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/ [From Workshops to Workforce: Tips for Providers Transitioning to an Integrated Employment Model](#)

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## From Workshops to Workforce: Tips for Providers Transitioning to an Integrated Employment Model

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### Newsroom

October 26, 2016

*Annette Shea, Administration for Community Living Program Specialist*

Throughout the past year, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) has shared profiles and promising practices from employment service providers (<http://acl.gov/Programs/CPE/OPAD/Integrated-Employment-Blog-Series.aspx>) working with people with disabilities across the country. Many of the providers described their experiences transitioning from a sheltered workshop to more integrated community-based models.

For National Disability Employment Awareness Month, we've compiled the many tips, strategies, and leverage points that providers identified as critical to their success. These include tips for planning, cultivating partners and funding, staffing, and supporting beneficiaries.

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### Planning and Preparation for a Successful Transition

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- Develop and implement a strategic plan.
- Take small incremental steps to build infrastructure and slowly reallocating resources.
- Establish a committee to identify strategies for the workshop transition. Include parents and caregivers of individuals who have transitioned from the workshop to successful integrated employment on the committee and ensure the committee reports to the provider's Board of Directors regularly.
- Utilize technical assistance resources and subject matter experts, including those focusing on individualized supports and person-centered planning.
- Stay connected to other providers who have either gone through, or are undergoing, the same transformative change. Learn from each other.
- Create a core team that really believes in the integrated model. The team should get together regularly so they can overcome issues and keep things moving to avoid falling back on the old model.

- Implement a holistic approach that includes "wrap-around" services to meet the diverse needs of their customers.
  - Communicate with families about their fears.
  - Make sure the community hears about the program's successes during the transition. Utilize newsletters, email blasts, board meetings, parents groups, and other relevant forums to highlight the positive experiences of successfully employed individuals.
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## Cultivating Partnerships and Funding

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- Optimize funding mechanisms, policy levers, and incentives. This includes federal grants from the U.S. Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services as well as funding from Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Medicaid.
  - Sequence resources from multiple funding streams like Medicaid and VR for services and supports such as discovery, writing an individual job development plan, customized job development, job coaching, and job stabilization.
  - Utilize Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act (TWWIIA) Employment Network funds.
  - Become an eligible training provider through the Department of Labor American Job Centers, formerly One Stop Career Centers.
  - Participate in Project SEARCH (<http://www.projectsearch.us/Home.aspx>).
  - Engage the VR agency as a strong partner.
  - Examine and, where necessary, improve service rate reimbursement methodologies.
  - Secure grant funding from local foundations and corporations to assist with infrastructure changes including purchasing equipment and supporting hiring additional staff to help transform the model.
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## Staffing for a Successful Transition

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- Talk to staff early and frequently about the business model change and reassure them that the plan is not to fire them.
  - Shift staff hiring, job functions, and training approaches to fit the integrated model. For example, sales staff who secured workshop contracts can shift to seeking and developing community employment opportunities and business partnerships.
  - Train all staff to incorporate an individualized, person-centered, and customized approach to supporting integrated employment into every aspect of their work.
  - Initially, have staff focus on small groups of individuals age 26 or younger in the workshop who have expressed a strong interest in getting a job.
  - Cross-train job development staff so anyone could perform intake, discovery, and placement if needed.
  - Hire stabilization coaches to support individuals once they are employed.
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## Guiding Beneficiaries Toward Integrated Employment Outcomes

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- Start by implementing a soft skills curriculum including: resume writing, handling conflict with a boss, interview preparation, dressing appropriately, and navigating a professional environment.
- Offer career-counseling, discovery-based assessment, job development, job placement, on the job training and ongoing employment support.

- Adapt services to meet each person's specific needs. The more individualized the support, the more likely there is a successful employment outcome.
- Connect beneficiaries to "wrap around" supports and continuing education programs including meaningful day activities such as fitness activities, computer courses, volunteering, and cooking classes.
- Explore volunteer placements to develop skills and experiences.
- Welcome individuals who transitioned to integrated employment to return as motivation for their peers.
- Maintain a "wall of fame" in a common area featuring pictures and individual success stories of peers.

A final theme that emerged among the providers we interviewed was the importance of the Employment First movement and policies. **Employment First** is a framework for systems change that is centered on the premise that all citizens, including people with disabilities, should have opportunities for full participation in competitive integrated employment and community life.

*ACL is interested in hearing from states, providers, and advocates working on integrated employment. Share your successes, challenges, and questions by sending an email to [acinfo@acl.gov](mailto:acinfo@acl.gov) (<mailto:acinfo@acl.gov>).*

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[All Blogs \(/news-and-events/acl-blog\)](/news-and-events/acl-blog)  [next > \(/news-and-events/acl-blog/implementing-wioa\)](/news-and-events/acl-blog/implementing-wioa)

20 of 112

*Last modified on 04/07/2017*



Back to Top

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## Other ACL Sites

Eldercare Locator (<http://eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Index.aspx>)

OlderIndians.gov (<https://olderindians.acl.gov/>)

National Center on Elder Abuse (<https://ncea.acl.gov/>)

LongTermCare.gov (<http://longtermcare.gov/>)

Alzheimers.gov (<https://alzheimers.acl.gov/>)

BrainHealth.gov (<https://brainhealth.acl.gov/>)

## Related Sites

[Grants.gov \(http://www.grants.gov/\)](http://www.grants.gov/)

[HHS.gov \(http://www.hhs.gov/\)](http://www.hhs.gov/)

[No Fear Act \(on HHS.gov\) \(https://www.hhs.gov/about/agencies/asa/eeo/resources/no-fear-act/index.html\)](https://www.hhs.gov/about/agencies/asa/eeo/resources/no-fear-act/index.html)

[Plain Writing \(on HHS.gov\) \(http://www.hhs.gov/open/plain-writing/index.html\)](http://www.hhs.gov/open/plain-writing/index.html)

[USA.gov \(http://www.usa.gov/\)](http://www.usa.gov/)

[White House \(http://www.whitehouse.gov/\)](http://www.whitehouse.gov/)

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[Home \(/\)](#)

[Navigating this Site \(/welcome\)](/welcome)

[Accessibility \(/node/444\)](/node/444)

[Contact Us \(/contact\)](/contact)

[Disclaimers \(/node/446\)](/node/446)

[Freedom of Information Act \(FOIA\) \(/node/447\)](/node/447)

[Privacy Policy \(/node/445\)](/node/445)

[Site Map \(/sitemap\)](/sitemap)

[Viewers & Players \(http://www.hhs.gov/plugins.html\)](http://www.hhs.gov/plugins.html)