

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

A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TOOL FOR NAVIGATING THE ROAD TO WORK

MODULE 5

THE PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR 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

MODULE 5:

The Practical Tools for System Building, Developing, and Going to Scale

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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 PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR SYSTEM BUILDING, DEVELOPING, AND GOING TO SCALE

G There are three practical “tools” related to any initiative that grantees can use during each of the previously mentioned “stages” to help take their local effort to scale—they are: Using Information Creatively; Using Resources Creatively; and, Creating the Right Environment for Fiscal, Policy and Regulatory Changes.

Using Information Creatively *The Denominator Exercise and Resource Mapping*

Begin by using the **Denominator Exercise**—a practical

and effective way of distinguishing between the universe of youth with disabilities and those most likely to be served by the initiative. The exercise identifies the percentage of youth to be served and the resources necessary to measurably improve outcomes for youth with disabilities. The successful, sustainable initiative serves enough young people to “move the needle” and substantially improve the poor outcomes that initially led to the initiative. Identifying the youth that will be served in an organized approach can help a local initiative set a realistic course for going to scale, since the grantee will determine the level of resources

QUICK TIP

The Denominator Exercise

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, through its technical assistance intermediaries, has provided some of its grantees who are working in the area of youth development with one possible approach for getting to an accurate “denominator.” The Foundation’s reviewers have looked at each proposed strategy and tested them by: (1) identifying the **numerator** (how many youth can be reasonably expected to be affected by the strategy); then (2) identifying the **denominator** (how many youth are affected by the problem); which then (3) becomes the basis for a projection of change in the area-wide statistics. The projected change is then considered in light of the cost (funds, facilities, volunteers, etc) of pursuing the strategy.

For many of the Foundation’s grantees, completing the above exercise prompted them to reevaluate their strategies, develop

more realistic approaches and see themselves more as change agents with a directed mission than as direct service providers. Once the grantees knew the **scope of the work**, they were able to develop fiscal, evaluation, practice and communication strategies which, in turn, supported taking it to scale.

ODEP grantees can replicate something very similar to the Robert Wood Johnson process by adapting and answering the following broad set of questions about their constituents:

- How many youth with disabilities are in the city, the region or the state?
- How many youth with disabilities can be expected to avail themselves of the services? (*This information comes from the best practice approaches or promising approaches, as well as data within the state. The grantees*

should ask what number is realistic to expect)

- How many of the young people are likely to remain involved with the services over time? (*For example, is it likely to be 20%, 30 % or 50 % as the program goes forward?*)
- How many youth will need to achieve an acceptable level of success in order to have some impact on the system or to “move the needle?”
- If the engaged young people were provided the appropriate level of support—according to the best practice/promising approaches in the field—what would the number of youth with disabilities who have successful outcomes be?
- And, finally, what resources beyond the grant will the sites need to do this?

necessary to go to scale, and will have necessarily drawn the distinction between an impossibly expensive pilot and a more practical prototype.

Finally, identifying resources as a part of the denominator exercise implies more than dollars; it should always include the following elements:

- The logistics of delivering the services
- Useable and accessible databases
- A responsive and interactive Management Information System (MIS)
- Identification of matching and flexible dollars
- Preparing professions through coordinated professional development
- Technical assistance to sub-grantees

Next, look at **Resource Mapping**—a critical, initial part of any strategic planning process. Resource mapping has the ability to support the sustainability of initiatives for youth by capturing information about what does and does not exist and what it will take to

serve a majority of the young people who are eligible for the services. Resource mapping, as described by ODEP, is the identification of available assets and resources within the state’s youth service delivery infrastructure and an evaluation as to whether and/or to what extent the system is currently serving youth with disabilities. ODEP cautions grantees in its implementation instructions that this mapping is a process and not an end in itself.

Using Resources Creatively *Reviewing How Current Resources Are Deployed*

Grantees should note that there is an assumption in what follows that no new resources will be forthcoming in the near term from federal or state revenues to promote new ODEP initiatives. This means it is essential for grantees to review how current resources are deployed. Redirecting and/or pooling resources is required. The passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) escalated the federal government’s push to encourage state and localities to join resources from an array of the federal grant-in-aid

QUICK TIP

Resource Mapping

Resource mapping activities can help grantees answer the following questions which will, in turn help any initiative’s sustainability:

Youth and Family

- How many youth with disabilities are being served in a year?
- What are the experiences of disabled youth and their families in the current system?
- What are the characteristics of these youth and families facing the most significant obstacles—include age range, gender, socio-economic status, etc.

Resources

- What resources are available and in place to assist these youth?
- What does it cost to serve this number of youth?
- What other resources are needed and where are they most likely to be accessed?

