Florida Findings

Approach

The purpose of this section is to present findings from statewide stakeholder groups and then consider these findings within the context of the lessons learned from Employment First states. This work is intended to assist Florida's efforts, not only in development of an Employment First proclamation, but also to translate that mission statement into operations and practice at all levels of the service system.

The strengths in Florida's existing system provide a solid base on which to build an Employment First initiative. The task at hand is to connect existing initiatives, work towards coalition building, capitalize on innovation, and realign services and supports to focus on the overarching goal of greater opportunities for employment and self-sufficiency for individuals with IDD in Florida.

The review presents findings from a comprehensive review of Florida's strategies and experiences supporting integrated employment outcomes that occurred in the spring and summer of 2012. An online survey was used to gather input from a wide stakeholder group about the state's infrastructure for achieving integrated employment outcomes among people with IDD receiving publicly financed support. Using the High Performing States Model (see Table 1) as a guide, the project team conducted onsite visits with key state agency officials; regional, county, and local leaders; providers; advocacy groups; and families and individuals receiving services.

Information gathered through the online Employment Assessment and site visits (which included in-person town-hall style forums across the state, focus groups specifically held for self-advocates, key stakeholder interviews, and an online forum) is summarized.

In summary:
- 150 people participated in in-person town hall style forums in six sites.
- Three additional in-person focus groups were held with self-advocates.
- 36 people participated in the web-based forum.
- 65 individuals responded to an online survey.

Project staff focused efforts on identifying Florida policies, systems, and services that support employment for individuals with IDD. The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) is the largest source of supports for adults, and a significant resource for younger individuals. However, agencies and partners with whom APD collaborates, including the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Department of Education (DOE), community rehabilitation providers, and family support organizations have important roles in facilitating the expansion of employment, and have made significant contributions.

The EmployME1st Advisory Board, the coalition that guides this project, includes a variety of perspectives, including individuals with disabilities, family members, state agencies, universities, and community rehabilitation providers. It is the intent of this coalition that the Florida findings speak to that broader audience, shedding light on areas of success and areas of challenge. Only

through collaborative and broad partnerships can Florida align missions, goals, and processes to better coordinate supports for individuals with IDD to be successful in the labor force.

Organization of this section
The key findings within this report are organized according to seven employment framework areas (High Performing States Model, Hall et al., 2007) that will guide the implementation of a successful Employment First initiative (see Table 1). This report acts as the basis for the development of a workplan detailing outcomes, goals, and strategies to be pursued.

Background
Recognizing the importance of community employment, in 2003 the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) convened a statewide taskforce on financing supported employment. The work that emerged from the taskforce represents a significant commitment to removing barriers to employment and creating new opportunities. The group identified the collaborative effort of the system and emphasized the notion that each party had an important role to play (*Employment is Job One* report, 2003).

Also in 2003, Governor Jeb Bush created a blue ribbon task force to provide the APD with guidance on improving inclusive options and outcomes for Floridians with IDD. The governor appointed the Blue Ribbon Task Force Implementation Working Group, and charged the group with making recommendations for aligning resources and eliminating barriers to: (a) expanding and improving inclusive community living options; (b) coordinating the provision of effective school-to-work transition services statewide for students with disabilities; and (c) expanding and improving access to competitive, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. State agency officials saw the working group as a key mechanism for developing a consensus around new approaches to improving access to integrated employment supports statewide.

In 2004, the APD launched a five-year employment initiative, with the goals of (a) having 25% of Adult Day Training (ADT) recipients employed by July 1, 2009; and (b) having 50% of all individuals receiving DD waiver services who indicate a desire to work employed by July 1, 2009. To reach these goals, each district in the state was mandated to redirect a minimum of five percent of the people from ADT services into competitive employment each year, from 2004 to 2009. As such, districts developed specific performance targets and resource strategies. While this initiative was a directive from APD, it lacked specific policy language that mandated employment as the first option for adults with disabilities.

In 2007, Governor Charlie Crist created the Governor's Commission on Disabilities to advance public policy and work with state agencies and organizations on behalf of Floridians with disabilities. Activities of this commission have included support for the Florida College Transition Program, a structured college transition program that provides individualized transition services to high school students between ages 14 and 22; the development of a comprehensive clearinghouse web site with a grant from the Able Trust; an employment and career awareness campaign; and work with employers through the Business Leadership Networks.

Despite such initiatives, recent data suggest a relative decline in the percentage of individuals in integrated employment in Florida. From a high of 30% in 1999, data provided by APD indicate that only 20% of individuals served by APD received integrated employment services in FY 2011 (Butterworth, et al., 2013). This suggests that a sustained and long-term effort will be needed if Florida is to accomplish the goals of an Employment First initiative.

Other systems show a decline as well. Within the education system, the 2010 Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS) State Education Agency profile showed a downward trend for employment for students with disabilities at one year after graduation from 2005–2006 to 2007–2008, decreasing from 48% in 2005–2006 to 45% in 2006–2007 and to 38% in 2007–2008. The methodology for reporting data changed in 2008-09 and no longer reflects employment in isolation.

The 2011 and 2012 SEA profiles include students with disabilities in employment as follows: in higher education (at least 20 hours per week at minimum wage or greater) or competitively employed at 40% in 2007–2008, 37% in 2008–2009, and 39% in 2009–2010. Students in some other form of employment (less than 20 hours per week at minimum wage or greater) or continuing education were reflected at 54% in 2007–2008, 50% in 2008–2009, and 51% in 2009–2010. The 2009–2010 data reflected a slight increase over previous years.

Finally, Florida offers a 9–12 Supported Competitive Employment course description that is used primarily for students in supported employment. Enrollment dropped from 397 in 2009–2010 to 319 in 2010–2011. Within the VR system, the rehabilitation rate for VR customers with an intellectual disability declined from 45% in 2003 to 34.2% in 2010.

Recent efforts by APD
Florida recently established new goals and objectives for 2010–2015 and plans to monitor achievement by each area (APD 5 Year Employment Plan, 2010). APD restructured its operations to increase efficiencies beginning July 1, 2012 due to a legislative funding reduction. The agency moved from 14 areas to six regions.

In September 2012, APD issued a memo stating that employment is one of its four strategic priority areas. The memo also stated that APD leadership is collaborating with school systems, provider networks, public-private organizations, existing and potential employers, DVR, and other state agencies towards greater employment outcomes. In particular, staff resources are to be allocated to collect accurate employment data and to allow for adequate regional structure to support employment outcomes. APD plans to follow up the memo with web-based meetings to train and educate on details specified in the memo, changes in roles, and criteria for meeting performance measures.

Recent efforts by Department of Vocational Rehabilitation
Vocational rehabilitation has made efforts in a variety of areas to increase employment for individuals with IDD. Efforts have been underway to increase collaboration between DVR and APD. DVR has also been instrumental in supporting self-employment opportunities, and established Florida as the first state to create a certification for providers related to self-employment; the agency continues to do widespread training.

<u>Recent efforts by the Department of Education/Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services</u>
Florida has a number of effective model programs targeting the successful transition of youth and young adults from high school or post-secondary education to competitive integrated employment. For instance, Project Achieve is a partnership of the Duval County School District, Nassau County School District, and Florida State College at Jacksonville to include students with IDD in programs that lead to certification or modified certification in a career field of their choice. Other examples include Project STING RAY, which offers young adult with significant disabilities an opportunity to experience life on a college campus; and Project Search, which uses an innovative workforce and career development strategy that benefits both the individual and the workplace.

