

BUILDING, DEVELOPING, AND GOING TO SCALE:
GRANT FUNDED PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH IN TRANSITION

A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TOOL FOR NAVIGATING THE ROAD TO WORK

MODULE 4

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF SYSTEM BUILDING, DEVELOPING, AND GOING TO SCALE

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National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth

“The significant problems that we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when they were created.”

— Albert Einstein

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The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) is composed of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, and workforce development issues. NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. The Collaborative is charged with assisting state and local workforce development systems to integrate youth with disabilities into their service strategies.

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Information on the Collaborative can be found at
<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/>.

Information about the Office of Disability Employment Policy can be found at
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/>.

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL/ODEP) has embarked on an ambitious youth-focused research initiative. Its primary purpose is to improve outcomes for youth with disabilities who are transitioning into workplace settings. Currently, the outcomes are poor, and have been so for some time.

The ODEP youth initiative presents states and local communities with an opportunity to reverse this trend for youth with disabilities. These grants, combined with ODEP’s funded technical assistance, can help non-profit public and private entities build a system of care for transitioning youth.

The rationale for this initiative is well justified. The outcomes for youth with disabilities continue to be unsatisfactory, in almost all areas. There is little likelihood that they will find meaningful employment as they begin the transition process. More disturbing, the lack of an organized system of support continues to hamper their chances of success. Numerous studies report problems addressing the transition needs of youth with disabilities through interagency collaboration and cooperation. Indeed, all ODEP grantees are no doubt aware that the following problems exist in many state and local systems:

- Lack of shared student information across agencies
- Lack of follow-up data on program recipients that could be used to improve efficiency and effectiveness
- Deficient interagency agreements
- Difficulty in predicting needed post-secondary services
- Minimized role for parents and student in decision-making
- Inefficient and ineffective management practices

Grantees should also understand that their participation in these initiatives are coming at a time when both government and philanthropic organizations are focusing their attention on the broader arena of “transition.” Although each of the

ODEP’s Mission

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) provides national leadership by developing and influencing disability-related employment policy as well as practice affecting the employment of people with disabilities.

Its vision is a world in which people with disabilities have unlimited employment opportunities.

ODEP serves as a catalyst for change through:

- Developing evidence-based employment solutions
- Delivering authoritative and credible data on employment of people with disabilities
- Guiding economic and social policy
- Building collaborative networks

ODEP youth projects have different emphases, they all share one thing in common: the charge to organize their work around evidence-based system neutral guiding principles and guideposts that help youth-serving institutions improve the transition process. For many youth at risk, entry into the new economy is nearly impossible. This includes young people leaving foster care, youth who are returning from juvenile justice facilities, and those who have chronic mental health concerns. There is an acknowledgement, based on credible evidence, that the discreet systems for these populations working in isolation are simply not effective. Further, the overlap between these high risk populations and youth with disabilities is considerable. In that sense, the grantees who are participating in the ODEP initiative are part of a much larger national process examining how the challenges for youth in transition can become opportunities. That implies that as a field of practice, the grantees, in collaboration with their state partners, can move towards a more comprehensive understanding of service delivery approaches, policy changes, funding strategies and desired outcomes.

The reality is that no one organization ever “owns” the transition responsibility. Multiple agencies are responsible for parts of the transition process. Success requires building cross-agency partnerships – based upon the guideposts – to affect multiple delivery systems.

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Like most well-intended reform initiatives, ODEP's youth initiative has created a high level of excitement, especially among veteran service providers. The initial reports from the grantees regarding their progress are very positive. Though it is still too early to identify any specific effective practices, there are undoubtedly several promising approaches. Although one common element of these approaches is that they are mostly centered on direct services, the key point is that agencies, intermediaries, and workforce development systems will need to craft new collaborative arrangements that include representation by human services, employers, business, education, vocational rehabilitation and young people. Again, this becomes especially relevant in light of a broader, national level of attention.

