



April 13, 2017

The Honorable Brian Calley  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 30013  
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear Lt. Governor Calley:

We thank you for the opportunity to meet with you again on April 17, and appreciate your commitment to individuals with disabilities throughout Michigan.

In support of our recent proposal on implementation of Employment First in Michigan, and the objectives stated in Michigan's Executive Order 2015-15, we are asking the State of Michigan to invest in the service provider community to promote and increase competitive integrated employment outcomes for persons with disabilities receiving employment supports and services. This investment will support technical assistance in the process of provider transformation among community rehabilitation organizations; reimbursement rate restructuring among the state departments and agencies that fund employment supports and services; capacity building to promote a skilled community of practice among professionals providing job preparation, placement, and retention supports and services; technical assistance to promote seamless transition outcomes from education to employment for individuals with disabilities; and education and outreach to persons served and their families, including information on benefits coordination and planning to promote successful employment outcomes.

Detail in support of the return on this investment is attached. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Todd Culver  
CEO  
MARO

Vendella M. Collins  
Executive Director  
DD Council

Sara Grivetti, MA, CRC  
Past-Chair  
SILC

# **Employment First in Michigan**

## Enhanced Recommendations for Implementation

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## **Statewide Capacity Building**

Capacity to provide services aligned with Employment First objectives is being established and nurtured through technical assistance funded through the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Project (EFSLMP). Specifically, the discovery and assessment and job development skills of service providers are being advanced, with the assistance of training and field assignments, delivered by a Subject Matter Expert and resulting in certification through Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE). In FY 16, ten (10) nonprofit employment service provider organizations participated in a train-the-trainer community of practice experience; fifteen (15) individuals, primarily managers, completed the training - and these individuals in turn support 110 Employment Specialists or Job Coaches in the field. All the train-the-trainer workshops and community of practice webinars/conference calls incorporated the concepts of Employment First and provided an environment for these managers to talk about their provider transformation planning and their role and contribution to these change efforts.

One-hundred percent (100%) of those participants completing a post-training survey indicated they planned to use the ACRE Course Materials as part of orientation and training of staff; 100% indicated additional support would be provided by the organization for instilling this training – and the accompanying values of the priority of competitive integrated employment; and 100% of those surveyed indicated they now have the resources necessary to train staff without relying on an external trainer for providing this training – a key element of sustainable capacity. In addition, 40% of participating organizations are tracking employer engagement data to assess staff's job performance and skill acquisition over time. But, to truly impact system-wide change, further investment is required to build this skilled community of employment service practitioners across the entire state.

MARO, the statewide association of service providers, has established a Job Development Community of Practice, with access to recorded webinars and resources shared through a LinkedIn group. MARO has worked with the designer of this curriculum, TransCen, to extend the outreach of this certification program in 2017 and beyond; to more extensively build this capacity among the service provider community - the foundation for which has been enhanced through the ODEP EFSLMP in Michigan.

**ACTION ITEM: Funding to support sustainable infrastructure to deliver ACRE training and additional customized employment training to 100 employment specialists in FY18.**

## **Provider Transformation**

From FY 2015 through 2017, ten (10) community rehabilitation organizations participated in the Provider Transformation component of the ODEP EFSLMP. Each of these organizations has worked directly with a Subject Matter Expert (SME) to review current business practices, and assess strengths and areas in need of improvement; this process has resulted in a written report by the SME, and a corresponding plan of action by the service provider. Substantive change has occurred in the culture of these organizations, and the competitive integrated employment outcomes they are achieving – as evidenced by the data submitted to ODEP each quarter through FY16, and this data collection is ongoing. In calendar year 2016 alone, 352 individuals with disabilities transitioned to competitive integrated employment because of this transformation process.

Short and long term transformation goals have been established by providers; projected outcomes defined to establish benchmarks and a quality measurement framework and the goal of increased competitive integrated employment outcomes has been woven into organizational strategic plans. The external focus on their customers, and the internal focus on their operations, has been aligned to obtain greater buy-in from stakeholders, and helped secure support from funding sources. Data collection has been incorporated into the service provision process to establish internal accountability and demonstrate external impact. Participation in EFSLMP has truly been a transformative process.

Conducting the provider transformation technical assistance while Employment Services Managers are participating in EFSLMP's capacity building efforts will strengthen this component. Skill acquisition activity will be provided to staff while participating organizations go through provider transformation planning. Both the provider transformation and capacity building activities reinforce the employment first concepts and better define relevant staff roles, as goals and activities change for those they support.