To increase interagency collaboration, DOE has developed Third Party Cooperative Agreements, which are collaborations between the Local Education Agencies and DVR to provide eligible students with work and social skills needed to successfully transition into their careers. Finally, through the use of Discovery and Discovering Personal Genius, the FL education system has been implementing alternatives to assessments that focus on strengths, preferences, and abilities. The Florida Department of Education, Project 10: Transition Education Network has provided technical assistance to school districts across the state on the Discovery process.

I.   Leadership
Definition: Leadership is defined by whether a state has clearly identifiable individuals and groups who are "champions" for employment. Evidence of its existence in a state includes the presence of full or part-time state positions dedicated to employment development, local/regional staff who focus wholly or in part on employment, a network of dedicated and longstanding stakeholders working towards furthering employment in the state, and a continuous and consistent employment message across a variety of audiences and formats.

Key findings: Florida has a history of investing in policy development aimed at supporting employment and in employment leadership staff. A challenge has been consistently communicating employment as a priority goal across stakeholder groups. This has been evidenced by an inconsistent voice around employment, though in some parts of the state, providers have been identified as leaders who continue to push forward an employment agenda.

Leadership evidenced by policy development
Analysis of Florida documents and policies suggest that Florida state government has a history of publicly supporting integrated employment.

For example, the Bill of Rights of Persons with Developmental Disabilities[1]declares that the design and delivery of treatment and services to people with IDD should be directed by the principles of self-determination, reduce the use of sheltered workshops and other noncompetitive employment day activities, and promote opportunities for those who choose to seek employment.

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[1]FL Statute 393.13, section 2.B (4)

Florida Statute 393.066(6) supports individuals who are receiving APD services to pursue employment. It stipulates that individuals should be provided supports and services to promote independence and productivity.

Lastly, Executive Order 11-161(2011) created the Governor's Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities. This interagency commission is charged with reducing the employment gap between Floridians with and without disabilities. A 2012 commission report provides recommendations for promoting employment, including assisting employers in meeting their business needs, and promoting private-sector solutions. The commission recommends streamlining information and identifying a single point of contact for employers for easier navigation of the disability service system; increased awareness about employment for people with disabilities; and the promotion of internships and work experience programs with employers.

State and local leadership
Florida APD has full-time staff positions at the state level dedicated to supporting employment. A major strength in Florida's employment system has been the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, which supports four APD employment specialists. While the funding for these positions ended in December 2012, leadership within APD felt that they could maintain these positions with alternate funding because of the positive impact they have had on the system. Employment specialists have provided training and technical assistance and have implemented local employment outreach and development activities such as mentoring and mock interview days at high schools in the Pensacola area.

Like many states across the country, Florida is dealing with a focus on cost-containment, as well as turnover in top levels of administration. This has challenged sustaining a clear message about employment for people with disabilities as a priority. Some respondents in the forums, while acknowledging the positive, also asked, "Where is the voice around employment?"

Community service providers were mentioned as leaders in expanding employment. In some areas of the state, such as Jacksonville, service providers have been dedicated to employment, but there was concern about their ability to maintain a dedicated focus on improving employment outcomes.

In the education system, BEESS' State Secondary Transition Interagency Committee (SSTIC) is a state level interagency team whose members represent all major secondary transition stakeholders in Florida. SSTIC subcommittees address issues of data, dropout, family involvement, postsecondary education, and employment. The employment subcommittee recommended improving middle and high school employment outcomes through revised Exceptional Student Education/Career and Technical Education courses. As is evidenced throughout this report, leadership from within the school systems can play an important role in employment outcomes after students exit high school.

DVR maintains dedicated positions focused on transition and supported employment that also support interagency efforts with APD and BEESS.

Communicating the mission
An important component of leadership is the ability of the state agency to integrate its mission in its communications, policies, and practices. Regional forum participants described a disconnect between what state agencies communicated as their priorities in policy and goals and the experiences of individuals who received services at the local level.

In particular, stakeholders reported that the focus on employment varied widely across the state, and that employment is not consistently addressed in the service planning process. Some respondents suggested that policymakers in Tallahassee needed better lines of communication with and among the local areas to achieve consistency in how policies and values are being articulated throughout the state.

APD has made efforts to focus on a clear branding strategy through its external affairs department, including promoting success stories on their website and in printed materials about individuals who are working, and creating a brochure aimed specifically at employers. There was evidence that the marketing campaign could be made more effective if it were to reach a broader audience. One survey respondent noted that the philosophical beliefs that support the state's service delivery model should be made more available to stakeholders, suggesting that its mission and vision has not been translated throughout the state.

Findings also suggested that employment values, policies, and goals are not consistently translated from leadership priorities to practice. In particular, APD support coordinators were seen as critical in the employment decision-making process, and as key stakeholders who needed to understand APD's priorities around employment. Both forum attendees and survey respondents felt that within the current system, support coordinators need to do more to emphasize employment as the preferred choice.

Within the education arena, BEESS has been able to emphasize the importance of earning at minimum wage or better within their employment-related curriculum. BEESS has integrated the mandated minimum wage requirement through the *Supported Competitive Employment* course and the Special Diploma (Option 2). The Option 2 Diploma provides an opportunity for students with disabilities to benefit from an individually designed community-based employment program. It allows students to acquire academic and community living skills related to employment while earning credits towards graduation.[2]

Absence of a consistent voice around employment
Local level APD was described as supportive of employment, but the overarching message of employment from APD was described as inconsistent. Forum participants reported that when local staff did push employment, they were "in the background" as opposed to leading the local movement. This could in part be attributed to uncertainty at the local level related to turnover in APD's top administration.

Respondents gave the example of employment training for service coordinators that started two years ago but has since dropped off. There was a belief expressed that if services were not documented as "medically necessary," they would be denied authorization in Tallahassee. This

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[2]https://www.fldoe.org/bii/studentpro/pdf/DiplomaCriteriaChart.pdf

was perceived as an example of an inconsistent message from leadership about the value of employment. Providers who participated in the forums noted that sometimes they feel "in the dark" about employment efforts because of this disconnect.

Survey respondents did agree that local and state-level administrators are clearly identifiable as "champions" for employment, and 55% of respondents felt that there was a core network of stakeholders within Florida who are committed to and advocate for employment. While these are important strengths of the system, it was reported that there are only intermittent instances that bring these advocates together.

Inconsistent expectations about work for people with intellectual disabilities
Throughout the regional forums and self-advocate focus groups, there was frequent mention of expectations about work for people with disabilities and how perspectives varied across providers, families, and communities in Florida. In some instances forum participants communicated the straightforward message that "people with disabilities can work" while others expressed statements such as "not everyone on the caseload is functional to work in employment."

This was an especially prevalent theme when participants discussed transition-age youth and expectations in the adult systems as well as the education system. This was described in terms of the need for a cultural shift, and the need to build partnerships that focused on raising expectations for individuals with disabilities as well as those that support them. With respect to the perspectives of self-advocates who participated in the focus groups, expectations about work were consistently high. They included having one's own money, having co-workers, and feeling included in the community.

