

Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program (EFSLMP)

PROVIDER TRANSFORMATION MANUAL

Module 8: Beyond Transformation

Pilot Version

* 1. Department of Labor

Office of Disability Employment Policy

May 5, 2017

Contract No. DOL-OPS-14-D-005 Order No. DOL-OPS-16-T-00129

**Authors:**

Lisa Mills, Ph.D. Rachel Pollock, JD Pat Rogan, Ph.D. Genni Sasnett, MA

**Submitted by:**

Economic Systems Inc.

3120 Fairview Park Drive, Suite 500 Falls Church, VA 22042 703.642.5225

[www.econsys.com](http://www.econsys.com/)



*This document was prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DOL, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. The Provider Transformation Manual will be used in the pilot webinar series that is scheduled from May to August 2017. We will collect feedback from participating Community Rehabilitation Providers and incorporate it into the final version.*

Table of Contents

[Introduction 1](#_Toc520188157)

[More on the EFSLMP Approach to Provider Transformation 4](#_Toc520188158)

[The Case for Organizational Transformation: Why Do It and Why Now? 5](#_Toc520188159)

[Contemplating Expansion to Meet Broader Needs 11](#_Toc520188160)

[Serving as a Mentor to Other Organizations 11](#_Toc520188161)

[Communities of Practice 11](#_Toc520188162)

[Consortiums and Collaborations 12](#_Toc520188163)

[Hosting “Learning Journeys” 12](#_Toc520188164)

[Training and TA Provider 13](#_Toc520188165)

[Conference Presentations 13](#_Toc520188166)

[Conclusion 14](#_Toc520188167)

List of Exhibits

[Exhibit 1. National Baldrige Model’s Criteria for Performance Excellence 1](#_bookmark1)

[Exhibit 2. Criteria in Performance Excellence in Employment First – Provider Transformation 2](#_bookmark4)

# Introduction

This manual has been created to capture learning from, and support the continued success of, the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program (EFSLMP), an initiative of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).[1](#_bookmark2) The EFSLMP is a cross-disability, cross-systems change initiative providing a platform for multi-disciplinary state teams to focus on implementing ***Employment First***[***2***](#_bookmark3)with fidelity through the alignment of policies, coordination of resources, and updating of service delivery models to facilitate increased integrated employment options for people with the most significant disabilities.

ODEP recognizes ***Employment First*** as a national movement providing a framework for systems change that is centered on the premise that all citizens, including individuals with complex disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life. ODEP defines ***Employment First*** as the expectation that public systems align policies, practices, and reimbursement structures to foster competitive integrated employment as the priority option in publicly-financed day and employment services for youth and adults with significant disabilities.

ODEP recognizes that the achievement of ***Employment First*** requires transformation of both public systems and service providers. To guide this two-pronged approach to Systems Change, ODEP has adopted the National Baldrige Model’s Criteria for Performance Excellence [see Exhibit 1] which includes seven key elements: Leadership; Strategic Planning; Customer Focus; Workforce Focus; Operations Focus; Results; and Ongoing Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge.

Exhibit 1. National Baldrige Model’s Criteria for Performance Excellence

Strategic

Planning

Workforce

Focus

Leadership

Results

Customer

Focus

Operations

Focus

Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

Source: <http://www.nist.gov/baldrige>

To facilitate provider transformation using the Baldrige approach, ODEP has developed a set of *Criteria for Performance Excellence in Employment First Provider Transformation* [see Exhibit 2]. This provider transformation manual builds on the criteria that have been developed, offering significant, detailed information, advice and examples based on best practices for provider transformation developed through the

1 This edition will be used as a pilot model. Our goal is to receive feedback over the course of the EFSLMP Community of Practice (CoP) webinar series throughout the rest of the year regarding the usefulness and applicability of the manual.

2 <https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/EmploymentFirst.htm>

EFSLMP and derived from the experience and expertise of EFSLMP subject matter experts working on transformation with providers around the country.