MARO, the statewide association of service providers in Michigan, will continue development of a Community of Practice, with access to recorded webinars and resources shared through online groups. This will strengthen the linkage between participating providers, and extended the outreach of this project to other affiliated organizations. The structured networking facilitated by the association builds connections to the EFSLMP, broadening the project's impact and sustaining the change process

**ACTION ITEM: Funding to support additional technical assistance to additional providers. SME's would work directly with ten (10) additional community based organizations in FY18 to assess current business practices, with consultative action plans developed as a result to achieve additional competitive integrated employment outcomes. A train-the-trainer, mentor development program would also be implemented with six (6) agencies to promote sustainability.**

## **Rate Restructuring**

Michigan utilizes a managed care framework to implement long-term services and supports for individuals with intellectual/ developmental disabilities and behavioral health disabilities. Regional Pre-Paid Inpatient Health Plans (PIHPs) contract with the state to manage the Medicaid resources for behavioral health and intellectual/developmental disabilities services for Medicaid and Healthy Michigan enrollees. PIHPs sub-contract with Community Mental Health Services Programs (CMHSPs) for services including Medicaid-funded supported employment services, day habilitation, prevocational services, and skill building services. Each CMHSP typically serves one to several counties in their catchment area (there are 46 CMHSPs and 83 counties in Michigan.)

In fiscal years 2015, thirteen (13) CMHSP's were interviewed to explore how they currently contract and purchase Supported Employment services, what policies or practices have contributed to improved competitive integrated employment (CIE) participation among enrolled individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities and behavioral health disabilities, and what barriers or challenges hinder CIE participation. Specific recommendations are detailed in the "Report to Michigan on Recommendations for Systems Transformation Related to Employment First."

In FY 2016, two CMHSPs and one PIHP worked on a 1:1 basis with a SME to determine how they could, in collaboration with their supported employment providers, establish the ability for CMHSP's/PIHP's to pay for support employment services based on outcomes rather than 15 minute units. This resulted in some groundbreaking work, particularly at the Oakland PIHP, where they revised their IPS funding structure; revised their supported employment funding structure for I/DD SE providers, and launched a Customized Employment pilot with Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) for persons with I/DD. In FY17, formal guidance from MDHHS is being prepared for contracting and purchasing strategies for PIHP's and CMHSP's within the managed care framework to increase the use of CIE. In addition, a MOU between MRS/BSBP, Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Services (BHDDA), addressing the provision of on-going/follow-along supports/services, comparable benefits/payer of last resort, and braiding services for youth and adults with behavioral health and I/DD eligible for both VR services and behavioral health and DD services is being developed.

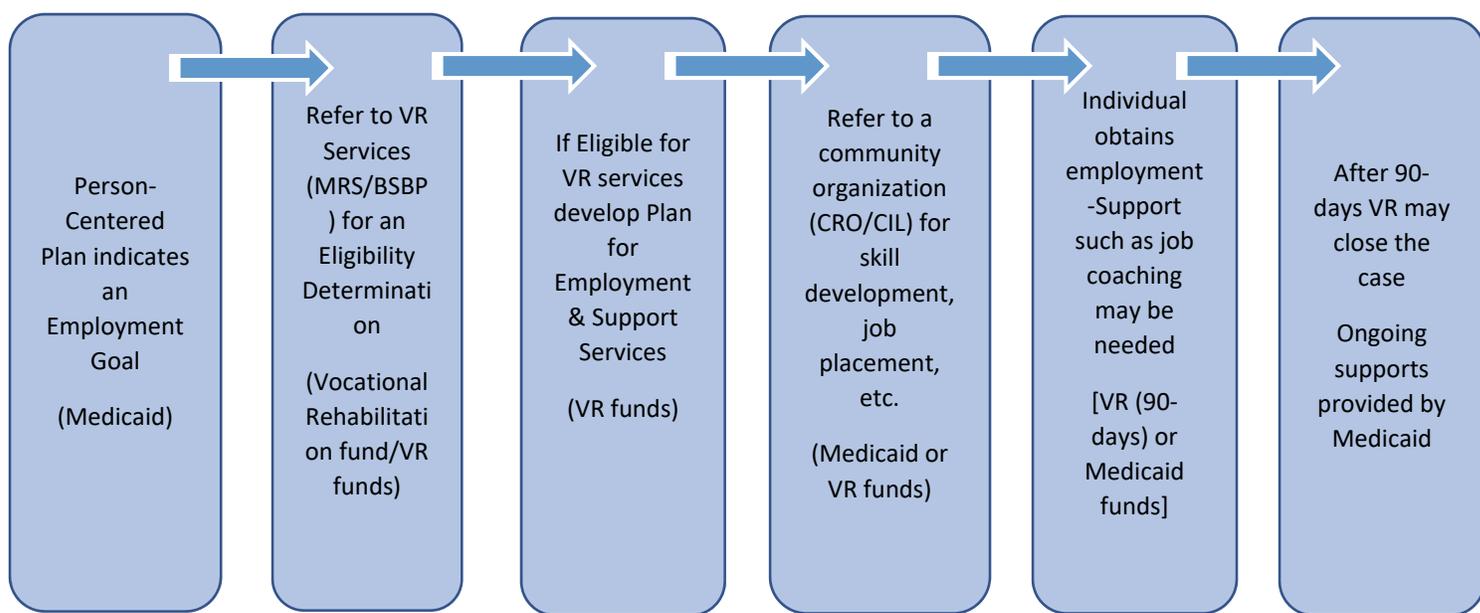
**ACTION ITEM: Funding to support additional technical assistance to additional PIHP's and CMHSP's. Subject matter experts would work directly with 3 additional organizations in FY18 to redesign their rate structures to support CIE outcomes as the most favored option for employment services, using value-based purchasing principles.**