Engaging employers as leaders
Respondents discussed the importance of employers as champions for employment for people with IDD, and the need to help employers share their success stories. This need was discussed at both the in-person and web-based forums. One suggestion included greater connection with the Florida Business Leadership Network, which serves as an information clearinghouse by providing employers with disability employment resources. A provider at the Sarasota forum talked about the importance of provider agencies, school systems, and state agencies hiring people with disabilities as a model to other employers, with leadership setting an example as well as raising expectations. The group considered how legislation could support the interests of employers who hire people with disabilities.

II.   Strategic Goals and Operating Policies

Definition: Strategic goals and operating policies are defined as those that support employment and emphasize employment as a preferred outcome. They are evident when there is a clear understanding across stakeholders of the philosophical beliefs that support the state's service delivery model, and both short-term and long-term term policy goals establish clear benchmarks for expanding integrated employment. State practices encourage innovative methods to meet policy expectations with dedicated resources, clear accountability, and local-level flexibility to initiate pilot activity.

Key findings: Despite Florida's efforts in creating two five-year initiatives with measurable goals that have focused on expanding employment, there was no common opinion about employment as the preferred outcome in the state's mission, goals, and operating policies. Furthermore, the growing waiting list for services continues to be a barrier to successful implementation of policy goals. Employment is not perceived as a priority within the service planning process.

Two five-year employment initiatives
In July 2004, Florida implemented its first five-year employment initiative for people with IDD (described in detail in the background section of this report). At the time of implementation, APD provided several mechanisms to support the five-year initiative. These included integrated employment training initiatives for support coordinators and employment support providers; the Start-Up Florida grant, which focused on creating self-employment opportunities for adults with IDD; and APD area office plans to enhance the employment of people with IDD that identified target goals for each area (these goals are updated semi-annually). From 2006–2007, Florida was a member of the State Employment Leadership Network, a coalition of state IDD agencies working on improving employment outcomes. Because of funding reductions and staff changes, this membership was discontinued after 12 months.

During FY 2005–2006, the Florida legislature appropriated $2 million in general revenue to assist APD to enroll additional individuals in supported employment services as part of the agency's employment initiative. APD used these funds to enroll more than 420 individuals who were on the waiting list for waiver services in supported employment services. Employment outcomes of the 2004 initiative showed that between 2004 and 2007 the percentage of people in integrated employment grew from 14% to 23%. However, the sustained movement of individuals out of ADT services continued to be a challenge. In July 2008, a year away from the final goal, APD reported 4,869 individuals in integrated employment, a number that was shy of the 2008 target of 5,160.

APD has remained committed to increasing the number of individuals in integrated employment and to putting supports in place to ensure continued growth in employment. The second five-year employment initiative was launched in 2010. There are six primary goals of the initiative, each with series of sub-goals with targeted age-ranges, target populations (e.g., individuals on the waitlist, transition-age youth), tasks to achieve the goals, responsibilities for the completion of the tasks, and requirements for reporting on progress towards obtaining the goals. Additionally, the initiative defines outcomes around competitive versus non-competitive employment, volunteerism, and post-secondary education.

While many policy elements are in place, APD could do more to communicate its efforts to its constituency. Results from the online survey suggested that despite APD's two five-year employment initiatives, there was no common understanding about employment as the preferred outcome in state mission, goals and operating policies. Furthermore, about half of survey respondents disagreed with the statement "APD has measurable goals with clear benchmarks regarding employment," indicating limited understanding or familiarity with the clearly defined operating policy.

The waiting list for waiver services
Discussion about APD's goals around integrated employment regularly segued into a topic about which many were passionate: the state's waiting list for services. Forum attendees spoke about the concern that individuals on the waiting list were struggling to retain skills, and were languishing at home because of the lack of funding for services. Many respondents also described the waiting list as a barrier to accessing DVR services, since there was not an identifiable source for Phase 2 (follow-along) support funding.

In FY2011, Florida reported its waiting list to be at 20,891 for all categories of service. Of this number, 4,333 people who were not currently employed were self-identified as wanting to be employed. DVR and APD have been working together to try and ensure that those who are not on the waiver find resources for follow-along that are not part of the waiver. These efforts include providing education about options, including natural supports in the workplace, Social Security work incentives, and private pay for families and individuals. Leadership within APD has identified the waiting list as a top priority and part of the fiscal management goal of the director.

Both forum and online webinar attendees explained that in the last several years, Florida has focused discretionary general revenue funding to address people on the waiting list. At a regional forum, APD personnel said that APD staff have culled through the waiting list to identify individuals who are interested in becoming employed in order to prioritize resources. These state funds were described as an option for follow-along funding, but the availability of the funds was not well understood at the local level or by families and individuals. Another resource that has been used to address the waiting list is a statewide Florida ARC special appropriation to support both dental services and employment services for those waiting.

Individuals' status on the waiting list for waiver services has important implications for receiving support through DVR to begin the job search process. Respondents widely felt that DVR is unlikely to provide supported employment services to individuals who will not have adequate funding for follow-along support once the person has been stabilized in a job, although as noted earlier efforts are being made to identify employment supports for individuals not currently funded by the waiver.

Support Coordination
There is not a clear expectation in the service planning process that employment will be addressed as a priority outcome, and support coordinators were described as not placing a priority on employment or referral to DVR for job placement.

III.   Financing and Contracting Methods
Definition: Successful employment service systems have funding mechanisms and contracts with providers that emphasize employment as the preferred outcome. This is evident when providers receive greater financial compensation for community employment compared to other outcomes and contracts, and funding levels provide incentives for integrated employment. In addition, goals and/or benchmarks for achieving integrated employment outcomes are included in provider contracts and operating agreements, and rate-setting methodologies correspond with service definitions that promote integrated employment.

Key findings: Florida stakeholders expressed concern about what is and what is not considered a billable activity in the rate structure, the impact of iBudget implementation on individuals' ability to purchase employment supports over other essential services, and insufficient follow-along funding to sustain employment. Overall, respondents felt that Florida rates for supported employment are insufficient, and that rate structures encourage providers to focus on ADT services.

Concern about billable activities
Employment providers from the regional forums explained that often the activities that are considered "best practices" are not billable, creating a disincentive. Tasks identified included developing employer connections, solo transportation time for the employment specialist to a job site, time spent completing documentation and required paperwork, and phone-based consultation with employers and other supports. This issue was identified within both the DVR and APD systems. APD's rate structure for billing is built around face-to-face contact, but the rates were developed with the intention to include "non-billable" activities like transportation and documentation.

These views were reinforced through the findings of the online survey. Fifty-five percent of respondents did not think that the rates and rate structures in place for individual integrated employment encouraged employment over other day service options. Furthermore, 42% disagreed that financial incentives are offered to providers to increase integrated employment outcomes. One respondent noted, "If APD has supported employment as an outcome for ALL individuals on the waiver, they would pay better for an employment outcome."

Stakeholders reported that it is more profitable for an agency to provide ADT services compared to individualized integrated employment. Providers funded through DVR for up-front job development will not receive payment for helping an individual transition from ADT into employment until the individual obtains a job, potentially creating a substantial gap in billing for the provider. Once an individual moves into supported employment follow-along, even though the supported employment rate is higher than the ADT rate, providers are only able to bill for a limited number of units, and core activities are not billable. Rates for group-supported employment are lower than ADT rates for comparable staff ratios, despite having higher staff qualification requirements.