Communities

- What communities have the poorest outcomes for youth with disabilities?
- What communities have organized an effective outreach to this population?

Staff Development

- What staff development and technical assistance opportunities are available to support this initiative?

Strengthening Collaborations

- What experience do the partners have in developing Memorandums of Understanding?
- What experience do the partners have in the cross-training of staff or in joint staff development?

programs. WIA's focus has been to connect the 17 mandated programs that are to be a part of the One-Stop Center (see Making the Connections paper for details). A purpose of One-Stops was to make services more easily obtainable to job seekers. As with any new

ODEP'S "GUIDEPOSTS" FOR EFFECTIVE YOUTH SERVICES

ODEP has integrated the following four guideposts into its youth-related policy initiatives:

- 1. Preparatory experiences** which include career interest and vocational assessments, information about careers including education and entry requirements, income potential and work-readiness skills including computer skills.
- 2. Connecting activities** which involve collaborating with other institutions (e.g. sponsoring schools, postsecondary institutions, local workforce development organizations) to provide necessary support services for youth and to enrich program content. This includes insuring academic tutoring is provided if necessary; providing exposure to supportive peer and adult mentors; and helping youth explore self-sufficiency issues like assistive technology, transportation, benefits planning, and health maintenance.
- 3. Work-based experiences** which include site visits, job shadowing, internships, entrepreneurial ventures, and/or actual paid employment activities building up to on-the-job experiences. Such experiences are an essential component to promoting informed job choices.
- 4. Youth leadership and development** which include providing structured relationships with adults in both informal/formal and individual/group mentoring situations, and exposing every youth to personal leadership skills such as self-advocacy and self-determination, as well as activities that build self-esteem, interpersonal skills, and teaming.

requirements related to how fiscal resources can and should be used, the implementation of joining funds has required substantial negotiations among the partners, and at times, much gnashing of teeth given the different administrative and procurement procedures among organizations; for example long term leases or ownership of buildings have had to be accommodated. The WIA reauthorization process that is currently underway includes plans to refine and clarify the processes for pooling of funds. Regardless of the ultimate outcome, the continuation or even escalation of joining resources will remain a hallmark of effective transition services for youth, since the reality discussed earlier will remain – no one organization has the full scope, responsibility, expertise, or resources to ensure youth the comprehensive services they need as outlined in the Guideposts to Success.

There are several means and reasons to join funds to *expand or deepen* services to any given clientele. Fiscally, a benefit of the guideposts is that the activities and services youth need to succeed are generally allowable activities. What varies are the details, such as eligibility rules including age categories. There are also other types of realities such as the federal government's priority guidance to Vocational Rehabilitation agencies that requires some states to allocate funds on the basis of "an ability to benefit" or order of selection; thus constraining – but not totally eliminating fiscal flexibility at the state and local levels.

There are three primary ways agencies can redirect resources. But no agency's leadership is going to participate in any fiscal redirection without some homework being done. Thus, staff involved in the initiative will need to prepare briefing materials.

Getting Ready

Materials gathered during a resource mapping exercise and other planning efforts can help inform the process of allocating funds. The information resulting from resource mapping can be put together for use by all of the key partners – it should include:

- Aligning each guidepost with the corresponding legislative authority to allocate funds for the services (all federal and state)

- Documenting the eligibility criteria (age, condition, income, etc)
- Displaying the current “guidance language” sent to vendors and local agencies to show what parts of the guideposts are currently promoted etc.
- Providing recommendations to individual agencies and as partners

These same briefing materials can be used to help initiatives in other ways by:

- Clarifying for partners how their resources will be used; and,
- Assisting the partners in retaining their focus for change.

Working with Individual Agencies

Action taken within an individual agency is an essential first step in the improvement of transition services for all youth. By using the materials discussed above, changes can be made through whatever mechanisms the agency uses to provide guidance and resources to their own networks of providers. This can include reviewing and tweaking materials they use for distributing funds to vendors or local institutions (including issuances of RFP’s and guidance letters that establish priorities or promote outcome-based results). The word “tweaking” is used deliberately in that most, if not all current providers of youth services already include many but not all of the appropriate supportive services. By working first with individual agencies to identify shifts they can undertake within their own resource base, the work (discussed below) can, in turn, become more focused—and productive.

Suggested activities can include:

1. Having each agency expose their key networks to the guideposts during workshops and conferences
2. Developing a self-assessment tool for use by the networks to have them “judge” how their service strategies incorporate the guideposts and develop action plans for doing so
3. Providing periodic updates from the grantee’s prototype communities about progress being made

Braiding and Blending Funds

Two additional ways to use fiscal resources more creatively is through the pooling of resources across multiple agencies. Two terms of art included in ODEP’s SGAs will be used—“braided funding” and “blended funding.” In **braided funding**, the funding streams remain visible and are used in common to produce greater strength, efficiency, and/or effectiveness. In **blended funding**, mechanisms that pool dollars from multiple sources are used to make them, in some ways, indistinguishable. In both cases the overarching intent is to establish a different way of allocating resources—via outcomes and goals—not just through narrow funding streams or definitions of disabilities.

