet committed to dedicating every other Subcabinet meeting to the topic of competitive integrated employment. They also established a Disability Employment Workgroup, consisting of appointees from each Subcabinet agency and supported by the LEAD Center. The Workgroup advanced efforts between Subcabinet meetings and reported back to the Subcabinet on a regular basis.

5. *Expect and regularly review an employment data dashboard, pulling key data available from your agency's existing data systems.*

Data almost always aids in painting a clearer picture of performance than evaluative efforts that do not use data. Even if your agency's existing data addressing competitive integrated employment is limited and cannot answer all of the questions you and your team might have, looking at what the data *can* tell you, at regular intervals, will maintain focus on the importance of advancing the policy goal and improving outcomes.

When state agency leaders want to see and talk about employment data, it sends a clear message to the rest of the agency that employment is a priority for leadership, not just something that is paid attention to when the agency has a grant, special project, or other time-limited reason to give it attention. While a dashboard may take some time to create initially, running the data at regular intervals should not create undue burden.

Sharing competitive integrated employment dashboard data among state agency partners is also extremely valuable, and sets a tone for collaboration rather than competition. It is important to recognize that, in most instances, the data will not align perfectly. There will not be straight "apples to apples" comparisons unless targeted efforts are undertaken to structure data collection and reporting to achieve this. However, there is still value in sharing data that each agency can pull from its existing systems and trend over time.

6. *Learn just enough about innovative evidence-based strategies that create and sustain employment opportunities for people with disabilities to feel comfortable and confident asserting high expectations in relation to the employment of people with disabilities.*

One of the most difficult challenges that many state agency leaders face is getting comfortable with expecting employment for people with disabilities, and particularly with articulating this expectation in public forums. A lack of comfort does not mean there is a lack of commitment, however. It is particularly difficult to feel comfortable with expecting employment if we lack an understanding of how employment can be possible for almost all people with disabilities. (I do not say ‘all’ and I do not think that expecting employment requires such a position; there are exceptions to every rule in life.) For a state agency leader to feel fully comfortable with promoting the critical importance of expecting employment and increasing employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities, s/he must achieve a level of comfort with this being a reasonable expectation.

By becoming familiar with the basic concepts associated with the most common evidence-based strategies to create and sustain employment opportunities for people with disabilities, state agency leaders can feel more comfortable and confident asserting the expectation that, if we truly value and respect our fellow citizens with disabilities, we can and should expect they will work (and realize their own potential as well as the advantages of work through experience) when the right job match and supports are available to them. Nationally, there are currently three well-recognized and accepted evidence-based practices for the facilitation of competitive integrated employment among people with disabilities. Each practice has been demonstrated to be evidence-based for specific sub-populations of people with disabilities. The chart below illustrates the three practices and the populations for which they are considered evidence-based.

Evidence-Based Practices for Facilitating Competitive Integrated Employment of People with Disabilities



Progressive Employment

Evidence-based for:

Persons with significant physical, sensory or other disabilities.



Individual Placement and Supports (IPS)

Evidence-based for:

Persons with severe or severe and persistent mental illness.

Persons with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.



Customized Employment

Evidence-based for:

Persons with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

Persons with severe or severe and persistent mental illness.

Persons with significant physical, sensory or other disabilities.

Further, becoming familiar with a handful of success stories, representing people with a range of disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, can also provide the knowledge a state agency leader needs to feel confident asserting the expectation of employment for people

with disabilities. This allows a state agency leader to move from talking about employment of people with disabilities as an abstract concept, to asserting the importance of this policy goal with real success stories informing their remarks. While each state agency leader will want success stories from his/her own state, visit [Real People, Real Jobs](#) to see examples of videos and written stories highlighting the employment successes of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) who are working in competitive integrated employment. Another resource is [Customized Employment: Stories and Lessons from the Field](#).

7. Learn and make your own basic, but compelling, set of talking points about why employment of people with disabilities is a valuable and important goal for government, and why employment benefits people with disabilities, the broader community, and the state's economy.

Coupled with knowing how employment can be possible for a wide range of people with disabilities (as discussed in #6 above), state agency leaders can have the most impact if they learn and adopt “the narrative of Employment First.” Quite simply, this means having committed to memory a set of compelling talking points in favor of employment for people with disabilities and using those talking points whenever the opportunity or need arises.

There are few things that leave a more lasting impression on us than a highly respected leader who can speak passionately and convincingly about something we care about. When people hear a high-ranking politician or state official talk about the employment of people with disabilities in a way that inspires and moves them, they do not easily forget that. What makes some leaders so compelling is their ability to effectively “make the case” for employment of people with disabilities as a critical policy goal that should be prioritized and embraced. They do this, quite simply, by using a compelling set of talking points, which they are able to convey without reading from a paper or cue cards. Those leaders have made their talking points part of their own narrative.

TWO GOVERNORS WITH COMPELLING MESSAGES ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

State leaders who have adopted a strong commitment to the employment of people with disabilities include agency directors, cabinet leaders, and even the governor, a state's highest ranking elected official. Two governors who demonstrated great eloquence in making the case for the employment of people with disabilities were former Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin and former Governor John Kasich of Ohio. Both invested funding specifically to advance competitive integrated employment of people with disabilities. Both were excellent spokespeople for the value of increasing employment among the state's residents with disabilities.

No state leader gets to this point without practice and without making this a topic they publicly address on a repeated basis. The talking points become their own and, as a result, those listening are impacted differently because the state leader demonstrates ownership of the arguments for the value of employment of people with disabilities. By identifying, understanding, and committing to memory a short, but compelling, list of talking points, a state leader can influence so many

others who have the opportunity to hear that leader speak on the topic of employment of people with disabilities.

8. *Learn how to provide a short, but convincing response to the most common myths and negative assumptions people use to make the arguments against expecting gainful employment for people with disabilities.*

When any state leader becomes more publicly outspoken about the importance of employment for people with disabilities, that leader will inevitably encounter other people who are opposed to, or concerned about, the focus on expecting employment and improved employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities. With that opposition or concern will come negative assertions that state leaders will be expected to respond to in a variety of potential situations. For state leaders, dealing with negative assertions in a constructive and effective way is part of advancing the expectation of employment as a reasonable and appropriate outcome for people with disabilities. However, responding effectively to these negative assertions can be one of the most difficult things to do well, particularly if the state leader is not “armed” with valid counter arguments and viewpoints.

Fortunately, there are a predictable set of common myths and negative assumptions that are often raised. State leaders who learn, and commit to memory, an effective response to each of these most common negative assertions will almost always be prepared for these situations. Through the quality of their response, state leaders can establish an expectation that such myths and assertions should not and will not stand in the way of progress and that leader’s commitment to the goal of employment for people with disabilities.

9. *Empathize with the challenge, but don’t legitimize or accept bad, ineffective and/or non-existent relationships between your agency’s staff and their peers in other agencies.*

Without exception, experience and research tells us that achieving high rates of competitive integrated employment outcomes among people with disabilities served by state programs requires state agencies operating those programs to partner with each other, coordinate resources and efforts, and share costs as well as accountability for outcomes. All too often, opportunities for critical state agency collaboration may be significantly undermined by poor interpersonal relationships between key staff in the state’s programs serving people with disabilities. It may be hard to understand how profoundly impactful these poor relationships (or the absence of relationships) can be on a state’s success around competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities, unless a state leader has experience with such circumstances.

Historically, significant resources and efforts are expended to address issues related to the employment of people with disabilities. Many times, the extent of positive outcomes and progress is strongly influenced by the fundamental relationships among those involved in such efforts. Negative or non-existent relationships among state agency personnel can dramatically inhibit progress around maximizing competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities served through state programs.

It is critical for state leaders to be aware when poor relationships exist (or when there is an

absence of a needed relationship) including the impact that these circumstances can have, despite the fact that many other ‘ingredients’ for progress and success may be in place. Any state leader that is going to make a significant positive impact in the area of employment of people with disabilities will need to be aware of the signs that point to poor working relationships between agency staff (or the lack of positive relationships), which create barriers to progress; leaders must then take appropriate steps to intervene in these situations and apply effective strategies to correct these circumstances. The most powerful strategy is an obvious one: lead by example to the greatest extent possible.

10. Initiate - or be receptive to the idea of - a coordinated cross-agency strategic plan around the goal of increasing competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities served by state programs.

This last recommendation is by no means the least important. We certainly know from experience that better employment outcomes for people with disabilities don’t simply happen because we want them to. Accountability for action, including clear goal setting, timelines for achieving objectives necessary to achieve goals, and participation in measurement of impact and outcomes are all critical pieces of a successful state strategy. A state leader that embraces the need for a comprehensive strategic plan that outlines real commitments to be made by various state agency partners is a state leader that recognizes the essential path to improving outcomes.

Too often, state governments can end up with a variety of fragmented initiatives focused on the employment of people with disabilities. While much activity may be going on, accountability for outcomes is not mutually embraced by the various state agency partners. That is, everyone is not applying their time and resources in a coordinated way, in order to achieve the best possible impact. In contrast, a commitment to utilize a cross-agency strategic plan allows for establishing and documenting the mutual commitments of state agency partners.

Experience suggests it may be helpful for each state agency to utilize a consistent review/audit tool to evaluate each agency’s existing policies, programs, investments and the extent to which financial incentives are aligned with policy goals around competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities. Through analysis of the combined results of the cross-agency review/audit process, it becomes possible to define the action steps that should be included in a cross-agency strategic plan. When all partner state agencies agree to each undertake their own internal review/audit process, it is possible to establish a greater sense of mutual trust and partnership around quality improvement efforts. Overall, the review/audit process can help each agency identify what they need to change, what they need to start doing and stop doing, and where they need to target efforts to strengthen partnerships, in order to advance the overarching shared goal of increased competitive integrated employment for the state’s citizens with disabilities.

VI. CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, the challenges involved with being a leader in state government are extremely high. Often, few outside of state government leaders themselves (and those who work most

closely with them) realize the extent of the demands placed upon people who accept these public service roles.

KANSAS STATE AGENCIES SERVING ON THE GOVERNOR'S SUBCABINET ON DISABILITY UNDERTAKE AN EMPLOYMENT FIRST POLICY AND FUNDING REVIEW USING A COMMON TOOL

With technical assistance from the LEAD Center, the Disability Employment Workgroup, established by the Kansas Subcabinet on Disability, developed an Employment First Policy and Funding Review tool that could be completed by each of the involved state agencies. The review tool consisted of 20 questions designed to assess each state agency's alignment with the state's Employment First law and to provide insight into the focus of each state agency's efforts that would become part of a comprehensive cross-agency strategic plan to improve competitive integrated employment outcomes among Kansans with disabilities served by one or more of the involved agencies.

While it can feel like there is no time or space to make employment of people with disabilities a real priority in a state leader's work, the above guideposts are intended to provide focused suggestions for how a state leader can provide real and meaningful leadership in this area, making the most significant impact possible during their tenure, without compromising their performance on the essential responsibilities associated with their roles.

What remains most important is recognizing that state agency leaders in particular have a **critical** role to play with regard to improving employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities served by state programs. It is vitally important that all state government leaders consistently recognize the tremendous importance of their individual roles and the significant influence they can have if they choose to use their roles to advance the cause of the employment of people with disabilities.