Finally, providers expressed concerns about providing unfunded supports to individuals, both for individuals on the waiting list for services and for individuals who have had reductions in authorized units of support but continue to need services. For example, one provider reported that they are only being paid for three hours per day of ADT services, but continue to provide additional hours of support.

iBudget
Florida's APD announced in the February 2012 Champion Stakeholder Newsletter that it will implement the iBudget Florida program in Areas 1 and 2 by April 1, 2012. The program will eventually be implemented across the state. iBudget Florida is designed to improve financial management of Florida's Home and Community-Based Services Medicaid waiver program;

improve access to waiver services for individuals who are on the waiting list for enrollment in the program; and provide greater flexibility to individuals and their families to choose the services that best allow them to live in their community within the limits of an established budget. The program included a comprehensive redesign of the service delivery system, using individual budgets as the basis for allocating the funds appropriated for the Home and Community-Based Services Medicaid waiver program.

In some cases, implementation of iBudget includes a reduction in the total resources available to an individual in exchange for greater control over resources. Findings revealed concerns among many that after paying for essential services like supported living, there will not be funding available within individual budgets for services like employment. Service coordinators felt that the state was shifting funds to other services instead of employment to support emergency or higher priority needs.

The challenge from an employment perspective was that, given the options and choices presented, individuals are seen as opting for non-negotiable services like in-home supports, or for more "fun" services like non-work activities. This issue may also be affected by the role of providers in the individual service planning process. Some employment providers reported that they were not participants in planning, and so did not have an opportunity to give input on resource allocation decisions.

Respondents described concrete examples of resource decisions that were triggered by individual allocation reductions. One parent said that her child was given a choice of four days at a day program with transportation, or five days without transportation.

Follow-along funding
Forum attendees expressed concern about inadequate and diminishing funding for follow-along employment support services through APD once an individual is stable on the job. Self-advocates said that not having enough support once they got a job, or to help them learn how to do the job, or to ask for accommodations affected their ability to keep their jobs in the community. Employment providers shared that other periodic supports individuals needed were help renewing their bus passes or a ride home from work in inclement weather. However, these one-time factors are not currently part of the discussion around authorization for funding follow-along services, even though these wraparound supports are critical to help people keep their jobs.

A participant from Jacksonville provided a specific example of an individual receiving 16 units (a unit is 15 minutes) of follow-along support per month, when in reality her need was for 90 units. Many felt that this was because health and safety issues were seen as taking precedence in the funding allocation over employment services. The situation was resoundingly described as a "crisis" for providers.

In Jacksonville, attendees thought that turnover in leadership has led to inconsistent efforts around the appropriate fading of supports. Concern was expressed about recent APD initiatives that were understood to set a goal of individuals exiting or "graduating" from follow-along funding. APD is reviewing and reducing the intensity of job coaching services for individuals who have been employed over three years.

Others felt that APD does not have a clear understanding of the effort it takes to maintain employment, especially for those with the most significant disabilities. One stakeholder said, "Follow-along services are key to maintaining a severely disabled person in employment and [this] is not a key component or understanding of APD." One survey respondent said, "Individuals who need extra supervision or individual supports need not even think of employment under Florida's model." Such findings show a possible disconnect between what APD leadership expects in terms of follow-along supports and what practitioners at the local level actually need to sustain individuals at work.

Many providers talked about the need to provide support pro bono to help individuals remain successful on the job. An APD staff person felt that the state as a whole was expecting more from providers while cutting their rates and paying less for services. Providers said that in the long term, they would be unable to serve individuals without adequate reimbursement, and that this was not a viable option for funding follow-along supports.

Wait list and state individual family support funds. A significant restraint, particularly mentioned in the context of referral for DVR services, is the commitment of follow-along funds for Phase 2 of the employment process. Multiple respondents believe that DVR counselors will not enroll individuals unless APD had made a funding commitment to Phase 2. There is currently strategy change in this area (see Interagency Collaboration below). Inclusion on the waiting list for waiver funds makes this more difficult, but APD staff reported that limited state funds from Individual Family Support (IFS) resources can be targeted for this purpose. At one time, a portion of state funds ($500,000) was specifically targeted for employment, but those funds are now part of the IFS funding stream.

One region reported being assertive about using general revenue funds to support employment by calling individuals who were on the waiting list and asking if they were interested in a job.

As previously noted, Third Party Cooperative Agreements (TPCA) have been developed and expanded through DOE and DVR. TPCAs now include provisions to include funding for employment specialists in supported competitive employment courses. This may enable a smoother transition for students once they have stabilized on a job and moved into follow-along supports.

IV.   Training and Technical Assistance
Definition: Effective training and technical assistance is a critical component of a system that supports integrated employment. It is evidenced by support to providers for organizational change and development, competency-based training expected or required for direct support professionals working in employment supports, and waiver service definitions that establish minimum training requirements and qualifications for employment support and job-development-related skills/experience.

Key Findings: APD's 2011 employment conference encouraged broad collaboration, while emphasizing the importance of employment. Florida is one of a small number of states that maintain higher qualification requirements for integrated employment direct support staff,

including both training and educational requirements. However, discussion in the forums suggested that there is considerable confusion about the implementation of the requirements, and that they were often perceived as a barrier. In addition, support coordinator training and standards were identified as a major gap in the system regarding facilitating referrals between APD and DVR (discussed in more detail in the Interagency Collaboration section of this report).

Partnership among disability agencies to sponsor employment conference
In 2011, APD partnered with several other disability agencies to sponsor the first APD Employment Conference. Florida's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant made it possible for the agency to sponsor this event. Partnering agencies included DVR, Department of Elder Affairs, Department of Veterans' Affairs, Area Agency on Aging of Pasco–Pinellas, Inc., Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technologies, Florida APSE, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, and Project Search.

Objectives for the conference included providing employment-related information, highlighting resources and supports available to people with disabilities, providing an opportunity for input on APD's five-year employment initiative, and showcasing the organizations available to assist people with disabilities. Over 250 people attended, including individuals with disabilities, family members, support coordinators, supported employment staff, teachers, and employers.

Direct support staff training
A strength in Florida's system is its mandatory qualification and training requirements for direct support staff who provide employment supports, but discussions showed that there was confusion among providers about how this requirement is implemented. Some participants considered mandatory training requirements to be an asset, though others expressed concern that they were a barrier to hiring staff and that the state experienced uneven application of the requirements.

In particular, the requirement that staff have a college degree and at least three to four years of previous experience working with individuals with disabilities was a concern for some providers, and there was confusion about whether work experience could be substituted for academic training. Confusion remains about APD requirements for job coaches and the skills and knowledge needed to match APD's criteria.

The online survey echoed the findings that there is not clear communication across the system about training and qualification requirements. Only 48% of respondents believe that Florida sets minimum training requirements and qualifications for staff that provide employment supports and job development. Fifty-six percent did not believe that APD provides or funds sufficient training opportunities for direct support professionals working in employment.

Respondents either disagreed (42.2%) or were neutral/unsure (40%) about whether APD offers technical assistance or consultation resources to provider organizations to assist them in expanding or improving employment outcomes. Respondents were also neutral/unsure (58.5%) about whether APD personnel, including case managers, receive training on employment supports and outcomes.

APD regulations require that staff that provide supported employment services complete an established core curriculum. This curriculum can be completed as two two-day training sessions provided by APD, or as an on-demand web-based curriculum provided by TRN. The training includes basic information about job coaching and then more specialized knowledge such as about benefit planning. For group supported employment, waiver regulations specify that services provided by staff who do not meet the qualifications of a supported employment coach must be billed at the ADT rate, although the ADT rates are currently higher than the comparable rates for group supported employment.

