Assistance, support for providers shifting away from jobs at subminimum wages

Officials in Iowa, Maryland, Ohio, and Oregon identified several types of assistance and support for providers transitioning away from jobs that pay subminimum wages to people with disabilities. On behalf of the Task Force on Eliminating Subminimum Wages, Management Analysis and Development (MAD) interviewed officials in these model states, which either no longer allow subminimum wages or have dramatically reduced the number of people with disabilities earning subminimum wages. MAD conducted this research to support the task force as it explores solutions for challenges to phasing out subminimum wages in Minnesota.

This background brief highlights four approaches that these states cited to assist providers. There may be others as well. MAD compiled the information that follows from the interviews and from documents and websites about state efforts and initiatives.

During the April task force meeting, task force members identified the necessary transition for providers as a challenge to eliminating subminimum wages. Provider transformation is one of 10 critical areas needed to increase competitive integrated employment, according to an Employment First guide from the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).[1] Provider transformation is the process of increasing the capability to create and provide competitive integrated employment services. It is important enough to Employment First approaches that the ODEP has produced two provider transformation manuals.[2]

Summary information about the four approaches and the state examples

Officials in all four of the model states cited the following approaches, and they offered the examples listed under each:

- Sharing information with providers
    - Conferences, forums, seminars, and formal networks
    - A list of provider contacts for information about transition topics
    - Outside experts who talked with providers about options
    - A comprehensive guidebook for providers and coordinators
    - Communications tailored to providers about transitioning from sheltered workshop model
- Training and technical assistance for provider organizations
    - Training webinars, conducted and then made available online
    - Training sessions and retreats
    - A technical assistance team that identified transition models and helped with planning

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[1] David Mank and Richard Luecking, "Employment First State Transformation Guide: 10 Critical Areas to Increase Competitive Integrated Employment," US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, June 16, 2017, https://leadcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/E1st-State-Transformation-Guide.pdf.

[2] Refer to both Lisa Mills, Rachel Pollock, Pat Rogan, and Genni Sasnett, "Provider Transformation Manual: Pilot Version," US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, April 11, 2017, https://health.maryland.gov/dda/Documents/ODEP%20Provider%20Transformation%20Manual,%20April%2011,%202017.pdf, and Genni Sasnett and Rachel Pollock, "Provider Transformation Manual 2.0," US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, October 18, 2018, https://leadcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Provider-Transformation-Manual-2.0.pdf.

- o Grants that providers used to hire technical experts, including those involved in successful transitions
        - o Technical assistance from a provider association, including peer pairings for providers in transition
        - o Assistance on customized transformation plans for some providers and county boards
    - Training and guidance for employment support professionals
        - o A series of two-day training sessions for professionals, with sessions then made available online
        - o Required core competency training modules for job placement service contracts
        - o Training sessions regularly offered in-person and online
        - o Funding to providers so they could send staff to trainings about supported employment
    - Financial assistance and preparedness for the transformation
        - o New reimbursement rates to increase the financial viability of Employment First approaches
        - o Grants to some providers for innovative actions related to transitioning
        - o Grants for transforming an existing provider, starting a new provider service, or expanding services
        - o Grants to allow providers to think through and plan for transitions
        - o Funding to providers for pilots focused on customized employment in community settings

The sections below provide more information about the four approaches and the examples from the model states.

Information sharing

Officials from all four of the model states cited information sharing as important to providers as they transition away from use of subminimum wages. Approaches to information sharing include the following:

- All four states offered conferences, forums, seminars, or formal networks where providers learned about transition strategies both from presentations by experts and providers who successfully shifted away from subminimum wages, as well as through conversations with peer organizations.
- Maryland's Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) created a list of directors from supported employment and day programs who could provide ongoing information and resources related to best practices in community-based employment, updated policies, operating procedures, and training opportunities.
- Maryland brought in experts from the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) to talk with providers about options for transitioning away from subminimum wages.[3]
- Iowa's Department of Human Resources worked with other state agencies and Iowa's Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) to compile a comprehensive Iowa Employment First Guidebook for service providers and coordinators.[4]
- Oregon developed communications tailored to providers about the transformation from sheltered workshop employment to competitive integrated employment.