Exhibit 2. Criteria in Performance Excellence in Employment First – Provider Transformation[3](#_bookmark5)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Leadership | * Promote ongoing professional development and mentoring of leaders within provider networks to cultivate a cadre of strong leadership capable and committed to the development of competitive, integrated employment outcomes and socioeconomic advancement for people with disabilities. * Build in incentives for supporting, retaining, and rewarding “early adopters” of effective practices among staff. |
| Strategic Planning | * Infuse & embed the State’s *Employment First* vision, goals, guiding principles, & conceptual framework within the strategic planning processes, consistent with similar efforts undertaken across relevant State government agencies. * Develop, disseminate, and make readily available the provision of effective practices that lead to competitive, integrated employment for individuals with disabilities, as well as benefits planning, financial capability, and economic advancement strategies for all clients. * Develop operational agreements across various state publicly-financed systems and provider networks resulting in the alignment of policy, practice, and funding strategies to allow for a consistent focus on performance-based results. |
| Customer Focus | * Survey customers & stakeholders regularly to understand level of satisfaction & determine the areas of improvement needed. * Review service coordination processes to determine whether key steps in the process could be strengthened in terms of being more focused on person-centered, individual strategies, and experiential informed choice. * Expand and improve upon existing assessment processes to ensure a rich collection of data on the individual’s strengths, gifts, and preferences that can be used to leverage multiple options. |
| Workforce Focus: | * Realign organizational structure and standard operating procedures (SOPs) to allow the time, flexibility, and incentives required to develop professional staff in key areas critical to successful transformation. * Ensure ongoing professional development, mentoring, coaching, and staff support promoting continued strengthening of skill sets critical for expanded business models. * Optimize service time and ratio deployment for provision of long-term supports, crisis interventions, and new job starts within provider network. * Consider incentives for staff to facilitate clear measurable performance outcomes for competitive, integrated employment and to effectively address individual and cultural resistance to change. |
| Operations Focus | * Diversify funding streams to optimize available support for competitive, integrated employment services. * Expand the provision of services to include a stronger focus on the dissemination of effective practices that result in competitive, integrated employment outcomes. * Promote the modernization of operational processes including IT//electronic record-keeping and decentralized staffing models to successfully meet growing demand for the provision of competitive, integrated employment strategies. * Consider reconfiguration of service management elements within provider organizations (including, but not limited to, communication, data collection, logistics, technology, transportation, billing systems, supervision, and customer satisfaction) and infusion of “lean management” techniques. |
| Results | * Grow percentage of competitive, integrated employment placements over baseline, and capture length of time from start of service to placement. * Coordinate employment efforts with other long-term supports (housing, transportation, natural supports) and benefits planning/work incentives. * Survey customers & stakeholders regularly to understand level of satisfaction & determine the areas of improvement needed. * Track staff development milestones, including training/TA received, credentials/certification completed, etc. * Track impact of applying effective practices to internal daily operations and service approaches. * Demonstrate cost-effectiveness of competitive, integrated employment supports through maximization of natural workplace supports, assistive technology, and job customization. * Align policies, operational procedures, and funding to reflect adoption of effective practices and competitive, integrated employment service delivery. |
| Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management | * Create shared performance-based outcomes & corresponding metrics across various divisions of the organization to incentivize effective coordination of human & technical resources & collective action around pursuance of organizational strategic goals. * Establish bench-marks from baseline data and collect high-impact, relevant data to help inform continued organizational restructuring, internal policy changes, operational practice updates, and development strategies. * Translate high-impact knowledge through continued commitment to training, technical assistance, professional development and communities of practice. |

3 [http://www.leadcenter.org/system/files/resource/downloadable\_version/Employment\_First\_Technical\_Brief 3\_0.pdf](http://www.leadcenter.org/system/files/resource/downloadable_version/Employment_First_Technical_Brief__3_0.pdf)

The reader will note that the manual has been organized with individual modules that each focus on one element of the Baldrige model. In addition, modules on two other critical topics for success – bringing provider transformation to scale and being a mentor to other providers – are also included to round out this comprehensive manual. Readers can opt to use the manual as a comprehensive resource or to pull-out specific modules as they are needed during the process of transformation.