Provider training needs were emphasized throughout the forums. There was a call for regional trainings around job development, as well as further training in customized employment. Certain programs are already piloting customized employment strategies. In central Florida, DVR has a pilot program whereby individuals are receiving supported employment services through DVR vendors who have been trained in the process of Discovery. The goal of the project has been to identify strengths, areas of need, and job matches through customized employment planning.

There has also been investment in building capacity to support self-employment outcomes, with support from the national START-UP/USA project and from a project supported by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. In particular, DVR's role with respect to training around self-employment has been important. Additionally, DVR and the department of education collaborated to create a self-employment handbook, which is a resource for families and individuals as well as VR counselors.

V.   Interagency Collaboration

Definition: Through interagency agreements and relationships, provider collaboration, and outreach to stakeholders, employment is shared as a common goal. Examples of this include cooperative networks within the provider community and across state agencies to support employment goals; specific marketing and outreach efforts geared at all levels of stakeholders, including policymakers, families, providers, state agencies, individuals, and the business community; and partnerships between state agencies on pilot projects or other employment initiatives.

Key findings: With respect to interagency collaboration, most respondents focused on the relationship between APD and DVR. Of pressing concern was the belief that DVR is hesitant to provide up-front supports if an individual is not able to access waiver services for follow-along, and the effect this has on APD and DVR's ability to work together to support individuals. In particular, the role of support coordinators in the referral process was mentioned as critical. Many believed that, as a whole, the partnership between APD and DVR was challenged by the high caseload of DVR counselors.

The other important efforts around collaboration were those with the education system and school districts. Florida has done much work to partner with schools, and it is evident through their focus on programs and opportunities for transition-age youth.

Collaboration between DVR and APD
Florida DVR has an active caseload of around 55,000 individuals. Its staff experience a high rate of turnover, estimated at up to 25% (Florida's Federal State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation

Services, 2013). DVR staff suggest that the average caseload per counselor is approximately 130, and with vacant counselor positions, some counselors carry a caseload of near 300 individuals.

Many respondents at the forums talked about the high caseload of counselors and the negative effect this has had on interagency collaboration. DVR entered Order of Selection in 2008 due to an anticipated state deficit, and the vast majority of individuals whom they support have significant or most significant disabilities. There is no waiting list for categories 1 and 2 (significant and most significant disabilities); category 3 (one barrier to employment and services will last less than six months) remains closed, and 1335 individuals remained on the waiting list as of April 2012 (State Plan, 2013). Rehabilitation Services Administration data from 2010 show that approximately 5.7% of Florida's DVR closures were individuals who identify as having an intellectual disability, as compared to the national average of DVR closures with an intellectual disability at 9.8%. This suggests that individuals with IDD have been underrepresented in the DVR caseload in recent years. DVR reports that resources are available, and that the agency is not currently using its full federal financial participation. Current constraints relate more to staff limitations.

VR reluctant to serve individuals without identified long-term funding. Respondents reported concerns both that individuals with IDD were found to be unemployable by DVR and that services were not initiated because APD long-term supports were not available: "Many folks go to DVR only to be told their loved one is 'unemployable.' That needs to change!" Respondents reported confusion around how long-term supports get funded, and how the transition is made from up-front employment services funded through DVR to follow-along supports funded and monitored by APD.

A family member at one of the forums felt that DVR staff had discretion when it comes to who would receive or be eligible for services. She stated, "If they can't achieve a quick closure, they don't take on the individual with IDD." Families also described being told by DVR counselors that their son or daughter "would never be able to work." DVR staff who participated in the forums said that "very rarely will someone be considered too severe" to benefit from DVR services, but there were many stories of individuals who were deemed ineligible for DVR funding and could only obtain job development services from APD through the waiver.

There has been recent work to increase collaboration between APD and DVR. In Tallahassee, DVR has begun tracking referrals that come from APD. Leadership within DVR has advocated for greater encouragement of APD support coordinators to explore employment as the first option, and to send interested individuals to DVR for phase I of supported employment services. DVR has also affirmed that APD funding is not a prerequisite for services, and that other long-term support options should be considered.

From DVR's perspective, the critical need area is for APD to fund and support follow-along services once an individual is stable on the job. Some maintained that low referrals from APD to DVR were due to lack of knowledge and education of support coordinators around expectations for employment. It was mentioned in a regional forum that some people refuse the DVR referral from APD because they are fearful of working and of the effects on Social Security benefits. This issue is discussed further in this report within the findings around benefits planning.

Respondents emphasized the need for collaboration at multiple levels. While administrative agreements at the highest levels of leadership are important and help to validate and solidify local relationships, on-the-ground collaboration needs to be established at the local level and on a case-by-case basis. Participants talked about resource mapping on a county basis, to help connect people and give individuals and families greater control over and knowledge about how agencies could collaborate to support more people working.

Collaboration with education
Florida's system has a wide variety of programs aimed at transition-age youth. Because of the importance of early expectations around employment, the school setting is fertile ground to introduce these opportunities. Many programs that involve collaborations between several systems including education, vocational rehabilitation, and APD provide evidence of the tenet that "it needs to start in the schools."

A transition coordinator in a middle school noted that the school works hard to connect students with both APD and DVR. Another respondent talked about DVR's focus on providing additional support to students who participate in Project Search, a work-based program that provides training in independent living, employability skills, and specific job skills to transition-age youth. In Jacksonville, participants highlighted innovative practices like bringing employers into the school for mock interviewing, and focusing more on building employment skills while in school. Duval County school system was noted as supporting a large number of job developers.

Overall, respondents reported that there is not a consistent emphasis on employment in schools and during the transition process. There was not a clear strategy for school and individual outreach by APD and DVR reported, although examples of local innovations and initiatives were discussed. Survey respondents reported "parents' lack of awareness of APD" and that "transition services in our schools are inadequate at preparing our young adults to enter the workforce…"

Respondents also noted that individuals who are on the waiver prior to graduation are more likely to receive transition information and support, while individuals on the waiting list have limited access. Family training on transition is available, though it was described as insufficient to meet the needs ("we always turn people away"), and the Family Care Councils and family advocacy organizations are information resources. While a number of resources exist, participant perception was that overall, families are not receiving sufficient information in a systematic way.

Training was seen as important as a way to raise expectations among family members and school staff about employment after high school. Respondents saw some school systems as "fine with graduating individuals at age 22 who don't have any direction for employment." Despite multiple efforts around transition-age youth, there was the sense that schools and families need even more information about the adult system, benefits planning, and expectations around work.

As previously indicated, the State Secondary Transition Interagency Committee (SSTIC) is a collaborative effort with representation that includes BEESS, DVR, the State University System, Career and Adult Education, and Dropout Prevention. A memo from BEESS and DVR clarified the role of each agency regarding the implementation of Transition and Postsecondary Programs

for Students with Intellectual Disabilities into Higher Education, which includes an employment component.

The need to engage employers
Concern about labor market conditions in Florida and the influence that will have on an Employment First initiative was expressed repeatedly. Attendees felt that this issue would need to be taken into consideration and addressed if and when the state prioritizes implementation of an Employment First initiative.