Grantees, currently or in the near future, will be approaching the critical stage of determining how to take their work to scale, how to build strategic collaborative relationships, how to blend and braid resources, and how to sustain their work past the grant

period. This document is being prepared as a technical assistance tool for grantees and their sub-grantees. It is part of an overall strategy to support the work of grantees entering these critical stages.

These modules reflect a combination of established practices from human systems and educational reform, successful business models, and responses to insightful questions raised by ODEP's grantees. Even though their original purpose was to support the efforts of the ODEP's grantees, the information contained in the modules have utility for anyone involved in workforce development system, state agencies working with youth in transition, policy makers and any public or private funders interested in innovative, collaborative youth development efforts. The modules are not meant to provide a step-by-step approach, nor should they imply any linear process. Instead they offer a straightforward overview of the complex and deliberate interactions and coordination needed to effectively fulfill our collective responsibility to improve the well-being of youth with disabilities.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF SYSTEM BUILDING, DEVELOPING, AND GOING TO SCALE

Grantees' efforts to develop and to bring to scale their transition initiatives are not separate or distinct stages occurring in a linear fashion. The process is more concurrent in nature. And, because of the collaborative nature of these initiatives, the dynamics are constantly changing. Most successful *system-building* efforts take several strides forward, and inevitably, a few in reverse. This back and forth movement accommodates innovations, ideas, and the ingenuity of the partners as well as a generous amount of learning moments. Ultimately however, grantees and sub-grantees must move from the prototype to full implementation and this means that local grantees will need to become a part of the outreach team to help promote the prototype to their peers in other parts of the state.

Throughout the ebb and flow of system-building, one directive remains: the need to sustain the effort on behalf of transitioning youth. The common wisdom is that sustainability begins on day one of the planning cycle of a grant. In the case of the ODEP grantees, the participants should be attending to the five most common tasks associated with the task of sustainability process:

- Clarifying the elements that will strengthen the relationship between the local project and employers
- Clarifying the core elements of what they hope to sustain
- Clarifying the number of youth to be served through the use of reliable, local data sources
- Clarifying who will have responsibility managing the tasks related to sustainability of the initiative
- Clarifying the process for evaluating the progress of the initiative

While ODEP and its grantee partners are primarily concerned with implementing sustainable models of service delivery that improve the transition outcomes for young people, the challenge of paying for this work cannot be ignored. Models developed at grant sites,

framed by the state and implemented in local communities will not continue simply because they are the “right thing to do.” Such models will be sustained only if the partners do the right things in planning and designing the initiative with the future in mind.

The organization, content, and recommendations in this document follow the reality of initiatives' concurrent activities beginning with the critical differences between the sustainability of pilot programs and the sustainability of prototype programs through the stages of *system-building*. Since sustainability of the initiative should be a concern from day one, this theme will be carried throughout the subsections of this document.

For the purposes of all sustainable initiatives, the term *system-building* is described throughout this document as having two distinct but related stages – these are:

1. Building and Developing
2. Going to Scale and Sustaining

All of the collaborative partners share the responsibility for sustainability. There is a practical set of questions that have evolved from a number of system-building initiatives, which are relevant to this project as well.

Carrying on the work of sustainability really requires “organizing the organizations” at both the local and national levels. All the partners in a collaboration need to be involved in taking a hard look at the current way they do business and then they need to test their efforts' core assumptions. Doing this effectively may require the creation of an “intermediary perhaps at the state and local levels or both.” The “intermediary” is not a new institution and it should not be viewed as threatening. For more information, take a look at the “Intermediary Guidebook-Making and Managing Community Connections for Youth” produced for the School to Work Intermediary Project by Jobs for the Future and New Ways to Work located on the web at <http://www.intermediarynetwork.org>. Also, the National Center on Workforce and Disability for Youth