## Blending and Braiding of Resources

In Michigan, there are two primary funding sources for employment services, vocational rehabilitation funds and Medicaid funds. Secondary resources include employment services offered by Michigan Works! and Intermediate School Districts and Local Education Agencies (ISD/LEA's).

Utilizing a coordinated approach and operational agreements these resources can be leveraged in a manner to optimize CIE outcomes. For example, if an individual has an open case with Community Mental Health and their Person-Centered Plan (PCP) includes an employment goal, they may be referred to work with a local Community Rehabilitation Organization (CRO) to develop employment skills prior to being placed in a competitive, integrated employment setting. These services are paid with Medicaid funds. Or, the individual may be referred to Vocational Rehabilitation Services (Michigan Rehabilitation Services/Bureau of Services for Blind Persons) for employment counseling, assessment, and job placement. These services are paid with federal Title 1 rehabilitation services funds (non-Medicaid).

Because of the different sources of employment funds the resources can be blended and braided to optimize services in a more efficient manner. This is contingent on the fact that services are not paid from both sources at the same time. An example of how blending and braiding of resources could work is below:



The benefit of this approach is that it allows funds and services to be utilized in a more efficient manner. It has the potential to free up some Medicaid funds to be re-purposed towards Community Living Supports or other community-based, non-employment services. It also connects individuals with the vocational rehabilitation system whose purpose is to assist eligible individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment. In addition, individuals will be connected to community-based resources such community rehabilitation organizations or Centers for Independent Living (a.k.a. Disability Network) who offers a plethora of additional supportive services for individuals.

**ACTION ITEM: Utilize SME's to develop a framework to blend and braid resources and present to MRS, BSBP and BHDDA to determine implementation steps.**

## **School to Work**

In Michigan, only 30% of adults with disabilities are employed (U.S. Census), and as a result, many Michigan residents with disabilities are unable to enjoy the financial stability and other benefits of stable employment. As stated by Governor Rick Snyder, “People with disabilities have much to offer our great state and should be provided the same opportunities for employment as everyone else.” For young people with disabilities, a key focus during their teenage years is on “transition” – i.e., the process for preparing young people to go from school to adult life.

In Michigan, there are many promising practices and pockets of excellence in terms of transition. However, the current low employment rate for adults with disabilities in Michigan, clearly points out the need for a much stronger emphasis on preparing young people with disabilities, including those with very significant disabilities, to become successfully employed as adults. Numerous federal and state laws and regulations provide the parameters for transition of young people with disabilities. Preparation for employment and a successful career must be the centerpiece of any successful transition process for any young person with or without a disability. Employment cannot and should not be viewed as an optional part of transition for students with disabilities, or a side issue that may or not be dealt with. Employment is the ultimate outcome of a successful transition system for any young person – including those with disabilities

In fiscal year 2015, four (4) pilot sites were identified to implement a “Seamless Transition to Employment” Pilot project. This model was built on a sequential delivery of specific preparatory and coordinated services that begin in early high school, continue through post-school follow-up supports, with the intended outcome of each student employed in an individualized, integrated job of choice and/or enrolled in postsecondary education prior to school exit. In this model, youth are jointly served by school system and adult employment agencies. Currently in Michigan, many youth exit school with no work experience, or, with work experience, but no post-school supports in place. This model focuses on youth exiting school with work experience and seamless linkage to adult system and/or educational supports in place.