Forum attendees explained that companies that have traditionally been open to employing individuals with disabilities are becoming more stringent in their job descriptions and less flexible in terms of customizing employment. For instance, positions such as "greeters" or "cashiers" have been combined with other job responsibilities, resulting in the need to multitask to complete more complex job requirements.

Moreover, employment providers shared that employers are implementing recruitment techniques, such as online applications, which were perceived as a way to screen out individuals who need more support. Webinar attendees emphasized that some businesses continue to be dedicated to hiring individuals with disabilities (Publix Supermarkets, Walgreens, and TJ Maxx were mentioned).

Attendees also questioned whether there were adequate incentives for businesses to hire people with disabilities. It was emphasized that the primary incentive should be the hiring of qualified individuals for jobs, with possible tax or other incentives that fluctuate with political and economic situations viewed as secondary. One forum participant said that there is not enough discussion about employers overall, and that the economy is cited as the reason for poor employment outcomes but the real issue is lack of relationships with the business community. He noted instances where businesses have opened their doors to employees with disabilities, only to experience inadequate support from providers towards a long-term job match.

Activities that were described as successful in engaging employers have been Disability Mentoring Day, coordinated by the Able Trust, and collaborations established through the Florida Business Leadership Network. Participants noted the need for more public/private partnerships.

The Florida providers association is sponsoring training on job development and employer engagement to expand access to intensive training in these areas.

VI.   Services and Service Innovations
Definition: The state IDD agency works to create opportunities for providers, individuals, and families to make optimal use of the resources available for employment. This includes disseminating information related to creative strategies to support individuals in employment. Examples include the following: the state targets transition-age individuals to move directly into employment opportunities; comprehensive benefits planning is available to individuals and their families when choosing employment options; employment and community-based services are structured to support an individual's valued role in the community; transition from school to

adult life is identified as a priority, and resources are targeted for this population on a regular basis; postsecondary options are explored; and person-focused career planning is used to identify an individual's strengths, skills, and support needs for employment.

Key Findings: Results from the online survey suggested that people did not believe that APD works to create opportunities for providers, individuals, and families to make optimal use of the resources available for employment. Fifty-four percent did not believe that Florida supports and encourages innovation in employment services. However, in-person and web-based discussions yielded several examples of innovative services and pilot projects. These were specifically in the area of self-employment, transition planning, customized employment and person-centered planning, and benefits planning. Throughout the descriptions, barriers that could limit the effectiveness of these programs are discussed.

Self-employment projects
DVR enabled Florida to be the first state to create a certification for providers related to self-employment. Through a contract with DVR, Griffin-Hammis and Associates, a disability consulting agency, has been certifying DVR and APD providers and training DVR counselors about increasing pathways to self-employment. Currently there is no APD policy specific to self-employment and long-term supports, but an advocate notes that it has long been an area of interest for the FDDC.

APD has also piloted microenterprise opportunities. APD staff described an example of an effort to support development of small businesses within an ADT program.

Discovery pilot and customized employment. An advisory board member noted that the state had seen success with using the Discovery process for customized employment, and visual resumes in identifying supports and accommodations. This has helped to broaden the skill set regarding helping people with IDD and more significant disabilities to get jobs by limiting/eliminating the complicated online application process that often eliminates people with IDD as candidates. DVR in the Orlando area is piloting the use of Discovery and customized employment as tools for improving employment opportunities. Providers have received training in the Discovery process as part of the pilot.

While there is a successful customized employment pilot project in Orlando, participants in the online webinar and the survey believed that there were not enough customized employment and person-centered strategies being used throughout the state. "As a parent with a child on the waiting list," stated one respondent, "I am completely unaware of any resources available to us…I do not see any evidence of [person-centered planning] being used during transition when young adults should be preparing to enter the workforce." Another said, "Person-centered planning does identify strengths, but it is not being offered to any families by any agency I am aware of."

Transition projects. Survey respondents talked about the critical point at which a student is transitioning from the school system into the adult system. "Working with… APD customers who are exiting from the school system is a no brainer—you have to stop people from going into ADTs and sitting on the couch at home!"

Towards this end, there were several innovative transition programs highlighted. Some of these project include *Project Achieve,* a partnership of the Duval County School district, Nassau County School District, and Florida State College at Jacksonville that offers young adults an opportunity to increase their knowledge of a trade and learn skills alongside their peers without disabilities; and *Project Search,* which connects students with community services and prepares them to work with a job developer post graduation. Other projects include:

Rural Routes to Employment: The project, funded by the FFDC, develops employment opportunities for individuals with IDD who have graduated from high school, live in rural areas, and are unemployed. Rural Routes to Employment is working to identify the barriers to employment that face individuals with developmental disabilities, find out how employment needs in rural communities can be addressed, and assist those communities to develop and implement a plan for employing individuals with IDD. While this is not a "transition project," school-age youth and transitioning youth may be involved in some of the sites.

CODIE: Collaborative on Discovery and Innovation in Employment (CODIE) is another initiative funded through FDDC. CODIE provides training and technical assistance to school districts to develop Facilitators with Fidelity, embedded strategies into curriculum for students with significant challenges to exit into customized employment and other post-secondary outcomes which might lead to customized employment.

Project 10: Transition Education Network. The goal of this project is to assist Florida school districts and stakeholders in building capacity to provide secondary transition services to students with disabilities in order to improve academic success and post-school outcomes. Activities within this program encourage parents and schools to think about career planning for students at an early age. The Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS) in Florida DOE funds the project.

Project 10 focuses on four major initiatives: capacity-building, interagency collaboration, transition legislation and policy, and student development and outcomes. The project also supports transition initiatives such as school-based enterprises and Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, as well as the BEESS State Secondary Transition Interagency Committee (www.project10.info).

Additional local innovative strategies mentioned:
- Transition coordinators in middle school are connecting children with APD and starting the discussion about post-secondary options.
- Some local schools have set up volunteer opportunities that allow students to become engaged with government departments and NGOs.
- Local school districts have shifted teacher responsibilities to make time in their regular work hours for them to serve as job coaches.
- A charter school for children with autism requires students to spend one day a month in internship in careers of interest.
- Junior Achievement has engaged with students.
- Mandated 20 hours of parent training on transition

- 5th-year program for high school graduates who need more intensive services related to work and career education
- FYITransition.org website

Discussion during the webinar focused on barriers to effective transition services in Florida. These included lack of attention to individuals who are home schooled,[3] an inadequate supply of transition staff in schools, a focus on volunteering for youth as opposed to paid employment, and the challenges of employment supports and expectations for youth with significant disabilities.

Survey respondents also noted the problem of school staff being unfamiliar with resources for transition planning, such as through APD or DVR. One response suggested that "APD needs to reach out to the schools in their districts and educate them that the agency exists. Many school counselors are aware of APD, but have little information regarding what the Medicaid waiver program is able to provide and not provide."

Benefits planning
Concerns about the impact of work on benefits have been consistently documented as a barrier to employment, both for adults and transition-age youth. Self-advocates from the focus groups said that worrying about earning too much money and losing Social Security benefits made it hard to find and keep a job in the community. This issue has been exacerbated by the cessation of the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program in July 2012. Respondents expressed concerns about people having no information or misinformation about the impact of employment on benefits.

DVR is contracting with providers, including prior WIPA projects, to maintain benefits planning expertise in the state. DVR funds benefits planning services for its customers. At one of the regional forums, a respondent mentioned training that had occurred for some APD staff in benefits planning, although it was unclear if they were certified "benefits counselors."