Training, technical assistance, and consultation for provider organizations

All four model states moved beyond information sharing to provide training, technical assistance, and consultation for providers to help them transition. The following are state-specific examples of this approach:

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[3] SELN is a joint program of the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services and the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and the State of Minnesota is a member. https://www.selnhub.org/home

[4] "Iowa Employment First Guidebook," Iowa Department of Human Services, 2017, https://dhs.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/Iowa_Employment_First_Guidebook_2nd_edition.pdf?042220221239.

- The State of Maryland worked with experts and partners to form a technical team that created different models for providers to consider in their transition away from jobs that pay subminimum wages. The technical team helped providers with planning, including what to do with facilities that had functioned as sheltered workshops.
- Maryland's DDA and its Division of Rehabilitation Services offered trainings and retreats, often with involvement from provider networks, to build skills for tailored employment services that meet the needs of the individual.
- The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council offered grants to providers for technical assistance from subject matter experts on ways to improve services for individuals finding and keeping jobs in their communities, as well as for individuals engaging in other meaningful activities aside from employment.
- Maryland's DDA offered technical assistance to providers as requested and on a case-by-case basis through the state's Statewide Coordinator for Transition and Employment Services, Community Rehabilitation Program-Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs, and other channels.
- Oregon's Department of Human Services used several rounds of Transformation Grants to secure technical assistance for service providers moving to community-based, integrated employment services. The expertise came from an organization in Washington State committed to the transformation process and from a provider in Oregon that had transitioned away from a sheltered workshop model.
- Iowa's Employment First partners used federal grants for subject matter experts who offered technical assistance to providers shifting away from subminimum wage employment. The technical assistance experts included knowledgeable individuals from outside the state, as well as leaders and staff from a provider in Iowa that had successfully transitioned away from using jobs that paid subminimum wages.
- The Iowa Association of Community Providers has offered technical assistance to its members, including a program that paired up member organizations to learn from each other as they transformed from sheltered employment to integrated employment.
- For ongoing, online access, the Iowa Coalition for Integrated Employment (ICIE) compiled training webinars and session materials focused on employment for people with disabilities and intended for service providers and others.[5]
- As part of a project for the Employment First State Leadership Mentor Program from ODEP, the State of Ohio and its partners worked with a number of service providers and county boards on customized transformation plans, tapping Transcen in Maryland for technical assistance expertise.

Training and guidance for employment support professionals

The transition away from facility-based work at subminimum wages requires different skills from employment support staff as they work with individuals to pursue and keep competitive integrated jobs. For this reason, all four model states also offered information and training to employment support professionals. Examples include the following:

- Oregon hired Washington Initiative for Supported Employment (WISE) to develop a series of two-day trainings for employment support professionals on supported employment, discovery and career planning, Social Security benefits and work incentives, job development and marketing, and general instruction for improving job performance and increasing autonomy for people with disabilities. WISE held 19 training events that attracted 700 attendees

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[5] To review the available ICIE webinars and materials, visit https://sites.google.com/site/iowaemployment1st/home and select from tabs at the top.

- From its training series for Oregon, WISE created 32 online, on-demand tools for professionals and those coming into this field of work. In addition, Oregon worked with colleges to incorporate these trainings and tools into the social work curriculum.
- Oregon's Vocational Rehabilitation office adopted a set of 12 Core Competency Online Training Modules, available online, as necessary training for all existing and new employment support professionals in order to comply with job placement service contracts, prompting thousands of them to use the modules in the one-year period from July 2017 through June 2018.
- In Iowa, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the Department of Human Services regularly make training available on the topic of employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and market the training to providers, instead of requiring it. In addition, ICIE and Iowa's APSE offer online trainings.
- Regionally, the Iowa Division of Mental Health and Disability Services has offered funding to providers with sheltered workshops that allows them to send staff to trainings about supported employment.
- Ohio's Employment First organization, which involves five different state agencies and a non-profit organization, produced a series of trainings and tools for employment services professionals and makes them available online.[6] Topics include career discovery, work experience, employment supports, assistive technology, job coaching, and job matching.
- In Maryland, the DDA has held regional trainings for employment service personnel and case managers on benefits and work incentives, job development, and customized employment.

