

## ODEP's Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program Executive Summary

A critical priority for the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), is to invest in systems change efforts that result in increased community-based, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. This priority reflects growing support for a national movement called **Employment First**, a framework for systems change that is centered on the premise that all citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life. Under this approach, publicly-financed systems are urged to align policies, service delivery practices, and reimbursement structures to commit to **integrated employment**<sup>1</sup> as the priority option with respect to the use of publicly-financed day and employment services for youth and adults with significant disabilities. Many states have formally committed to the *Employment First* framework through official executive proclamation or formal legislative action.

ODEP recognizes that many states desire to align their efforts to support individuals with disabilities toward an *Employment First* approach, but may not yet possess the capacity, experience or technical resources necessary to lead and facilitate such change. To address this need, ODEP has initiated the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program (EFSLMP), a cross-disability, cross-systems change initiative. EFSLMP is providing a platform for multi-disciplinary state teams to focus on implementing the *Employment First* approach with fidelity through the alignment of policies, coordination of resources, updating of service delivery models, to facilitate increased integrated employment options for people with the most significant disabilities.

### Objectives of the EFSLMP

The objectives of the EFSLMP are to:

- Provide mentoring, intensive technical assistance (TA) and training from a national pool of subject matter experts and peer mentors to core states as they transform existing policies, service delivery systems, and reimbursement structures to reflect an *Employment First* approach;
- Facilitate virtual training and knowledge translation on effective practices;
- Facilitate dialogue on shared experiences related to effectuating *Employment First* policies and practice;
- Link participating states with current Federal initiatives that are focused on promoting state-level systems-change conducive to *Employment First* objectives; and
- Evaluate the impacts of the investments in state *Employment First* systems change efforts over time to identify common challenges faced by State governments and validate innovative strategies and effective practices that lead to the successful implementation of *Employment First* objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> ODEP defines **integrated employment** as work paid directly by employers at the greater of minimum or prevailing wages with commensurate benefits, occurring in a typical work setting where the employee with a disability interacts or has the opportunity to interact continuously with co-workers without disabilities, has an opportunity for advancement and job mobility, and is preferably engaged full-time. This definition is being modified to align with the recent passage of the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act, which contains a similar definition for the term "competitive, integrated employment".

## EFSLMP – Provision of Intensive Technical Assistance to Core States

Through an application process, states have an opportunity to become an EFSLMP Core State. Core states receive a combination of onsite and virtual technical assistance in the following areas:

- Strategic Guidance on policy/funding reform, and training on effective practices from a pool of national subject matter experts.
- Practice & Policy Reform: policy analysis; strategic planning; rate restructuring and resource braiding; service delivery coordination; cross-agency collaboration; and provider contract reform.
- Provider Transformation: vision/mission statement drafting; staff restructuring/decentralization; financial diversification; executive leadership mentoring; communications/marketing; and performance benchmarking.
- Capacity Building: training and ongoing coaching supports for front-line direct support professionals and management in the use and successful implementation of evidence-based effective practices.
- Peer-to-peer mentoring: access to peer experts from other state governments who have demonstrated success in implementing one or more key components of an *Employment First* is a critical ingredient to the EFSLMP model.
- Policy consulting via participation in the EFSLMP Vision Quest Series: Vision Quest is a series of small working groups (3-4 state teams) focused on analyzing, developing and implementing policy recommendations related to a specific aspect of a state's *Employment First* systems-change efforts.

## EFSLMP's National Employment First Community of Practice

In addition to the intensive technical assistance and training being offered to the EFSLMP core states, ODEP has launched an *Employment First* Community of Practice (CoP), which is open to state *Employment First* teams. Thirty-three state teams are currently participating in the EFSLMP Community of Practice, although it is open to all fifty states.

The EFSLMP Community of Practice provides a variety of services to support state *Employment First* teams, including:

- **Monthly Webinars**: ODEP hosts monthly educational presentations on a variety of *Employment First* topics facilitated by national leaders in the field of systems reform.
- **Access to ePolicyWorks Virtual Workspace**: ODEP's ePolicyWorks provides a free virtual policy workspace for all EFSLMP CoP participating states, along with an array of resources and services to encourage virtual communications and policy work in a safe and user-friendly environment.
- **Access to Technical Assistance Resources and Policy Tools Developed through ODEP's EFSLMP**: A variety of technical assistance resources and policy tools are available to provide additional support at no cost to participating CoP states.

In addition to the EFSLMP, ODEP offers a dedicated website containing comprehensive information on integrated employment for a variety of audiences. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/ietoolkit/>. For more information on ODEP's Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program, please contact Serena Lowe (Senior Policy Advisor, ODEP) at [Lowe.Serena.D@dol.gov](mailto:Lowe.Serena.D@dol.gov). Anyone interested in receiving federal policy announcements, funding opportunities, and webinar schedules, should subscribe here: <http://www.econsys.com/efslmp/?subscribe>.