In the past, DVR has collaborated with the FDDC for joint training around benefits planning. They are also a part of the FBIRN which is a network of state agency staff who are trained to support people with disabilities to connect with the right person (federal and state workers who are certified to provide benefits assistance) to better understand benefits planning issues. Started by APD in 2007, FBIRN is a consortium of staff members from various Florida agencies: Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Department of Children and Families (ACCESS and Mental Health), Agency for Workforce Innovation, Governor's Office (Volunteer Florida), and University of South Florida (Start-Up FL and METTA). Additionally, Griffin Hammis & Associates was mentioned as a significant resource in this area.

Transportation
Overall, transportation (and how it is paid for) was mentioned as a significant issue. Participants felt that transportation options, including those provided by their job coach, might be difficult to afford. There were concerns that as funding gets reduced, there will be even fewer resources for

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[3]For the 2011–2012 school year, 72,408 students were home schooled in Florida. Over the past five years, the number has increased by 27.8%. Source: Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice, Florida Department of Education. Home Education in Florida, Annual Report 2011-2012.

transportation. Respondents in Ft. Lauderdale discussed FDDC efforts around transportation. The FDDC has a transportation task force, which has developed a transportation legislative priority paper that has been shared with members of the state legislature.

Transportation was one of the main concerns of self-advocates. Many felt that the limited hours and travel routes of public transportation options negatively affected their work experiences, and they also cited problems with determining eligibility for para-transit. Self-advocates expressed the need for safe, reliable, and accessible transportation that would not interfere with their ability to get to work on time and consistently.

One self-advocate shared that she had to get up very early to get to work on time, because her commute time to her job on the other side of town was two hours each way. Self-advocates felt that transportation problems were compounded by the fact that their employment support staff could not provide transportation.

VII. Employment performance measurement, quality assurance, and program oversight

Definition: Employment performance measurement, quality assurance, and program oversight are ensured through comprehensive data systems that are used to further the state's goals of increasing employment. Florida regularly collects and publishes data on employment outcomes, which is shared in summary form with stakeholders. Furthermore, provider-level employment data are made available to consumers and families; the provision of data to the state is a requirement in provider contracts.

Key Findings: Although Florida has a robust supported employment tracking system and routine dissemination, findings showed limited understanding and/or knowledge of whether comprehensive data systems are used as a strategic planning tool to further the state's goals of increasing employment. Furthermore, findings showed stakeholder concern that APD's quality assurance process may not be reflective of APD goals and philosophy.

The Supported Employment Tracking System
As a part of APD's first five-year initiative, the agency created the Supported Employment Tracking System (SETS). Reports contain employment data, collected on a monthly basis, that indicate the number of individuals served by APD who are employed, as well as quality indicators of the jobs obtained (e.g., wages, hours, benefits). Employment data are published on a regular basis on APD's public website.

A supported employment liaison in each office is responsible for overseeing the collection of employment outcome data for the area. Data are collected on all individuals who receive services from APD, those who work in the community, and those on the waiting list to receive services. "Working in the community" is defined as individual or group employment (not more than eight people as part of a work crew or enclave), working with or among people without disabilities, and earning at least minimum wage.

Employment data is gathered locally and analyzed by region. While data for each area is added to the regional and statewide data collection effort, local data is useful for developing the area

office's new target goals and employment plan for the following year. Each region can view its own report, and can also generate reports that are statewide.

The analysis is done at the local level, both by the SE liaisons and the program administrator within the area office. At the state level, analysis is done within the employment unit of APD. While regional office personnel have provider-level data, data reports do not compare one provider to another across the region or across the state. Such reports are typically produced on a monthly basis, and distributed to each region and staff within APD central office.

APD also makes use of the Internet and its intranet to highlight data. Line graphs documenting the state's progress in meeting its employment goals are posted on its public website. On the intranet, area offices have access to a table that provides employment data for each area.

Although the establishment of the SETS and routine dissemination of data are significant achievements, respondents to the online survey were neutral/unsure as to whether the data systems are used as a strategic planning tool to further the state's goals of increasing employment. Data are not actively shared with stakeholders beyond APD, and provider-level outcome data are not provided to stakeholders. This includes whether data are used to inform employment strategy and contracting; whether core outcome variables including individual earnings, hours of employment, benefits, level of workplace integration, and job satisfaction are assessed on a regular basis; and whether provider-level employment data are made available to consumers and families. The neutrality may indicate a disconnect between the establishment of a strong data collection structure, and limited understanding of or familiarity with it outside of APD.

Some respondents expressed concern that the data are considered an unfunded mandate, and not reported fully or accurately by all providers. There are efforts in place to update the strategy and build it into online systems.

This disconnect between the establishment of a data-collection structure and an understanding of its purpose is also exemplified in a discussion among providers from the Pensacola regional forum. They explained that while they do not mind providing data, they feel they receive little benefit from it in return. These forum attendees also perceived their own lack of involvement in discussions around what to collect, how to collect it, etc.

Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program

The Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) is a data collection and consumer reporting system established by Florida Statutes Section 1008.39 to provide follow-up data on former students and program participants who have graduated, exited, or completed a public education or training program within the State of Florida.

This data collection system is used as the source of information for Indicator 14, which is part of Florida's annual reporting requirement. Indicator 14 is defined as the percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and were enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school; enrolled in higher education or became competitively employed within one year of leaving high school; enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or became competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.

Performance scorecards

In May 2012, APD began posting performance scorecards and rankings for provider organizations operating under its Medicaid Home and Community-based Services Waiver. They are to be conducted annually, and the rankings are based on provider organization scores on two quality assurance reviews that reflect both regulatory compliance and the organization's ability to ensure the quality of services. The ranking also factors in the organization's per-consumer expenditures.

There are six categories of provider organizations included in the new performance measurement system—adult day training; waiver support coordination; supported employment services; and services provided by three types of group homes: intensive behavior support services, behavior-focused residential habilitation, and standard residential habilitation. The performance scores are reported geographically as well.

APD contracts with the Delmarva Foundation, a subsidiary of Quality Health Strategies, to conduct the performance measurement. They work at both the central and local area office levels. Their rankings are based on provider organization scores on the Delmarva Service Specific Review and the Delmarva Provider Discovery Review.

The Delmarva scorecard includes over 60 measures, weighted on a one-to-five scale. Some of the most highly-weighted measures include reporting all instances of abuse, neglect, and exploitation (weighted at a 5); tracking and addressing medication errors (weighted at a 5); tracking and addressing all incident reports (weighted at a 5); and meeting all minimum provider education and experience requirements (weighted at a 3).

For supported employment, the ranking combines two concepts. First, as consumers gain skills in the job setting, the cost of service intervention declines. Second, the Delmarva quality assurance reviews provide a score based on regulatory compliance focused on ensuring quality services.

Providers were concerned about Delmarva's quality assurance process, and questioned whether the priorities of the quality assurance process were in line with APD's mission and goals. The perception exists that Delmarva measures compliance and not the quality of outcomes, as illustrated in the following quote: "Again, there is too much management, and not enough results. The entire APD system is set up to measure compliance, but not results. Consequently, the providers get high grades because they fill out all the right forms, and push all the right buttons, but there is no measurement as to whether they actually get anybody a real job."