Both braiding and blending requires familiarity with federal, state and local requirements (both legislative and regulatory) such as caps on how much can be spent for administrative purposes and what are required services as opposed to discretionary activities for each key funding source. This information will help inform which one of the two techniques is the most appropriate to promote for which service.

Initiative leaders will also need to formulate strategic funding strategies because they will need to know what they want to sustain, what resources they need to sustain, their activities and how to access those resources. The only way to effectively do this is to have identified strategies to put those resources together in order to achieve their goals (Hayes and Bryant, 2002). Funding strategies need to merge different funding sources—federal, state, local, public, and private—so that the child and family needs drive agency decisions about which services to provide (Bazelon, 2004). Decisions about which sources and strategies to pursue need to be based on a careful analysis of short- and long-term needs. Ultimately, the most successful and sustainable collaborations incorporate multiple funding sources that cut across traditionally separate services and programs. One of the most important principles of effective financing is to recognize that the resources necessary to build and sustain community programs may come in a variety of forms and from many sources (Hayes and Bryant, 2002).

Braided Funding

Braided funding can and does take many forms. For example, the most common form of braiding can be found in support of some of the higher cost services such as occupational training. In these cases, either formal or informal agreements are established between key partners in a One-Stop Center that have a

QUICK TIP 1: Braiding Funds

Create a small incentive pool (perhaps 5 to 10 percent) that gives providers bonus funds if local proposals are jointly developed by youth serving organizations that contain all the suggested guideposts

hierarchy from which source of funds are to be tapped first for tuition and other educational supports (for example, Pell Grants or other tuition assistance programs supported by the state, Individualized Training Account funds from Title I of WIA and the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency). Other forms of braiding can be as simple as one organization providing space (e.g. a One-Stop) for a GED preparation course with the teaching staff funded through WIA Title II funds and VR and/or WIA youth funds providing a modest stipend for the youth in attendance.

A modest beginning to promote initiative sustainability might be to have each state agency agree to treat the grantee's prototype communities in a somewhat different fashion than the rest of the state for a three to four year period. In this scenario, each agency would agree to use the guideposts as a common framework for the individual RFP's they each periodically issue to their own network of providers. Included in such a framework can be a small incentive pool that would give providers bonus funds if the local proposals were jointly developed by youth serving organizations that contained all of the features. This approach would allow local communities to find their own strategies for

braiding resources and encourage disability-centered organizations and non-disability organizations to come together.

Another approach for braiding funding can be to identify a common activity that each organization is typically expected to provide to clients such as individualized assessments. The braiding opportunity in this case would be to organize a community wide – or even state-wide – common assessment service plan for the purpose of reducing duplications, improving the range and quality of assessments, streamlining the time spent on developing individualized service plans, and more. Common fee structures can be established that allow the funds to be tracked for accountability purposes while promoting a more user friendly system.

QUICK TIP 2: Braiding Funds

Identify a common activity that each organization is typically expected to provide to clients—such as individualized assessments—then organize a community-wide or even state-wide common assessment plan—reducing the red tape and promoting a more user-friendly system.

Blended Funding

Grantees can assume that funds which are pooled so as to become “indistinguishable” will seldom become a large percentage of funds flowing into a community or an individual organization. To do so flies in the face of the justification used for the separate sources and could become threatening to the constituents that closely identify with each of the primary programs. Blended funding may best be approached via a process of establishing criteria for what “merits” blended funding. There is no “right” way to organize such a process but several things come to mind, again first focusing on the grantee's prototype communities and what the state can do to support local innovations, the following suggestions may help.

Suggested Criteria for Blending Funds:

Activities should be time limited and should *not* be used for ongoing direct service such as tuitions or stipends *unless* the following criteria apply:

- a. Testing a new or improved service that is applicable for vulnerable youth that at least three agencies agree need support in order to overcome significant barriers (e.g. foster youth with identified disabilities including mental health support needs)
- b. Designing and testing a new service (e.g. youth development and leadership opportunities that are “assessed” as a weak link in the grantee’s prototype communities)
- c. Testing new forms of collaboration to improve a goal of supporting employers such as a local Chamber of Commerce to be the convener, facilitator, and trainer of all job related staff in all organizations
- d. Promoting professional development training opportunities across all youth serving agencies
- e. Melding goals and strategies with other transition-related, federally funded demonstrations (e.g. Developmental Disabilities leadership initiatives, Social Security transition and/or Ticket to Work initiatives, Vocational Rehabilitation mentoring initiatives, etc.)