SUSTAINABILITY CHART

Question or Task	YES	NO	Next Steps
Do the collaborative partners have a mission statement that clarifies its role in the community?			
Do the collaborative partners have agreements, written and otherwise, regarding fiduciary responsibilities, clarity of roles and responsibilities and how to handle conflict?			
Have the collaborative partners sought out and secured assistance from state and local decision-makers?			
Are the youth and family members active in the work of the collaborative?			
Do the collaborative partners understand the current scope of services offered by the key institutions in the community which have relevance to the population?			
Do the collaborative partners use the data that is available to plan and deliver services to the population? Is the collaborative partnership capable when it comes to collecting that data?			
Has the collaborative partnership prioritized desired outcomes that are understandable by the community of providers and the consumers of services?			
Does the collaborative partnership have a clear, concise, but comprehensive written version of its plan that outlines the desired outcomes of the initiative?			
Has the collaborative partnership completed a community assessment to determine priorities?			
Have the collaborative partners developed a cross-training plan (training in both service delivery strategies and collaboration)?			
Have the collaborative partners developed resource strategies to support new and ongoing program directions?			
Has the collaborative partnership developed a finance plan for securing public and private dollars to achieve the desired outcomes?			
Is there an intermediary or a full-time individual who supports the work of the collaborative partners?			
Have the collaborative partners developed anything resembling common forms or releases?			
Have the collaborative partners developed methods for community feedback?			

Adapted from the work of The Finance Project

offers several resources on the role of intermediaries [www.ncwd-youth.info].

As a grantee you have a variety of challenges ahead. This technical assistance document will highlight the two most important of those challenges. The first is to build and make operational and manage a system of

support for youth in transition that is outcome-focused and produces measurable results. And the second is to take the work to scale and to sustain it past the grant period. This document revolves around these two challenges, starting with building and developing the initiative.

BUILDING, DEVELOPING, AND SUSTAINING

If recent history is any indicator of how successful these types of *system-building* grant projects are, then grantees need to approach their initiatives by recognizing that this is especially difficult work requiring a unique combination of skill and good fortune. A novice staff person who happens to have a high energy level will not accomplish it. It will also not happen because of a moral imperative. At the community level, there might be a tremendous desire for change among a community of service providers and advocates, but this does not always translate into the capacity to create and sustain the change.

At the state level, policy makers who have the authority to redirect resources and develop strategies are faced with a number of populations of young people (e.g. foster youth, juvenile justice, special education). This can create competing priorities and may cause the work of *system-building* to slow down. Some grantees have also reported that demands of high-profile, federally-mandated efforts such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB Act) have caused state policy makers to waiver in their support of any “system” work. Rather than allowing categorical differences to stand in the way, policy makers should be looking for the obvious “win-win” program design.

Making connections and supporting state and local priorities such as the NCLB Act effort are smart ways to promote systems wide change and may help develop coordinated efforts. For example supporting such efforts may help leverage fiscal support for those

local projects in communities where support services (such as tutoring) are required to assist vulnerable youth under the NCLB act. Another critical connection gaining momentum across the country in states and local communities are efforts to reform high schools—in fact, one could argue that for the ODEP transition guideposts to become a reality, high schools must be reformed. An obvious connection is working with those responsible for special education at the state and local levels since transition is a mandated activity. It is probably a fair observation that special education transition is a classic example of how process and rules have stifled the needed creativity of innovation. Other connections that need to be made are with the agencies responsible for foster care and juvenile justice (systems both of which include a large number of youth with disabilities).

System-building means that the partners create an environment for the deployment of the effective practices, to a majority of clients. It is characterized by the redirecting of resources, generating new resources, “blending and braiding” of resources and creating a regulatory and legislative authority for the work. In turn, the new approaches are embedded in the daily operations of the agencies. *System-building* does not imply a few procedural changes but rather an institutional shifting to create a more holistic, measurable approach to serving the population. *System-building* is dependent upon the infusion of ideas, practices, and resources throughout the participating organizations. It is not a stand-alone

System-building occurs where “...a combination of operational and administrative strategies is employed in an environment in which critical success factors facilitate their implementation.”

event that involves something as simple as agency collaboration and collocation of staff from multiple programs. It occurs where ...”a combination of operational and administrative strategies is employed in an environment in which critical success factors facilitate their implementation.” (*Building Better Human Service Systems: Integrating Services for Income Support and Related Programs*, Mark Ragan, June 2003, p. 16; prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This document includes valuable observations and findings about systems building challenges based upon actual case studies.)