Recommendations

The FL IDD system has several strengths that provide a solid foundation for the development of an Employment First initiative. Mandatory job development training/requirements, a data collection system, and articulated goals with measurable outcomes (two five-year initiatives) are tools that the state can use to mobilize towards greater employment outcomes.

A variety of pioneering and collaborative efforts support youth with disabilities to prepare for the world of work. Training around self-employment and customized employment is helping to

diffuse innovative practices throughout the state. Dedicated employment staff within APD can do much to enhance the visibility of employment as a priority goal.

However, it is critical that APD become more effective in communicating its mission, vision, and policies, and obtaining buy-in from all stakeholders, including DVR and school system staff, and individuals and families. Enhanced coalition-building will be vital to the success of any effort. In successful Employment First states, leadership is demonstrated through multiple entities like cross-stakeholder working groups or legislated commissions, and there is both a planning and accountability focus. The EmployME1st Advisory Board has the potential to be an important vehicle in this process.

Based on the findings gleaned from the information-gathering effort in Florida, as well as the themes that emerged from the cross-state summary report, we propose consideration in the following areas:

1. Messaging Through Communications and Policy
Florida stakeholders should address APD's messaging around employment as a priority area. Service coordinators can be a critical resource for supporting a message around employment. For example, Missouri has implemented mandated training to service coordinators on employment policy and goals. Oregon, a state not reviewed for this report, also provides a strong model for strengthening the focus of service coordinators on employment. This strategy promotes consideration of employment during the service planning process and in work with families, individuals, and other partners. Buy-in from APD and its partners is key, and communications must reflect this.

Messaging also requires a systematic outreach strategy for engaging families and individuals, particularly while individuals are still in school. Connecticut, for example, has designated transition service coordinators who are responsible for outreach to schools and engagement with youth and families prior to graduation. In some areas of Florida, transition coordinators in middle school connect children with APD and start the discussion about post-secondary options. More widespread application of this strategy is important in facilitating communication.

2. Data and Performance Measurement
We recommend that APD share high-quality employment outcomes data with multiple audiences, including self-advocates, policy-makers, families, community rehabilitation providers, legislators, and school systems. Moreover, stakeholders should engage in a plan to not only share APD's employment data, but data from other agencies, including DOE and DVR. Washington and Oregon share employment data online, and users can generate reports by provider, county, or region, as well as at the state level. Massachusetts publishes an annual statewide data summary, and gives each provider a comparison report that places their data next to the data for their region and the state.

We also recommend that APD review the role of employment in the Delmarva quality review and reporting process. This will help to ensure that the quality assurance process for community rehabilitation providers is effectively measuring what APD deems as important.

3. Continued Focus on Transition

Transition continues to be an important area for focus in Florida. Though many strategies and programs facilitate the movement of students into employment after school, stakeholders were clear that more needs to be done and that these efforts must be collaborative.

We suggest that Florida develop a clear plan and shared accountability for APD and DVR outreach to schools, students, and families; expand innovative programs around transition; and focus on raising expectations about youth and employment. Washington's Jobs by 21 Partnership Project allows Washington's Department of Developmental Services to capitalize on the supports available to young adults while in school, and to use the support of adult services and stakeholder groups so that young adults with developmental disabilities can enter the workforce at age 21. Massachusetts created School Days to Pay Days: An Employment Planning Guide for Families of Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities as a transition resource. This type of comprehensive planning document can help disseminate information, raise expectations, and coordinate efforts around transition planning throughout Florida.

4. Collaboration

While the theme of "working together" is threaded throughout the recommendations within this report, in particular APD and DVR share a similar mission, client base, and community rehabilitation provider pool. It is important to offer clear guidance about DVR/APD coordination and process, including addressing the wait list and long-term funding supports. This includes development of strategies for increasing referrals to DVR for job placement.

Additionally, the important role of BEESS in transition planning for students with disabilities cannot be underestimated. In Tennessee, the Tennessee Employment Consortium provides a platform for identifying barriers to integrated employment, developing mutually beneficial solutions, and promoting positive change in how agencies work together. Development of a process guide that establishes shared definitions and defines roles and responsibilities may provide guidance to staff.

5. Financing

Funding of employment services is critical to the discussion. The recommendations provided regarding funding are based on the identification of best practices in funding approaches, and how different funding approaches may potentially undermine state efforts to increase integrated employment outcomes.

We recommend that Florida review rates, service definitions, and contracting structures for funding integrated employment supports. This should include an assessment of the impact of iBudget implementation on investment in employment supports, and development of strategies to strengthen and create incentives for the priority given to employment in the budget process. Additionally, we recommend that any changes to funding rates be based in the real-world costs of providing high-quality integrated employment services. We strongly recommend not taking the typical approach of revising funding based upon historical costs. Basing funding and pricing methodologies in real-world costs would meet the specific funding barriers faced by the Florida employment service system, and would allow Floridians with disabilities to receive high-quality integrated employment services.

Lastly, we recommend that all agencies in Florida that pay for employment services, specifically APD, take a comprehensive approach to revising funding of the full array of day and employment services, including separating funding for transportation from funding for services. Past experience has shown that making fragmented changes to one or two service rates is not sufficient to address the underlying funding issues faced by providers and service recipients. Revising the entire funding system will help ensure that individuals receive services that support an individualized, community-centered approach.

6. Training
Through training, IDD agencies have an opportunity to conceptualize and communicate their goals, and to ensure that staff have the tools they need to provide, facilitate, and recognize quality employment supports. Florida is one of a small number of states that maintain higher qualification requirements for integrated employment direct support staff, including both training and educational requirements. However, discussion in the forums suggested there is considerable confusion about the requirements, and that they were often perceived as a barrier. As such, we suggest that Florida's APD continue to support training opportunities that help staff meet the training requirements, and clarify requirements around staff qualifications.

In addition, support coordinator training and standards were identified as a major gap in the system regarding facilitating referrals between APD and DVR. Clarification in the roles and expectations of waiver support coordinators in promoting and supporting integrated employment is key. Florida should consider the Minnesota example (cited earlier) of mandatory training in employment for support coordinators. Statewide, training and technical assistance efforts should use both innovative and evidence-based methods that meet the needs of employment seekers, the business community, service providers, policy makers, families, educators, and other workforce development professionals.

7. Stakeholder Input/Collaboration
Through the current EmployME1st Initiative, the FDDC is bringing together various groups, including self-advocates, and engaging in discussion of the meaning, goals, and implementation strategies of an Employment First effort in Florida. It is critical to continue to meaningfully involve and support self-advocates in Employment First initiative planning and implementation efforts.

Connecticut had an early focus on involving self-advocates, and was able to create demand-side change. Washington invested heavily on stakeholder input during the period in between adoption and implementation of its Working Age Adult Policy, as did Massachusetts during its policy formation. In successful Employment First states, leadership can be through entities like cross-stakeholder working groups or legislated commissions, but there is both a planning and accountability focus. The EmployME1st advisory board has the potential to be an important vehicle in this process.

Employment First is not just a policy strategy. It is a vision for the system that can only be successful when there is longstanding leadership with the focus on the value of working in the community. This foundational concept must be accompanied by policy and goal development,

financing that supports the goal, training and technical assistance, mechanisms for service innovation, and a focus on outcome data. Together, these elements can produce a system that supports people with disabilities to increase their self-sufficiency and to have meaningful experiences alongside community members.