

Employment First

New Expectations and
Promising Practices to Meet Those

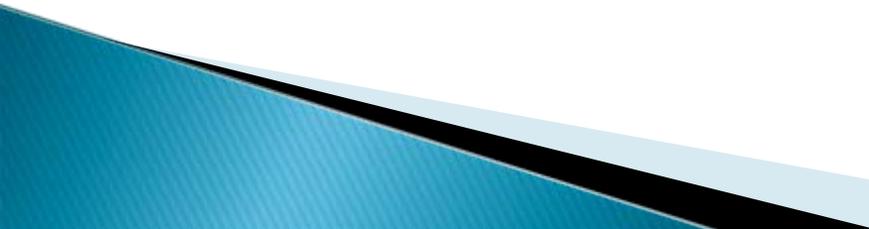
Employment First

- ▶ Refers to the affirmation in state and federal public policies, legislative statutes, regulations and operational procedures that “employment in integrated settings at minimum wage or higher with commensurate benefits” is a priority objective and preferred outcome of publicly-financed services furnished to people with intellectual, developmental and other disabilities; including persons with the most significant disabilities.

Employment First

- ▶ **Employment First prioritizes the use of public funding for persons with disabilities, including persons with the most significant disabilities, toward service delivery strategies that support the primary or preferred employment outcome of integrated employment at minimum and prevailing wages.**
 - ▶ **The strategy includes the issuance and implementation of policies, practices, and procedures promulgated through federal and state statutes, regulations, and/or operational procedures.**
 - ▶ **This includes an expectation that systems, which have a statutory responsibility to provide services to people with disabilities, align their policies, guidance and reimbursement practices to incent, encourage and fund services and supports that lead to integrated employment.**
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Fundamental Change in Approach

- ▶ Traditionally, we have assessed employability and this determined whether an individual was offered the choice (and services) to pursue integrated employment
 - ▶ Employment First begins with presumption that all individuals are employable with the right job match and supports *but it goes further...*
 - ▶ Employment First involves delivering a full array of employment services with that presumption held intact
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Fundamental Change in Approach

- ▶ Moving toward federal policy that requires adequate and effective job development effort over reasonable period of time before any conclusion of “non-employability” can be reached
- ▶ Onus on states to demonstrate greater investment in integrated employment services as compared to segregated employment and non-work services
- ▶ Onus on states to encourage and promote integrated employment services when engaging with individuals with disabilities and their legal guardians (especially if person is already in or would otherwise be placed in a segregated employment service setting)

Employment First Expectations Regarding Service Delivery

- ▶ Service providers are expected to use best, promising, emerging practices with respect to the provision of employment-related services and supports.
 - ▶ Technical assistance should be available to service providers for the purpose of expanding and improving their capacity to provide supported employment services, customized employment strategies, and other services and supports resulting in integrated employment as the preferred outcome consistent with best, promising and emerging practices.
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Do Service Providers Use Best, Promising and Emerging Practices?

- ▶ National survey of employment specialists

Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 2010, Vol. 35, No. 1-2, 15-23.

- ▶ Looked at job development practices used as compared to practices recommended in research literature.
 - ▶ Found most common job development practices reported conflicted with best practices as established in the literature.
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Job Development: Best, Promising and Emerging Practices

- ▶ Literature:

Employers typically look for candidates who are connected to the employer's network of acquaintances as opposed to relying on advertising.

Only 10%–20% of openings ever reach job market

Only 10%–15% of employers advertise job openings

Only 22% of job offers for those receiving job development services originated from advertisements

- ▶ Two Most Commonly Reported Job Developer Practices:

1. Browsing classified ads in newspaper/internet
 2. Making cold calls to employers
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Job Development: Best, Promising and Emerging Practices

▶ Literature:

Involvement of the job seeker's family and acquaintances is one strategy for expanding connections with employers

Only 34% of Job Developers surveyed reported doing this.

Efficient job development process requires Job Developers to track contacts and interactions with businesses and key community leaders

Only 22% of Job Developers surveyed formally tracked contacts.



Job Development: Best, Promising and Emerging Practices

- ▶ Literature:

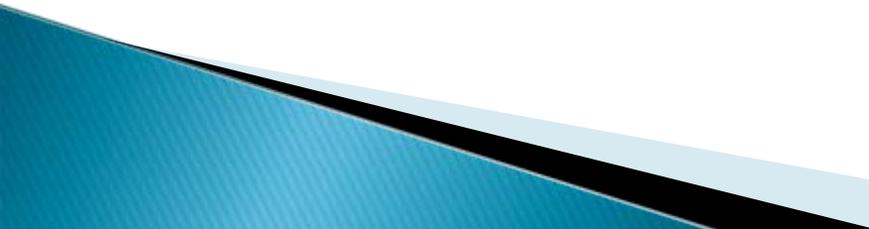
If finding jobs that match the job seeker's skills and preferences is challenging, an effective alternative strategy is to create or negotiate new job descriptions.

Only 27% of Job Developers surveyed reported negotiating new/modified positions or facilitating the reorganization of tasks to customize a job

When Insufficient Capacity Exists

- ▶ Employment First calls for technical assistance to be available to service providers for the purpose of expanding their capacity.
 - ▶ Insufficient capacity results in vendors receiving disproportionately large number of referrals
 - ▶ Vendor waiting lists inhibit healthy competition that contributes to increased quality of service
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When Insufficient Capacity Exists

- ▶ With large numbers of referrals, Job Developers operate with a focus on numerical placement targets
 - ▶ Best practices necessary to successfully serve individuals with most challenges are not implemented because numerical targets can be met by focusing on referrals with less challenges
 - ▶ Current referral and reimbursement system doesn't seem to adequately reward vendors for effectively and efficiently serving consumers with more challenges (& penalize vendors who don't)
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Achieving Higher Quality Service

Delivery: Multiple Strategies Are Needed

- ▶ Sufficient capacity that results in referral scarcity can drive vendors to focus more on quality service delivery
 - ▶ Incentives and consequences are needed which relate to service/performance with consumers with highest level of need
 - ▶ Those authorizing and approving payments for services should fully understand what high quality service looks like so standards for reimbursement are high enough to ensure best practices are the norm.
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Going Forward

- ▶ Many challenges to address
 - ▶ Changing expectations among youth, the rise of Employment First and new expectations regarding ADA/Olmstead compliance all happening at once
 - ▶ New consumer group emerging that in past would have never applied to VR or would have been referred to sheltered work for long-term employment
 - ▶ Pressure for states to find ways to successfully serve this new group in integrated employment
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Going Forward

What if we embraced the challenge and applied all of our energies toward finding paths to success?

What if we pretended we had no other option but to succeed with every applicant?

What if we tried to make our highest local performance the statewide average rather than judging our state's performance solely in comparison to other states?



Closing Thoughts

“To improve is to change, so to be perfect is to have changed often.”

–Winston Churchill



Contact Information

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