At this point in time, very few jurisdictions have been able to put all of the pieces together for their most vulnerable youth, let alone all youth. In fact, no truly comprehensive examples of “who has done it all—and done it all well” exist—yet. So, for those initiatives looking for a singular approach, we caution patience and encourage practice. Getting to a truly comprehensive and effective practice model is the purpose of ODEP’s current set of demonstration projects.

GOING TO SCALE AND SUSTAINING

Perhaps the biggest challenge and opportunity facing the initiative is that of planning for “going to scale.” During the earliest phases of the initiative, grantees and their partners need an understanding and a definition of both the scope and scale of what needs to be done and they will need the capacity to organize the resources to get it done. The first step is to clearly define exactly what “going to scale” means for your initiative.

For example:

- How many youth comprise the initiative’s potential pool?
- How many youth with disabilities are included in this number?
- What is known about successful transitions for youth with disabilities and how is success defined?

QUICK TIP

System-Building for Foster Youth

The challenges for young people who are transitioning out of foster care are significant. The educational, employment, health care and housing outcomes for this population have always been very poor. The lives of foster youth are further complicated by the disproportionate number who has either a physical, learning or emotional disability. Obviously, the lack of a stable family structure is the overlay for all of this.

There are existing resources for foster youth who are preparing to leave, or who have already left the child welfare system. In a number of states, there are special foundation-funded initiatives to improve the well-being for foster youth who are in

transition. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Services in Connecticut, Casey Family Services in Seattle and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative – all considered Casey “cousins” – are the among the more aggressive advocates for foster youth in transition. Virtually every state has an independent living program which begins when the foster youth is around 14 years of age. The most innovative and flexible funding source the states have is the Foster Care Independence Act; sometimes know as the Chafee Program after its primary legislative sponsor. The Act allows states to support a wide range of activities for foster youth

who will need help as they move into the next stage of their lives.

One characteristic of all of these above-mentioned efforts is the principle of youth engagement and youth participation. The child welfare community has been only mildly successful in its attempt to bring young people into life planning, advocacy and policy-making roles. Child welfare professionals could learn a great deal from their counterparts in the disability community and young people could serve as wonderful ambassadors or mentors to those youth who have traditionally been assigned a more passive role.

- What does the data in your state and around the country tell you about the possible connections between youth serving systems and youth with disabilities?
- How will your initiative determine what qualitative and quantitative measures define “going to scale” for your project?
- How will your initiative find, engage, and collaborate with partners who are able to set goals leading to sustainability?
- What have you learned from the state’s experience with federal grants directed towards youth with disabilities?

Going to scale means implementing new and more effective strategies throughout the community that go beyond serving a limited number of pre-disposed youth. The successful, sustainable initiative should

serve enough young people to “move the needle” and substantially improve the poor outcomes that initially led to the initiative. Rather than measuring success in terms of 100% impact, grantees and partners need to revamp the old paradigm and look at how well their initiatives are achieving sustainability through goals that enhance the current state of practice and success.

For example, “By xx time all youth will receive work-based learning opportunities and youth with disabilities will increase 20 fold in terms of work-based learning (or any other need from the ODEP guideposts).” More specifically, taking the initiative to scale implies that the grantees will make a concerted, intentional effort to change the outcomes for all of the youth who request services. Without a plan to take the initiative to scale, the grantees are unlikely to have an impact on the outcomes of this population—like the old adage says, “an idea without a plan is simply a dream.”

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