Financial assistance and preparedness for the transformation

For providers, the shift from facility-based employment at subminimum wages to competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities can create financial uncertainty, especially in the short term during the transition. That transition will require thoughtful financial planning that considers all potential sources of funding and expands revenue flows tied to competitive integrated employment. According to the "Provider Transformation Manual 2.0" from ODEP, as revenue from contract work in sheltered settings declines and ends, revenues will need to increase from employment services and supports for jobs held by people with disabilities in the community at competitive wages.[7]

Officials in several of the model states cited ways to assist providers with the financial transition, through funding or by making it easier for them to prepare for the shift. Examples include the following:

- The State of Oregon distributed innovation grants to more than 20 providers as a way to build their capacity for the competitive integrated employment of people with disabilities. Open-ended in nature, the grants allowed providers to propose relevant and innovative uses for the funds, which included implementing a team-based, supported employment model; planning and implementing job coach trainings; and developing a guide for planning and hosting business engagement.

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[6] To access the Ohio Employment First trainings and tools, go to https://ohioemploymentfirst.org/view.php?nav_id=105.

[7] Genni Sasnett and Rachel Pollock, "Provider Transformation Manual 2.0," US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, October 18, 2018, pp. 70 and 76, https://leadcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Provider-Transformation-Manual-2.0.pdf

- Oregon also offered grants for transforming sheltered workshops, developing new supported employment service providers, and expanding services available through existing providers, all with the aim of assisting individuals in securing competitive integrated employment.
- Oregon provided incentive payments to providers for the competitive integrated employment of people with disabilities and bonuses in cases where those individuals worked 20 hours or more.
- Ohio provided one-time grants to some providers to help them rethink what they provide and how as they transitioned away from facility-based subminimum wage jobs.
- The model states all instituted changes in reimbursement rates for employment services in order to raise incentives for competitive integrated employment and increase the financial viability of the Employment First approach. In the case of Iowa, providers and other stakeholders were included in a funding redesign work group that explored financial barriers to competitive integrated employment and came up with new funding structures for employment services, ones that recognized the level of expertise required of employment service professionals in providing job exploration and career planning, job development, and job coaching.
- Iowa used federal grants to offer funds to providers for pilot programs focused on customized employment in community settings for people with disabilities, in part to demonstrate to providers, state agencies, and families that competitive integrated employment works. The state of Iowa has not offered incentive payments to encourage competitive integrated employment, but several regions in the state have done so using local tax dollars in part as a way to reduce costs they bear for sheltered workshop services.

MAD's research interviews with the model states

In consultation with officials in the Disability Services Division (DSD) at the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), MAD identified Iowa, Maryland, Ohio, and Oregon as states to interview based on input and guidance from the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN). These states stand out for their successful efforts to move people with disabilities away from jobs that pay subminimum wages. Maryland and Oregon have laws ending the use of subminimum wages, so they engaged in policies and practices to transition toward that end goal. Iowa and Ohio allow subminimum wages but have taken steps to substantially reduce the use of subminimum wage jobs.

The following individuals participated in the four MAD interviews:

Iowa—Tammie Amsbaugh, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities at Iowa State University; Amy Desenberg-Wines, Iowa Coalition for Integration and Employment (ICIE); Page Eastin, State of Iowa Human Rights; Jess Kreho, ICIE and Griffin-Hammis Associates; Ashley Lantz, Griffin-Hammis Associates; LeAnn Moskowitz, State of Iowa Medicaid Enterprise; and Lin Nibbelink, State of Iowa Mental Health and Disability Services

Maryland—Ken Capone, People On the Go Maryland; Jade Gingerich, Department of Disabilities, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA); Stephanie Jones, Department of Health, Maryland DDA; and Patricia Sastoque, Department of Health, Maryland DDA

Ohio—Stacy Collins, Division of Policy and Strategic Direction, Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities

Oregon—Acacia McGuire Anderson, Office of Developmental Disabilities Services, Oregon Department of Human Services

Additional sources not previously cited

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Jean Winsor, Cady Landa, Allison Hall, and Caro Narby, "Pushing the Integrated Employment Agenda: A Case Study of Maryland's High-Performing Employment System," Bringing Employment First to Scale, Issue 16, Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston, https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=thinkwork.