**ACTION ITEM: Funding to support additional technical assistance to additional intermediate school districts to fund more “seamless transition” sites. Subject matter experts would work directly with four (4) additional local teams in FY 18 to coordinate their service delivery to support CIE for youth in transition.**

## **Employer Engagement**

Currently, there are several mechanisms that employers are reached regarding the employment of people with disabilities. Our proposal recommends implementing a more streamlined and strategic approach to employer engagement. Utilizing the ten (10) economic prosperity regions, organizations within that region, that are focused on helping people with disabilities secure employment, could develop regional approaches. The regional approach could involve the following activities:

- Conduct regional mapping of businesses and potential employers;
- Engage with those employers to assess their talent management or labor market needs;
- Communicate labor market needs to appropriate entities such as schools and VR to ensure people are being prepared for jobs that match local market needs;
- Build coalitions of employers who currently hire people with disabilities to train other employers;
- Continue the Michigan Hidden Talent workshops;
- Convene all individuals within the region that conduct job placement or business development activities. This includes VR, schools, CRO's, CILs, private contractors, CMH, etc. The purpose of convening is to develop a strategic approach to engage in the above activities and to create mechanisms for enhanced communication to fill job openings.

**ACTION ITEM: Identify lead organization (s) to be accountable for implementing above recommendations & tracking outcomes.**

## **Outreach**

The purpose of outreach is to ensure individuals, families and guardians understand the full array of options regarding Competitive, Integrated Employment (CIE), and dispel any myths that may be lingering. As a provision of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act, VR agencies have implemented outreach efforts to conduct career counseling for individuals who are currently working in a facility-based setting.

Career Counseling, Options Counseling, Benefits Planning are all critical elements to outreach, and need to be conducted in a comprehensive manner to help individuals become more informed and comfortable with potential employment-setting changes. Engagement of individuals utilizing facility-based employment are currently receiving their information at the CRO, absent of the family or guardians. We recommend finding solutions that includes educating families at the same time as meeting with the individual.

Community Rehabilitation Organizations could host educational sessions where they invite the Centers for Independent Living, MRS/BSBP and CMH to provide information about options and services that are available regarding CIE. In addition, these sessions should include time to hear from individuals/families who have made this transition.

Local school districts could host similar sessions for families and students receiving special education services. Under the provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act, educating families is a recommended activity for Pre-Employment Transition Services. This education should begin when the student reaches the age of 14, and include families and students telling their personal stories, in addition to service-providers being available to assist.

The overall goal of outreach is to ensure people have access to credible information regarding all of their options. Dispelling myths is a critical factor in this process, especially as it relates to benefits. In addition, connecting to individuals that have made this transition will continue to elevate the confidence level in others that CIE is a viable option.

**ACTION ITEM: Identify lead organization (s) to be accountable for implementing above recommendations & tracking outcomes.**

## **Benefits Coordination and Planning**

Concerns about losing eligibility for benefits remains one of the most significant barriers to sustained employment success for people with disabilities in Michigan. Access to the information that will help individuals and their families navigate this complex system is an important part of achieving the goals of Employment First.

Currently, Michigan's disability service providers have some capacity for benefits counseling; however, the knowledge and availability is intermittent. The types of services these organizations provide are listed below:

- Understanding the major components and differences in the SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, and Medicare benefit programs, along with dispelling myths about these benefits;
- The basics of SSI/SSDI-entitlement factors, and how to file for benefits;
- Identify how the Social Security Administration defines work, disability and how employment income affects SSI/SSDI benefit checks;
- Understanding of the medical determination process;
- Understanding the federal and state work incentive programs and how they can be used to help an individual retain necessary cash and/or medical benefits;
- Locate resources that can help an individual navigate through these programs for successful employment outcomes.

This information helps individuals and families make informed decisions about the pursuit of competitive, integrated employment. Increasing the availability of this service, and enhancing the knowledge of service providers will be an important factor to helping people make informed decisions about employment.

**ACTION ITEM: Additional training in benefits planning to provide greater access to the information that will promote employment success, and optimize independence.**

## **Acronym Guide**

ACRE	Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators
BHDDA	Behavioral Health and Development Disabilities Agency
BSBP	Bureau of Services for Blind Persons
CIE	Competitive Integrated Employment
CIL	Center for Independent Living
CMHSP	Community Mental Health Service Providers
CRO	Community Rehabilitation Organization
EFSLMP	Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Project
I/DD	Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities
IPS	Individual Placement and Support,
ISD	Intermediate School District
LEA	Local Education Agency
MDHHS	Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRS	Michigan Rehabilitation Services
ODEP	Office of Disability Employment Policy
PCP	Person-Centered Plan
PIHP	Pre-paid Inpatient Health Plans
SE	Supported Employment
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation