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Indiana Employment First Plan 2019

In April, 2017, Indiana passed legislation regarding Employment First, meaning that employment is the first and preferred outcome for individuals with disabilities. The Employment First Act pertains to state agencies that provide services and support to help obtain employment for individuals with disabilities, and requires those agencies to effectively implement this employment first policy to advance competitive, integrated employment outcomes, including self-employment, for individuals with disabilities of working age. The Indiana Commission on Rehabilitation Services is responsible for developing a plan for advancing competitive, integrated employment as the first and preferred option, and the plan must include:

- A. Identification of barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities;
- B. An analysis of federal, state, and local agency policies concerning the provision of services to individuals with disabilities, including the impact of those policies on opportunities for competitive integrated employment; and
- C. Recommendations to advance competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.

The Indiana Commission on Rehabilitation Services has worked over the past year to draft an Employment First plan. This draft plan is now posted for public review and comment. **The draft plan may be viewed below and the Commission on Rehabilitation Services welcomes comments from individuals with disabilities and their families, state agencies, schools, stakeholders, employers, provider organizations, advocacy groups, members of the public, and others.** Comments may be submitted to VRCommission.vr@fssa.in.gov through Friday, December 13, 2019.

Indiana Commission on Rehabilitation Services

Employment First Draft Plan

November 8, 2019

Introduction/Background

Employment First is the vision of making employment the first priority and preferred outcome of services for individual with disabilities. It means: (1) expecting, encouraging, providing, creating, and rewarding integrated employment in the workforce; and, (2) at a minimum, securing competitive wages with benefits as the first and preferred outcome for working-age youth and adults with disabilities. This includes those with complex and significant disabilities, for whom job placement in the past has been limited, or has not traditionally occurred. Employment First is everyone's responsibility. State and local government agencies, employers, service providers, community members, and families and individuals with disabilities should work in partnership so people with disabilities and others with employment barriers get into the labor force.

In April, 2017, Indiana passed legislation regarding Employment First, meaning that employment is the first and preferred outcome for individuals with disabilities. The Employment First Act pertains to state agencies that provide services and support to help obtain employment for individuals with disabilities. The Employment First Act requires those agencies to effectively implement this employment first policy to advance competitive, integrated employment outcomes, including self-employment, for individuals with disabilities of working age, regardless of the nature or severity of the individual's disability. These state agencies must collaborate with other agencies in doing so, and share data and information to track progress where feasible.

The Indiana Commission on Rehabilitation is responsible for developing a plan for advancing competitive, integrated employment as the first and preferred option, and the plan must include:

- (A) Identification of barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities;
- (B) An analysis of federal, state, and local agency policies concerning the provision of services to individuals with disabilities, including the impact of those policies on opportunities for competitive integrated employment; and
- (C) Recommendations to advance competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.

Recommendations concerning the implementation and progress toward advancing competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities must be included as part of the federally required Annual Report. From 2018 to November of 2019, the Indiana Commission on Rehabilitation worked to develop recommendations. A task force comprised of people with disabilities, service providers, state agency staff, advocates, and family members met for several months and outlined barriers with potential solutions. In addition, the Commission invited Work to Include Coalition, a statewide effort to promote and inform individuals about Employment First, to include suggestions gathered from 11 town halls held throughout Indiana. Those town halls were attended by over 400 people, the majority of whom were people with disabilities. The following plan includes broad input and establishes Indiana's path to Employment First.

Definition and Guiding Principles

Federal and state agencies use many definitions of employment when describing programs and outcomes of individuals with disabilities. According to the Employment First legislation and for this planning document, employment is defined as competitive, integrated employment or self-employment with the following features

- Where employees with disabilities are included on the payroll of a competitive business or industry (unless self-employed);
- Where the individual receives minimum or prevailing wages and benefits consistent with others in the workplace; and
- Where there are natural opportunities for integration and interactions with co-workers without disabilities, with customers, and/or the general public.

The Association of Persons Supporting Employment First (APSE) is the international organization which promotes competitive employment for individuals with disabilities. The Employment First Task Force has adopted their stated Employment First Underlying Principles which follow:

- Access to “real jobs with real wages” is essential if citizens with disabilities are to avoid lives of poverty, dependence, and isolation.
- It is presumed that all working age adults and youth with disabilities can work in jobs fully integrated within the general workforce, working side-by-side with co-workers without disabilities, earning minimum wage or higher.
- As with all other individuals, employees with disabilities require assistance and support to ensure job success and should have access to those supports necessary to succeed in the workplace.
- All citizens, regardless of disability, have the right to pursue the full range of employment opportunities, and to earn a living wage in a job of their choosing, based on their talents, skills, and interests.
- Implementation of Employment First principles must be based on clear public policies and practices that ensure employment of citizens with disabilities within the general workforce is the priority for public funding and service delivery.
- Inclusion or exclusion of the specific term “Employment First” does not determine whether a public system or agency has adopted Employment First principles. Such a determination can only be made in examining whether the underlying policies, procedures and infrastructure are designed for and ultimately result in increased integrated employment in the general workforce for citizens with disabilities. Policies and practices must address:
 - Equal opportunity, including treating individuals with disabilities as individuals, making assessments based on facts, objective evidence and science, and providing effective and meaningful experiences in the most integrated setting appropriate.

- Full participation in society, including engagement of individuals with disabilities in decision-making at the individual and systems levels, self-determination, self-advocacy and informed choice.
- Economic self-sufficiency, including employment-related services and supports, financial literacy, entrepreneurship and work incentives.
- Independent living, including skills development and long-term services and supports.

Hoosiers with disabilities have the highest unemployment rate of any minority. They want to work and reduce their reliance on state and federal subsidies. Some can secure employment on their own but many need assistance to overcome stereotypes, develop work experience, and become independent. A strong economy is fueled by all Hoosiers working and contributing to the bottom line. Strategies to employ Hoosiers with disabilities must be part of economic development efforts to move the Indiana workforce forward.

Employment First Vision Statements

Based on prior reports and feedback from Employment First Task Force members, the group determined there are six main focus areas for recommended action. The Rehabilitation Services Commission established a vision for each area in order to set long-term goals and clearly define strategies.

Collecting data to benchmark current performance and measure progress

VISION: Indiana has the information needed to evaluate progress toward community, integrated employment.

Finding and supporting employers to hire individuals with disabilities

VISION: Employers have a positive attitude about seeking and hiring individuals with disabilities, know the benefits of an inclusive workforce, and utilize supports when needed.

Promoting effective school-to-careers transition

VISION: Transition services in schools support youth to prepare for life after high school and access services so that they leave school employed or enrolled in postsecondary or career technical education.

Aligning government policies and funding to promote employment outcomes

VISION: State and local government policies and funding incentivize competitive, integrated employment and self-employment for individuals with disabilities, including those with significant support needs.

Developing quality employment services and supports for competitive employment

VISION: Individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant support needs, have access to technology, innovative employment services and other assistance they need for competitive, integrated employment and self-employment.

Creating high expectations and economic self-sufficiency among individuals with disabilities

VISION: Encouraged by their families and communities, individuals with disabilities expect to work, have access to reliable transportation and understand how to navigate work incentives.

I. Collecting data to benchmark current performance and measure progress

VISION: Indiana has the information needed to evaluate progress toward community, integrated employment

Recommendations

A. THE STATE SHOULD DEVELOP AN EMPLOYMENT FIRST REPORT CARD TO COLLECT DATA AND EVALUATE PROGRESS ON COMPETITIVE, INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT.

1. All agencies serving individuals with disabilities will provide data annually on employment outcomes of their services for the report card by type of disability and characteristics.

Specifically:

- a. Bureau of Rehabilitation Services:
 - i. Share information on the employment status and characteristics of all people served.
 - ii. Collaborate with Department of Education to identify more consistent methods to identify the employment status of all students with disabilities exiting high school.
- b. Department of Workforce Development:
 - i. Collect and report information on the disability status of individuals served
 - ii. Report on employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities whom they served.
- c. Department of Education

- i. Work with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services to identify employment status of students with disabilities as they exit school.
 - ii. Share graduate follow up information with the Rehabilitation Commission.
 - d. Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Services:
 - i. Collaborate with the Office of Medicaid Policy and Planning to track and report on services received and employment outcomes for all recipients.
 - e. OMPP
 - i. Identify the number of people on M.E.D. Works by disability
 - f. Division of Mental Health and Addictions
 - i. Collect and report data on employment programs and outcomes.
 - g. Other state agencies with employment programs, such as Department of Veterans Affairs, Division of Family Resources, Department of Corrections, and Department of Aging should collect and report information on employment outcomes for people with disabilities served.
 - h. Service providers should be required to report employment outcomes for the people they serve.
 - 2. Identify existing data available and evaluate staffing, funding and other resources needed to provide information for the report card.
- B. ENCOURAGE STATE AGENCIES SERVING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO ESTABLISH A COMMON SET OF DEFINITIONS, ENSURING DATA ACROSS AGENCIES IS COMPARABLE.
 - 1. Research current terms and definitions and develop a strategy to align similar terminology across agencies.
 - 2. Use common terms in cross agency documents, i.e. the Report Card.
- C. EVALUATE FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, BY REQUESTING EACH AGENCY TO IDENTIFY AMOUNTS AND PERCENT OF DOLLARS DESIGNATED TOWARD COMPETITIVE, INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES.
 - 1. Evaluate and report on the amount and percentage of public funds provided to segregated programs, such as sheltered work, compared to competitive, integrated employment.

II. Finding and supporting employers to hire individuals with disabilities

VISION: Employers have a positive attitude about seeking out and hiring individuals with disabilities, know the benefits of an inclusive workforce, and utilize supports when needed.

Recommendations

A. DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE EDUCATION AND MARKETING CAMPAIGN FOR EMPLOYERS ON THE BENEFITS OF HIRING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

1. Convene a disability led cross agency, cross disability group to plan the campaign
2. Seek out alternative funding for the campaign.

B. SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL TO PROMOTE CONSISTENT MESSAGING ABOUT AND DELIVERY OF COMPETITIVE, INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT.

1. Compile and share disability led employment success stories with employers, communities, individuals with disabilities, and family members.
2. Identify model employers who hire individuals with disabilities and seek opportunities for those employers to mentor others.
3. Collaborate with the Indiana Workforce Cabinet efforts ensuring that it is promoting employment for individuals with disabilities, as well as, other barriers to employment.
4. Encourage business to establish paid internships and apprenticeships for youth with disabilities.
5. Establish a library of resources to serve as a point of contact for employers, job seekers, parents, schools, and organizations. Including:
 - a. Information about tax credits and any other incentives.
 - b. Hiring practices that may serve as a barrier to individuals with disabilities.
 - c. Accommodation resources.
 - d. What employment support agencies do and how they can help employers connect with and hire individuals with disabilities.
 - e. Benefits of hiring individuals.
 - f. Supporting individuals as they transition from disability assistance programs.

C. IMPROVE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT BY PROFESSIONALS THAT SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

1. Supported by the business community, develop and implement employer engagement training for provider staff to better meet employer expectations.
2. Explore and implement a coordinated approach to job development for individuals with disabilities in local communities while ensuring a balance with individual, customized employment.
3. Provide training for employment professionals on how to seek out and engage with other employer initiatives to provide a cohesive approach.
4. Establish a protocol so providers can efficiently share job leads.

D. ESTABLISH A BUSINESS LED NETWORK TO DRIVE OUTREACH EFFORTS TO INDIANA BUSINESSES.

1. Establish a business to business approach of promoting employment for individuals with disabilities.
2. Consider use of a regional approach to expand business involvement across the state and align with other workforce initiatives.
3. Provide training to local Chambers of Commerce, human resource professionals, legislators, and local officials on employment first values and enlist their support.

E. INCREASE THE NUMBERS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EMPLOYED IN STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING LEADERSHIP POSITIONS.

1. Establish Indiana as a “model employer” including hiring and retention goals, accountability measures, and training on disability inclusion for departments and hiring managers.
2. Work with local governments to create similar model programs in cities and counties.

III. Promoting effective school-to-careers transition

VISION: Transition services in schools support youth to prepare for life after high school and access services so they leave school employed or enrolled in postsecondary or career technical education.

Recommendations

A. MAKE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS ON BEST PRACTICES IN EMPLOYMENT AND TRANSITION.

1. Train educators and support staff (e.g. paraprofessionals, school job coaches) on customized and supported employment to help them think creatively about employment opportunities.
2. Make available technical assistance to align school transition services, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), and the employability skills focus of both Graduation Pathways and Certificate of Completion.
3. Require yearly professional development (e.g. face to face training and technical assistance, online webinars or courses, professional conferences or seminars) in transition to adulthood for special education staff serving students with disabilities ages 14-22.

B. PROVIDE INFORMATION AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES TO INFORM FAMILIES AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ABOUT TRANSITION SERVICES AND RESOURCES.

1. Provide information on Social Security processes and available work incentives,
2. Share information on alternatives to guardianship including supported decision-making.

C. PROVIDE INFORMATION TO STUDENTS AND FAMILIES TO FACILITATE CHOICE OF SERVICES AND PROVIDERS.

1. Develop an interview guide to assist families and people with disabilities to ask about types of employment services, experience of staff, and outcomes.
2. Provide or develop information on employment outcomes for individual providers.

D. ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADDITIONAL WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES AND EXPERIENCE DURING HIGH SCHOOL.

1. Provide a variety of workplace experiences to students including internships, job shadowing, job fairs, volunteer work, and mentoring.
2. Develop or enhance programs that provide students with a range of paid work experiences during the summer and school year.

IV. Aligning government policies and funding to promote employment outcomes

VISION: State and local government policies and funding incentivize competitive, integrated employment and self-employment for individuals with disabilities, including those with significant support needs.

Recommendations

- A. PROMOTE POLICIES WHICH SEND A CLEAR AND UNIFIED MESSAGE THAT COMPETITIVE, INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT IS THE FIRST AND PREFERRED OPTION.
1. Ask each state agency to incorporate strategic goals into their plans that prioritize competitive, integrated employment and address:
 - a. A commitment to maximize resources to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities seeking publicly funded services;
 - b. Strategic goals and reasonable benchmarks to implement the strategies;
 - c. Financing and contracting methods that will prioritize employment among the array of services provided by the respective agency or organization.
 2. Encourage the state to apply for assistance for strategic planning from the US Department of Labor's Employment Policy Employment First Leadership Mentoring Project or from another federal resource option.
 3. Ensure all planning and community of practice initiatives undertaken by the state agencies serving individuals with disabilities prioritize competitive integrated employment.
 4. Align service definitions and funding with Indiana's Employment First policy and ensure that providers are incentivized to support individuals in competitive integrated employment.
 5. Identify options to provide support (e.g. consultative, financial) to agencies providing segregated employment services to switch their model to competitive integrated employment.
 6. Advocate for additional funding, staffing and other resources needed to serve all individuals eligible for VR Services thereby moving out of Order of Selection.
 7. Identify strategies and advocate to transition away from the use of 14 C certificates that pay people less than minimum wage.

B. INCREASE COLLABORATION BETWEEN STATE AGENCIES, SCHOOLS, FAMILIES, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

1. Increase the knowledge of state agency staff and independent case managers about Employment First legislation, policy, work incentives, and best practice for employment.
2. Develop suggestions for provider rates that allow for compensation that attracts employment professionals who have the capability to operate effectively in complex and diverse work environments.
3. Encourage the establishment of statewide training and certification requirements for employment professionals so skill sets are consistent across the state.

V. Developing quality employment services and supports for integrated competitive employment

VISION: Individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant support needs, have access to technology, innovative employment services and other assistance they need for competitive, integrated employment and self-employment.

Recommendations

A. INCREASE AWARENESS OF AND ACCESS TO QUALITY EMPLOYMENT AND SERVICES CUSTOMIZED TO THEIR NEEDS.

1. Ensure career and/or post-secondary goals and opportunities for community-based employment experiences are included in planning for all individuals with disabilities receiving services.
2. Develop and implement a public information campaign on employment services targeted to individuals and families that:
 - a. Includes all available employment support options, such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Workforce Development, and the Social Security Ticket to Work Program;
 - b. Provides for culturally competent outreach strategies; and
 - c. Provides information based on service provider outcomes.

B. ADDRESS SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEMS BARRIERS TO COMPETITIVE, INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT.

1. Ensure that those supporting individuals with disabilities understand employment best practices and how to collaborate to ensure people with barriers get into the work force.
2. Identify strategies that address barriers to shifting from facility to community-based services such as, technical assistance, financial support, mentoring, etc.
3. Identify strategies to improve recruitment and retention of quality employment professionals such as, career development, wage increases, recognition, etc.

VI. Creating high expectations and economic self-sufficiency among individuals with disabilities

VISION: Encouraged by their families and communities, individuals with disabilities expect to work, have access to reliable transportation and understand how to navigate work incentives.

Recommendations

- A. MAKE TRANSPORTATION MORE WIDELY AVAILABLE FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES STATEWIDE INCLUDING RURAL AREAS.
 - 1. Encourage state level planning and grant programs so communities can develop creative transportation options.
 - 2. Develop flexible private transportation options, such as those provided by employers, family, friends, co-workers or ride-sharing services.
 - 3. Utilize or develop voucher systems to support the expense of transportation while an individual transition to employment.
 - 4. Expand and promote awareness of funding options for vehicle modifications, for example, low-interest loan programs.

- B. PROMOTE THE VALUE AND BENEFITS OF WORKING AND INSTRUCT PEOPLE ON THEIR RIGHTS IN THE WORKPLACE.
 - 1. Develop and implement a community education initiative about the positive contributions of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.
 - 2. Develop and implement a community education initiative about the rights of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

- C. INCREASE THE USE OF WORK INCENTIVES AND BENEFITS PLANNING COUNSELING AND ASSISTANCE.
 - 1. Develop and conduct a public information campaign on work incentives for individuals with disabilities and families through a variety of mediums (e.g., social media, toll free information access number).
 - 2. Include information in service planning across systems.
 - 3. Provide case managers with training.
 - 4. Include benefits planning as a Medicaid Waiver service.