The above suggestions are made to help start a conversation among the collaborative partners responsible for oversight of these grants. The conversation can include exploration of how the state and or local agencies can tap some of their individual discretionary funds since most have some modest discretionary funds that are not automatically passed through to the local units of governments or organizations. Such funds can be used for research and demonstrations, evaluations, professional development, etc. Stated another way, minimal restrictions apply to such funds. The term modest is operative, however, and there are always many legitimate requests for use of such funds, so tapping these “discretionary” funds requires compelling arguments. Though direct services (e.g. classroom teacher salaries, stipends, etc.) can in some cases be funded, the focus should be on testing new ideas, paying for staff that provides support to several agencies’ goals, etc.

Staff Development

The creative use of other resources, such as staffing, is also an opportunity for the sites. The field has gradually been changing the roles for professional staff from a limited human service function to one of a broader partnership with youth and employers and “systems navigation.” The disabilities and transition literature describe a number of evolving arrangements which are emerging as promising approaches. These include the front-line professional as a combination of advocate, consultant, educator, and resource manager. There are also interesting descriptions of how staff is working as “representatives” for employers and employment training sites. These roles are appealing to all of the partners since there is, for the first time, a central source of coordination for the dual customer model. The challenge for agencies and organizations is that they have not quite agreed upon the elements for project sustainability, how to adequately train staff for these roles and consequently how best to conduct staff performance evaluations.

One place to begin figuring out how to make better use of human resources would be to tap the work done by The Collaborative and to document the agreed upon knowledge, skills and abilities of front line workers. The background paper is on their website and can be used as a basis to develop training for the organizations in the grantee’s prototype communities. (www.ncwd-youth.info). Check with the staff at the Collaborative to pursue this idea.

Demonstrating Program Effectiveness

As evaluation designs are developed, attention needs to be given to documenting the added value gained by the use of a blended or a braided funding approach. A system of transition service for youth needs to: track, document, and account for the funds they spend; demonstrate effective outcomes for youth served and accountability to taxpayers; and, coordinate monitoring across agencies that will effectively demonstrate total costs and benefits across systems. The Collaborative is providing support to grantees on evaluation strategies, so checking with your lead staff person about any questions is strongly recommended.

Providing for Continued Training and Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is provided to public and private agencies to share knowledge and skills needed to create and sustain transition services and supports—grantees need to make themselves aware of the public and private technical assistance available and use it to help create sustainability (Sustainability Self-Assessment Tool, 2003).

QUICK TIP:

Technical Assistance Resources

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY) at <http://www.nichcy.org> is an information and referral center that provides free information on disabilities and disability-related issues. NICHCY can provide technical assistance to parent and professional groups through workshops, presentations, consultations, or NICHCY's Technical Assistance Guide.

Social Security Online: The Worksite at <http://www.ssa.gov/work/Youth/youth.html> has links to resources for youth and youth initiatives.

The New Freedom Initiative's Online Resource for Americans with Disabilities at <http://www.DisabilityInfo.Gov>

The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition at <http://www.ncset.org> creates opportunities for youth with disabilities to achieve successful futures by providing technical assistance and information on areas of national significance for youth with disabilities and their families.

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) at <http://www.ncwd-youth.info> has information and resources for youth with disabilities and their families.

The Youth Leadership Forum and High School/High Tech Program at <http://www.dol.gov/odep/programs/high.htm> has opportunities for students with disabilities to explore exciting careers.

Taking the initiative to scale and subsequently sustain the appropriate level of services to young people is also dependent upon the development of policies, regulations, and administrative mandates which support the initiative. The purpose of policy development is to remediate the confusion between entitlement and eligibility. This additional level of clarity helps to set the stage for a system based on ease of use and enables multiple pathways into the system for the young person. The grantees have been given the opportunity, within the context of the ODEP initiative to create new policy infrastructures for their work with youth. Likewise, many of the grantees have noted the willingness of their own state governments to explore new arrangements which have the potential to improve the outcomes for this population. Grantees should be engaging their state policymakers and developing strategies to address the challenges faced by young people across a wide variety of service categories. By the same token, it is the state's responsibility to provide a technical assistance plan for their local awardees.

Young people in foster care, special education programs, juvenile justice programs, and mental health services share a common set of concerns. However, because of the categorical nature of the service delivery system, and a maze of conflicting and contradictory regulations and mandates, public and private agency service providers continue to operate in isolation. Based upon transition guideposts which are universal, the ODEP grants provide the grantees with an excellent entrée into the state house as conveners of regulatory and policy changes.

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