## More on the EFSLMP Approach to Provider Transformation

The EFSLMP has developed a unique approach to supporting provider transformation in a comprehensive way. The approach brings together the collective experiences of over thirty Subject Matter Experts from around the country, all of whom are either disability employment service providers themselves – who have shepherded

their organizations through a process of transformation - or integrated employment and community supports experts who have provided support, technical assistance and training to disability employment and day service providers from around the country who have been actively engaged in organizational transformation. ODEP’s EFSLMP Subject Matter Experts are both, by definition and by design, an eclectic group of people with tremendous breadth of experiences and knowledge. This is particularly valuable in supporting provider transformation on a national scale because:



**Transformation:**

It takes the desire to change, the determination to start, and the dedication to continue.

* Ben Timmis

**Transformation:**

It isn’t about improving, it’s about re- thinking.

* Malcolm Gladwell
  + - No two providers’ transformation process and circumstances are the same, even if providers may operate in the same state or locality;
    - The nature of provider transformation has changed over time, both within particular states and nationally;
    - Core best practices for successful provider transformation – practices that are considered “tried and true” among those who make this topic their life’s work – can be implemented in many subtly different ways depending on a particular provider’s circumstances and challenges;
    - Effective mentoring relationships cannot be forced, and rely most heavily on “smart” matching of leaders and organizations who will “gel” in truly impactful ways;
    - Communities of practice that bring together Subject Matter Experts and diverse providers on the path of organizational transformation can enhance learning, information exchange, mutual support structures and translation of knowledge.

The EFSLMP Provider Transformation Initiative brings together many experts with a deep historical perspective on provider transformation. This has greatly enhanced the project’s ability to build on and further expand the historical knowledge base for provider transformation. In addition, one of the most important contributions of the EFSLMP Provider Transformation initiative has been to modernize, and recast as necessary, long-standing best practices into strategies that are geared toward the ***current realities- both challenges and opportunities*** facing traditional employment and day service providers across the country.

## The Case for Organizational Transformation: Why Do It and Why Now?

This manual’s publication date is 2017—twenty-seven years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. A quarter of a century ago, a very small number of community rehabilitation providers across the country, including some facility-based day service providers were engaged in organizational transformation. At the same time, federal supported employment capacity building grants were beginning to make a positive impact in many states, demonstrating



… in the past five years (2011-2016), an evolution in thinking has taken place across the field of disabilities that has set the stage for competitive integrated employment and integrated community supports to become the primary service models for transition-age youth and working-age adults with disabilities in every state.

the valuable outcomes that supported employment could bring to individuals with significant disabilities. Yet overall, there was not any sense that a major evolution in employment and daytime support services for people with disabilities was just around the corner.

And while it’s true that the intervening years leading up to 2011 did not bring to scale, to the extent many had anticipated, the systemic momentum and best practices built in the early years of supported employment, it is hard for anyone to deny that in the past five years (2011-2016), an evolution in thinking has taken place across the field of disabilities that has

set the stage for competitive integrated employment and integrated community supports to become the primary service models for transition-age youth and working-age adults with disabilities in every state. This broad-based evolution of thinking has been ushered in through a variety of different, but coinciding federal policy initiatives, state-level reforms, legal actions, and media coverage that collectively have begun to reshape public opinion. Among the most influential developments of the past five years are the following:

* + - The June 2011 Statement of the ***Department of Justice*** on Enforcement of the Integration Mandate of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and *Olmstead v. L.C.* This Statement[4](#_bookmark8) established for the first time, an expectation that compliance with the ADA and *Olmstead* required states to have an effective working plan to address “individuals spending their days in sheltered workshops or segregated day programs” and which “must have demonstrated success in actually moving individuals to integrated settings in accordance with the plan.” Most of the *Olmstead* lawsuits and settlement agreements that came after this Statement have had a strong focus (and in the cases of Oregon and Rhode Island, an exclusive focus) on transitioning publicly funded state systems away from segregated employment and day services to individualized supported employment and integrated community supports.[5](#_bookmark9)

4 See [https://www.ada.gov/olmstead/q&a\_olmstead.htm](https://www.ada.gov/olmstead/q%26a_olmstead.htm)

5 See U.S. Department of Justice settlement agreements with the states of Georgia, Delaware, North Carolina, and Virginia, as well as the settlement agreement with the state of Oregon and the consent decree with the state of Rhode Island. See <https://www.ada.gov/olmstead/>for more information.

