



Helping State Councils on Developmental Disabilities (Councils) Accelerate their Employment First Systems-Change Efforts

A Primer & Introduction to the DETAC Strategy Toolkit for Councils

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The primary goal of *Employment First* – aligning policy, practice, and resources across multiple systems of government to prioritize [competitive integrated employment \(CIE\)](#) as the preferred outcome of publicly-financed supports and services — is no small endeavor. However, we are at a pivotal time with respect to the degree of federal focus around disability employment policy. The 2014 publication of the [federal Home and Community Services Settings Rule](#) and the subsequent passage of the [Workforce Innovation & Opportunities Act](#) provided an unprecedented alignment of federal policy prioritizing the employment, independent living, and community integration of people with disabilities across education, workforce development, and long-term services and supports systems. Parallel to enactment of these landmark legislative and regulatory policies, several *Olmstead v. LC* settlement agreements related to state compliance with Title II of the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) prioritized access to employment in the most integrated setting and solidified a solid civil rights framework that would support bold and aggressive *Employment First* systems-change efforts across the country.

Prior to these monumental milestones in federal policy and civil rights enforcement, many States were already initiating *Employment First* efforts to coordinate resources, policies, and practices across multiple state systems to improve the employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Currently, there are forty-seven states with an official *Employment First* policy, twenty-four of which have passed legislation and the remaining twenty-three states have policies issued by state agencies, Executive Orders, and/or memorandums of understanding (MOUs).¹

States that have made the most progress in significantly increasing employment outcomes for people with disabilities are those that have committed to the grueling work of realigning their policies, service offerings, and financial investments toward prioritizing models and practices that lead to sustained CIE. States have all the federal public policy, legal framework, and evidence base

¹ For more information, visit Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)'s [webpage](#) on Employment First.



they need to invest in what works in terms of getting people with disabilities employed in the general workforce and contributing to the economic mainstream. Reimbursement models and payment methodologies must be as flexible and outcomes-oriented as possible to achieve desired results. States that are ahead of the curve in their financial investments related to disability employment have experimented with a few creative value-based payment options (tiered milestone payments, pay-for-performance, outcomes-based reimbursement) and many other states are taking the plunge as well to create payment models that are efficient, effective, and results-oriented.

Extraordinary progress in systems-change is possible only when States and their partners tackle such formidable challenges and bring together stakeholders to collaborate around a central goal: making the changes necessary to support people with disabilities advance socioeconomically and achieve maximum self-sufficiency. These are the priorities of our federal policy and civil rights framework, and thus need to be the outcomes that drive the work we do.

Councils play a critical role in effectuating policies, programs, and systems committed to preparing and supporting people with intellectual disabilities or development disabilities (ID/DD) in the general workforce and economic mainstream. The [Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000](#) emphasizes the importance of employment-related activities, defined in the legislation as “advocacy, capacity building, and systemic change activities that result in individuals with developmental disabilities acquiring, retaining, or advancing in paid employment, including supported employment or self-employment, in integrated settings in a community.” The following list outlines a few ideas for Councils looking to either initiate or expand their systems-change work to advance *Employment First* principles.

Figure 1. Examples of Strategies for Councils to Engage in Employment First Systems-Change Efforts

Advocacy	Capacity Building	Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engage self-advocates and families. ▪ Educate policy makers. ▪ Continue to invest in self-advocacy training around employment and self-determination. ▪ Support public awareness campaigns to push positive messages, success stories, and data demonstrating the value of people with ID/DD contributing to the workforce and economic mainstream. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Invest in piloting or bringing to scale evidence-based practices that lead to CIE. ▪ Invest in training and ongoing TA for providers interested in transforming their business models to promote CIE outcomes. ▪ Create tools and resources for self-advocates and families to better prepare for discovery, career planning, employment, and savings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create partnerships with employers and employer associations to build stronger commitment to hiring people with significant disabilities. ▪ Engage state-funded programs and payers to accelerate value-based payment structures incentivizing CIE outcomes. ▪ Serve as a facilitator of opportunities for family and self-advocacy groups to engage with employers, providers, and state government.

Now is the time to seize this alignment in federal direction and State efforts to improve the employment trajectory for millions of people with intellectual, developmental, or other significant disabilities. People with ID/DD deserve our dedication and commitment to helping them achieve



their goals related to inclusive education, competitive integrated employment, full community participation and optimal independence. To help Councils continue to further their role and work in this area, the Disability Employment TA Center will be developing a toolkit focused on the following key areas:

Emerging Employment First Toolkit for Councils

- Optimizing Stakeholder Convenings to Spur Employment First Systems-Change
- Effective Partnership Development and Engagement (DETAC-2021-Council-2)
 - Working with Providers (DETAC-2021-Council-3)
 - Working with MLTSS Payers (DETAC-2021-Council-4)
 - Working with State Government on Cross Agency Systems-Change Efforts
 - Working with Employers
 - Working with Families
 - Supporting Self-Advocates
- Communicate the Message of High Expectations and the Value of People with ID/DD in the Workforce
 - Strategies for Storytelling
 - Deploying Multimedia Tactics to Engage Stakeholders in CIE
- Recommend Systems Change through Policy & Payment Reform
- Invest in Capacity Building and Promoting Provider Transformation
- Advancing Technological Solutions to Increase CIE Options