* + - The September 2011 Informational Bulletin[6](#_bookmark10) released by the ***Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)*** which provided strong guidance regarding employment and employment-related services in Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Waivers.[7](#_bookmark11) This guidance underscores CMS’s commitment to the importance of competitive integrated employment and self-employment opportunities for waiver participants. The guidance is now part of the Technical Guide states must follow in creating, renewing or amending HCBS Waivers, and it contains a strong expectation from CMS that states will use HCBS Waivers to increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and meaningful community integration for HCBS Waiver participants with disabilities.
    - The August 2012 report by the ***National Council on Disability***, a federal agency, calling for a phase out of sub-minimum wage.[8](#_bookmark12) This report both preceded and followed local, state and national media coverage of the use of sub-minimum wage in the employment of people with disabilities. Meanwhile, legislation to phase out and end the use of Section 14(c) special minimum wage has been introduced multiple times in ***Congress***, first in October of 2011, then in February of 2013 and most recently, in January of 2015. The current House bill (HR 188) has 69 co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle, as of June, 2016, and the Senate companion (S. 2001) is bipartisan as well. Additionally, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), passed in July of 2014, established an ***Advisory Committee to the U.S. Department of Labor*** charged in part with making recommendations regarding the future of Section 14(c). WIOA also introduced restrictions on the ability of employers to pay youth a sub-minimum wage and new requirements for state vocational rehabilitation agencies to conduct annual outreach to all state residents with disabilities being paid sub-minimum wage to offer services that would allow these individuals to obtain competitive integrated employment paying at least minimum wage. And most recently, in March of 2016, the ***AbilityOne Commission*** issued a Declaration in support of minimum wage for all people who are blind or have significant disabilities.[9](#_bookmark13)
    - The September 2013 promulgation of a new rule, by the ***U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs***, governing the implementation of Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act which prohibits federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating in employment against individuals with disabilities and requires these employers to take affirmative action to recruit, hire, promote, and retain individuals with disabilities. The rule strengthens the affirmative action provisions of the regulations, requiring increased efforts by contractors to recruit and hire people with disabilities, and improve job opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
    - The February 2014 Executive Order 13658, signed by ***President Barack Obama***, “Establishing a Minimum Wage for Contractors,” to raise the minimum wage to $10.10 for all workers on Federal construction and service contracts, including all workers with disabilities whether covered under the Section 14(c) special minimum wage certificate program or not.

6 See <https://downloads.cms.gov/cmsgov/archived-downloads/CMCSBulletins/downloads/CIB-9-16-11.pdf>

7 Medicaid HCBS Waivers first became available in 1983 when Congress added section 1915(c) to the Social Security Act, giving States the option to receive a waiver of Medicaid rules governing institutional care. Medicaid HCBS Waivers allow a state to offer services and supports to people with disabilities, otherwise qualified for institutional care, in the community.

8 <https://www.ncd.gov/publications/2012/August232012>

9 <http://www.abilityone.gov/commission/documents/US%20AbilityOne%20Commission%20Declaration%2018March2016%20Final.pdf>

* + - The March 2014 promulgation of the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Settings Rule by the ***Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)*** which requires all HCBS settings eligible for Medicaid funding to provide opportunities for individuals to pursue employment, work in competitive integrated settings, and engage in community life. The rule further requires all HCBS settings eligible for Medicaid funding to be integrated in, and support full access to, the greater community. And finally, the rule establishes a requirement that states must offer HCBS participants an opportunity to receive HCBS services in non-disability-specific settings, thus requiring states to develop and offer integrated prevocational and day habilitation service models if the state had only facility-based prevocational and day habilitation service options prior to the implementation of the rule.[10](#_bookmark14)
    - The July 2014 passage into law of the ***Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)***, raising expectations across state workforce and vocational rehabilitation systems that competitive integrated employment be the prioritized investment and outcome for transition-age youth and adults with disabilities. WIOA ushered in the expectation that state workforce system programs achieve true programmatic accessibility for individuals with disabilities, while also introducing new requirements for state vocational rehabilitation agencies to provide pre-employment transition services to youth with disabilities enrolled in secondary education.
    - The May 2016 promulgation of new Medicaid Managed Care Rules by the ***Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)*** which requires states and managed care organizations to ensure access to, and supports for, competitive integrated employment in Medicaid Managed Long-Term Services and Supports programs that serve persons with disabilities. Prior to the issuance of these rules, numerous states moving to Medicaid Managed Care had built in expectations for increasing competitive integrated employment outcomes for enrollees with



… a number of federally funded grant and technical assistance initiatives include a focus on supporting provider transformation, extending mentoring, training, technical assistance and other key support strategies to a growing number of disability service providers across the country that are seeking such supports to evolve their organization’s services to align with changing expectations and opportunities.

disabilities.

Throughout this time, the country has also seen an array of federally funded grant and technical assistance initiatives aimed at increasing competitive integrated employment opportunities for transition-age youth and adults with disabilities, including an emphasis on facilitating systems change and implementing policies consistent with ***Employment First***. In addition to EFSLMP, a number of other federally funded grant and technical assistance initiatives include a focus on supporting provider transformation by extending mentoring,

training, technical assistance and other key support strategies to a growing number of disability service providers across the country that are seeking such supports to evolve their organization’s services to align with changing expectations and opportunities.

10 https:[//w](http://www.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Fact-sheets/2014-Fact-sheets-items/2014-01-10-2.html)ww[.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Fact-sheets/2014-Fact-sheets-items/2014-01-10-2.html](http://www.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Fact-sheets/2014-Fact-sheets-items/2014-01-10-2.html)

At the same time, our nation’s economy is beginning to recover from one of the most serious and long- standing recessions in history. Coupled with this is the stark reality that our workforce is fundamentally changing. With baby boomers now retiring in record



Yet at the end of the day, what appears to be moving more and more disability service provider organizations to embrace sustained organizational transformation is the recognition of the benefits and possibilities that transformation brings to the people with disabilities each of these organizations serves.

numbers, most every industry and economic sector is projecting major workforce shortages in the decades to come. And there is a recognition that American workers are changing as well, with the millennials ushering in expectations for a better work-life balance and greater workplace flexibility. As employers of all kinds respond to these trends, there is a groundswell of interest in non-traditional labor pools and groups that are untapped and/or underrepresented in the current labor

market, with individuals with disabilities being a key part of these groups. Further, there is growing interest in

progressive and innovative approaches to human resource (talent) management, including Customized Employment[11](#_bookmark15) and the concept of a Teachable Fit[12](#_bookmark16) to bridge the divide between employers and the new face of America’s modern workforce. These approaches not only make room for workers with disabilities but endorse fundamental strategies that pave the way for increased hiring of workers with all kinds of disabilities into competitive integrated employment situations.

For several decades, we have seen the emergence of a research and evidence base for competitive integrated employment services, thus enabling disability service providers to fill their toolboxes with a variety of innovative and “proven to work” strategies for facilitating competitive integrated employment outcomes for individuals with various types of significant disabilities. In the last decade, research addressing the connection between competitive integrated employment and positive health and mental health outcomes has increased, as has research demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of public investments in supported employment.

As federal and state funders of disability services increase emphasis on integrated service provision and competitive integrated employment services in particular, providers of more traditional employment and day services are no doubt feeling the pressure to participate in this evolution and bring their organizations and practices into full alignment with the many developments discussed above that have come about in rapid succession in recent years. Yet at the end of the day, what appears to be moving more and more traditional employment and day service provider organizations to embrace sustained organizational transformation is the recognition of the benefits and possibilities that transformation brings to the people with disabilities each of these organizations serves. What’s more, organizations embracing transformation are also finding that staff at all levels of the organization are similarly positively affected, finding new energy, passion and satisfaction in doing new work that is changing their roles and their impact on the people with disabilities they support and

11 [https://www.accenture.com/t20150824T010002 w /us-en/\_acnmedia/Accenture/Conversion-](https://www.accenture.com/t20150824T010002__w__/us-en/_acnmedia/Accenture/Conversion-Assets/DotCom/Documents/Global/PDF/Strategy_7/Accenture-Trends-Reshaping-HR-Workforce-One.pdf) [Assets/DotCom/Documents/Global/PDF/Strategy\_7/Accenture-Trends-Reshaping-HR-Workforce-One.pdf](https://www.accenture.com/t20150824T010002__w__/us-en/_acnmedia/Accenture/Conversion-Assets/DotCom/Documents/Global/PDF/Strategy_7/Accenture-Trends-Reshaping-HR-Workforce-One.pdf) and <https://www.dol.gov/odep/documents/vignette_v3_blue_508_final.pdf> For more information on Customized Employment, also see: <https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/CustomizedEmployment.htm>and

<http://www.leadcenter.org/customized-employment>

12 <https://www.manpowergroup.com.au/documents/White-Papers/2010_Teachable-Fit-Framework.pdf>

their communities. As one thirty five-year veteran manager of employment services from a community rehabilitation provider in Wisconsin put it:

“When you have staff achieve an employment goal with someone, and you see the joy that they experience with that individual…and you have someone come into your office and say ‘Yes! I’m a working man now. I’m going to be a working man now!’ it really brings home to you why you are putting all of this effort into this.”[13](#_bookmark17)

And finally, it seems clear that organizations engaged in transformation are recognizing the positive benefits of this work on their reputation and standing in the wider community. They are finding support is increasing from the local business community and their traditional community supporters. They are also finding significantly increased support from their funding sources that are equally invested in their success. And they are finding that peer organizations, both from within the state and from other states, are now looking to them for advice, mentoring and technical assistance.

If these outcomes are the kinds of outcomes that resonate with you and your organization, then transformation is the right next step. This manual brings together in one place, the best strategies, tips, lessons learned and perspectives on provider transformation to help you and your organization get started, or if you have already started, to help you and your organization continue your efforts and ultimately achieve the best possible success with transformation.

13 To view a video on organizational transformation efforts in Wisconsin and the perspective of this and other community rehabilitation provider directors and managers, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xd3qgUwLHbw>

**Module 8:**

**Beyond Transformation**

**Key Terms**

*Community of Practices Consortium of Agencies Cluster Model*

*Learning Journey*

**Module 8: Beyond Transformation**

## Contemplating Expansion to Meet Broader Needs

As you support people to make a place for themselves in the economy, you will be uncovering new avenues in which you can support them, and even new sets of people who could benefit from your work. These opportunities may be consistent with your mission, make a difference in people’s lives, and enable you to expand revenues and reach economies of scale.

Here are some new needs that might present themselves to you:

* Individuals who are working would like opportunities to socialize with and without people with disabilities on weekends;
* People want to further develop their careers;
* People would like to attend community college;
* People want to live on their own in the community with support;
* Unserved veterans would like to obtain your services;
* People with mental health issues who seek your services;
* Unemployed, underemployed, displaced or older workers who could benefit from your employment expertise.

You will want to evaluate these exciting opportunities through the same kind of self-assessment process

– though perhaps less comprehensively – that you have used to begin your transformation work. Through a self-assessment process, you can evaluate: 1) when is the appropriate timing for expanding your supports and services; 2) are you providing your current services as effectively as you can; 3) will the expansion further support and enhance your current services; 4) can you maintain quality or will you be spreading yourself too thin if you take on these new efforts.

Opportunities for expansion can be opportunities to reach out to foundations, and other private donors. Research and planning grants can help you evaluate these opportunities, and can provide your staff with new opportunities for creativity and leadership.

## Serving as a Mentor to Other Organizations

Once you have made substantial progress in your transformation, you may want to make mentoring and technical assistance part of your operations. This is a terrific opportunity for staff to develop leadership and public speaking abilities, think about their own work from a new perspective, and can generate some additional revenue. What follows are a few ways that you can get involved with mentoring other agencies.

### Communities of Practice

A *Community of Practice* is a group of providers who meet together, in person or virtually, to share ideas, strategies, expertise, and training resources. The group can bring in speakers and trainers to address areas of mutual interest and concern. They also may meet periodically to support and mentor each other in ongoing employment work. You can both receive and offer advice through this community

of practice. If you are ahead of other colleagues in your state or region, spearheading a community of practice is a good strategy for mentoring other provider agencies, spreading the cost of your staff training, marketing yourself as a resource to other providers, while providing your own team with an opportunity to brainstorm with other colleagues.

### Consortiums and Collaborations

Another avenue for mentoring other employment colleagues is by developing a ***consortium of agencies*** that actually work together to meet their employment goals. The growth of consortiums has been a response to the advantages of reaching out to the business community in a collaborative way so that competition between providers does not undermine individual’s ability to find a good match and employers need to find the right employees. Consortiums also enable providers to present a more cohesive presence to employers in a way that assures employers that the industry is designed to meet their needs, and to educate the business community in a consistent and effective way about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities.

A consortium is most sustainable if there is funding to support a coordinator for the consortium. Foundation funding is good initial funding for a consortium but you will want to consider ongoing government funding or membership fees to sustain the costs. For example, one New York City provider of customized employment has received multiple years of foundation funding to support the costs of staffing for a *Metropolitan New York Consortium for Customized Employment*. A project director schedules meetings, forums and trainings that will advance the members customized employment work, but also introduce customized employment strategies to New York metropolitan area employers on behalf of all of the members. The goal is to create a network of employers and providers committed to using customized employment. The Poses Family Foundation in collaboration with Autism Speaks, the Kessler Foundation, the New York Center for Autism, and the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust, has funded “clusters” of providers through its Workplace Initiative to collaborate together in a number of locations around the country. The ***cluster model*** has three main components: 1) Employer consortium

– a consortium of employers committed to implementing or expanding programs to employ individuals with disabilities; 2) A public/private partnership to coordinate services for job seekers with disabilities with a single point of contact for employers; and 3) Connections among employers, public and private agencies, and schools to reach young adults with disabilities who are in transition from school to work, including students with learning disabilities who may not be served by traditional providers. These clusters are now in operation in: Louisville, Kentucky; St. Louis, Missouri; Atlanta, Georgia; and Columbus, Ohio.

### Hosting “Learning Journeys”

You may want to host a ***learning journey*** for other providers. Providers in other parts of the State may be interested in your strategies. It’s a terrific way for your staff to improve their presentation skills, make connections with other employers, and think about their own work. A learning journey usually involves some time for other providers to go out in the field and see the employment opportunities, or individualized community opportunities your team has developed, and some time in your office, learning about your strategies, outcomes and what you have learned.

### Training and TA Provider

Once your team has become proficient at finding and supporting people in competitive integrated employment, you may want to offer yourselves as trainers or as consultants to provide guidance to executives and program managers of other agencies. You may also be able to provide technical assistance to schools preparing students for transition through internship and work experiences. This can be an extra source of income, can raise your profile in the community, and can offer your team opportunities to hone their presentation skills.

### Conference Presentations

If you think your agency has taken a promising new approach, or developed particularly successful partnerships, it can be a special opportunity for your staff to present their work at a conference. These conferences are attended by colleagues who will be interested in their work, and the presentations can provoke questions and ideas that may further advance your work. Conferences can be based in a state or region, such as a state or local provider association, or can be national and even international.

National conferences that may focus on employment and individualized work include TASH, National APSE, ANCOR, Reinventing Quality Conference. One international institute is the Toronto Inclusion Institute whose focus is on community integration more generally.

# Conclusion

This manual reflects best practices that have been developed over the course of the past 40 years, with an emphasis on the most up-to-date and effective practices that are relevant in today’ environment where we see a tremendous acceleration toward competitive integrated employment and inclusive community supports. The manual is a synthesis of the knowledge and experience that the authors, their colleagues and numerous provider organizations across the country have gained in transforming organizations, and the public systems that fund them, so that individuals with disabilities, including those with complex support needs, can get and keep competitive integrated employment in their communities.

Clearly, there is no one way for organizations to implement a transformational change process, but we hope that the practices described in this manual – practices that are considered “tried and true” among those who make this topic their life’s work – will assist you in your efforts. Be sure to tap the many resources cited in this document, as well as experts and mentors who can provide guidance on your journey.

We urge you to advocate for and enact positive change with a sense of urgency. Be part of the exciting Employment First movement that is underway toward true systems change and full lives in the community for all individuals with disabilities. As Margaret Mead said, “Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world. For, indeed, that’s all who ever have.”