

Welcome to a special conference edition of the NCHSD electronic newsletter capturing the promising practices and innovations from the **Fall National Conference of Medicaid Infrastructure Grantees** in Chicago, Illinois, on November 3-5, 2004. Presentation materials are available on the Conference Resource CD; you can also find materials and detailed notes from the sessions by visiting our [Conference Materials](#) webpage.

Regional Technical Assistance Meetings Increase State-to-State Information Sharing

Thirty-two states representing all ten CMS regions participated in regional meetings at the pre-conference session on November 3. NCHSD staff provided planning and facilitation support for these meetings.

In each regional session, states shared the latest updates on their MIG project activities, including some key challenges, accomplishments and new initiatives planned for the coming year. States reported that these discussions were extremely valuable for identifying common interests and technical assistance needs.

Many states discussed opportunities to work collaboratively on evaluation efforts for their Medicaid Buy In programs (such as developing common survey tools for cross-state comparisons); other states are sharing their outreach materials so that projects can adapt and refine successful models to their own state-specific details (such as program brochures, work incentives presentations and training manuals); and enhancing personal assistance services and developing materials for state legislatures continue to be important areas for state-to-state discussions.

Several regions of the country committed to participating in additional group activities, including topical teleconferences, electronic information sharing and future in-person meetings.

- *If you're interested in working with the states in your region of the country, contact an NCHSD staff person for more information.*
- *Detailed notes from each regional meeting are available by visiting the [Conference Materials](#) webpage.*

Employers Share Promising Practices for Building Partnerships with Business

In response to numerous requests from the states to learn more about strategies for engaging the business community, NCHSD partnered with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) to discuss promising practices for public/private partnerships on November 4.

Paul Wehman (VCU) laid the context for the day by reiterating the value of competitive employment in the lives of people with disabilities. He described the "Manpower Model," which builds on the expertise of the employee placement company Manpower in providing assessment, placement and support services. Paul also identified several ways to begin developing partnerships with the business community to improve employment outcomes. Below are some key strategies he discussed:

- Identify pockets of economic activity in your state... learn who is involved and why they're successful.
- Enhance transition from school to work by providing benefits planning, vocational rehabilitation and training supports to kids *before* they get steered into non-competitive employment activities.
- Leverage existing resources, such as your state's waiver programs. If there are 100 people on supported employment ask, "Why aren't there more?"
- Build long-term relationships and trust with companies through strategic relationships that work both ways. Identify five to ten possible business partners, and start building!
- Creating a single point of contact for both businesses and service providers can help bring needed supports together for potential workers.

Promising Practices: All conference participants received two valuable publications: [Business, Disability and Employment: Corporate Models of Success](#) and [Public-Private Partnerships – A Model for Success](#).

MIG Staff Get the “Scoop” from Employers

Millie Hewitt (Supplemental Staffing, Inc.) led a panel of employers, including Mike Shriver, *MBNA*; LaDrene Coyne, *Medtronic Emergency Response Systems*; Susie Ruthowski, *Cincinnati Children’s Hospital*; and Meg O’Connel, *Booz-Allen & Hamilton*. Each employer shared information about the evolution of the hiring practices in their workplaces to include people with disabilities. The employer panel provided feedback to the MIG project staffs about how they could work toward effective relationships with businesses.

Some suggestions included:

- Finding a “champion” in business and work with them. Human Resources personnel aren’t always the best places to start.
- Publicize and promote employer contributions. Provide continual follow-up and communication.
- Simplify the message to businesses—creating a single point of contact can really help.
- Sell *ability*, not disability.
- Focus on listening and learning what a business *needs*... not on “educating” that business.

Business Leadership Networks (BLN)

A BLN is an employer-led organization, focused on providing opportunities and resources for businesses to increase workforce and marketplace diversity. Local BLN’s are members of a national network, the USBLN, consisting of 51 chapters in 37 states. [Click here](#) for BLN contact information.

Susan O’Mara (VCU) and Dana Rosanelli (SunTrust Bank) presented some concrete steps Medicaid Infrastructure grantees can take to develop a comprehensive business development strategy. Below are some ideas from their slideshow:

- Establish a Business Development Leadership Team to take responsibility for planning and implementing systems development strategies.
- Conduct a resource and service assessment to identify and define the business services in your state, such as those provided by vocational rehabilitation, economic development agencies, and departments of labor.
- Learn the business climate and understand business needs through a business market assessment.
- Make connections with or help create Business Leadership Networks (BLN) as a forum to reach out to and understand where businesses are coming from.
- Establish a professional presence in the business community through relationships with Chambers of Commerce, supplemental staffing companies (e.g. Manpower, Kelly), other companies and employer organizations. Keep a current database to track employer contacts and transactions!

What’s a Business Market Assessment? *It’s an opportunity to gather information about:*

- *Industries and businesses in your state*
- *Specific business needs*
- *Businesses’ hiring practices*
- *Business people’s perceptions of people with disabilities*
- *Experiences with job applicants and employees with disabilities*
- *Business involvement in promoting employment of people with disabilities*

This information can be a useful first step for a MIG project to understand the current business climate and the needs of the local business community. View the entire presentation by [clicking here](#).

State partners worked in small groups for the remainder of the afternoon to discuss the information they heard, as well as share their experiences and future plans in their own states. Key insights from these discussions were captured and will be shared in an upcoming NCHSD report on states’ activities related to involving business successfully to increase employment outcomes for people with disabilities (January 2005).

Resource materials and examples for all conference sessions are available on the Resource CD distributed all conference participants. [Click here](#) for a comprehensive index of available materials.

Federal Partners at CMS Detail Important Information for Grantees

The Ticket to Work Team at CMS opened the last day of the conference with important updates and guidance for grantees on the principles of self-direction, shifting from economic “dependency” to economic “engagement”, and the role Medicaid Infrastructure Grantees play in systems change.

CMS shared the following key points with conference participants:

- Carey Appold introduced Shawn Terrell, the newest member of the Ticket Team. Shawn has a background in mental health and self-directed services that states are sure to find extremely valuable.
- Carey updated states on new opportunities for CMS to communicate directly with the grantees through regular teleconferences and topical meetings; anticipated changes to the online MIG reporting system; and plans for the Spring 2005 Systems Change conference in Baltimore, MD.
- Carey also explained that the MIG program was selected as a Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) project. The Ticket Team will be working with states to meet the reporting requirements associated with GPRA participation. Carey also described plans for making the 2005 MIG awards.
- Shawn delivered a presentation about the philosophy of self-determination and identified person-centered planning, individual budgeting, service brokerage, and strong support in financial, personnel and quality management as four key components of self-direction.
- Steve Knapp described a desirable paradigm shift in employment systems to promote a direct connection between people with disabilities and employers. Providers serve a supportive role and goals are expressed in terms of “real work for real pay,” economic self-sufficiency, career and business success. The new model recognizes that people with disabilities are an important resource in our economy; their participation in the workforce provides genuine economic benefit to both employers and employees.

State Experts Share Strategies for Improving Employment Outcomes

States participated in a series of breakout sessions to explore innovative employment initiatives and new models for support systems around competitive employment. Presentations for each session are on the Resource CD; detailed notes from the sessions will be available soon on our [Conference Materials](#) webpage.

Resource Mapping: A Critical Tool for Strategic Planning

Panelists: Joe Entwisle (WI), Becky Banks (IN); Facilitator: Barbara Otto (NCHSD)

This session introduced participants to resource mapping as a strategy for moving to the next level of meaningful infrastructure development. Two states shared efforts to better understand the who, what, where, how and why of their current Medicaid and employment infrastructure.

- *What is resource mapping?* It is a process that includes identifying system components and funding streams; system verification, an intensive assessment of how the system is working, tailored to a specific learning objective; policy analysis that identifies system gaps and overlaps; and policy recommendations for a smarter, more efficient and responsive system.
- *Indiana's Experience:* Indiana's Employment Leadership Group has undertaken a resource mapping process to better understand their employment services system. They are conducting focus groups in different parts of the state to identify available resources at the local level and how consumers get information about programs and services. Through these focus groups, consumers have become real participants in the mapping process.
- *Wisconsin's Experience:* Wisconsin is using a resource mapping process to facilitate a more holistic approach to service delivery, with the Council of Workforce Investment leading the process. The group has high-level departmental participation in addition to businesses; the Council's mission fits well with the goals of the MIG efforts. Resource mapping activities include data collection through staff work and consumer and provider interviews. Analyses will identify system gaps and funding allocations. The expected outcome is a clear road map with recommendations for changes to make the system more streamlined and responsive to workers (and potential workers) with disabilities.

Creating Incentives to Work and Save

Panelists: Cathy Chambliss (UT), JoAnne Malloy (NH); Facilitator Mary Ellen O'Brien Wright (KS)

This session addressed how to improve employment outcomes through stronger work incentives and financial independence initiatives.

Utah's Experience – Using Evaluation to Improve Work Incentives

- Utah has been using Medicaid Infrastructure funds to analyze survey and administrative data to identify and describe which groups increase their earnings once on the Medicaid Buy In program, and which do not. This understanding will help fine-tune their interventions.
- After Utah's legislature enacted large premium increases for the Medicaid Buy In program in response to the state's fiscal crisis, the MIG surveyed MBI participants to document the negative impact. This data helped advocates make the case to restore full funding for the program.
- [Click here](#) to view Utah's new WorkAbility website.

New Hampshire's Experience – Focusing on Opportunities to Develop Assets and Wealth

- New Hampshire is working collaboratively on creating opportunities that offer low-interest loans and individual development accounts (IDA) for workers with disabilities. These programs match a person's savings with external funding; savings can then be used to buy a house, a car or start a business. Matching funds can come from a variety of federal or state resources.
- The NH MIG project is piloting an intensive "Money Works" program for people with disabilities that includes financial literacy training, benefits counseling, person centered planning, goals setting, IDA and other supports.

Creative Funding to Support Competitive Employment

Panelists MaryAlice Mowry (MN), Millie Ryan (AK); Facilitator: Peter Baird (NCHSD)

Several MIG projects are exploring strategies to support competitive employment and stronger vocational services within the mental health system. Efforts have targeted transitioning reimbursable services from day-treatment to vocationally oriented programs; states are also spending resources to focus existing staff positions on supports for competitive employment.

Minnesota's Experience – Maximizing the Rehab Option

- Minnesota is helping mental health providers move from day-treatment to supported employment and developing strategies to bill the state's Medicaid Rehab Option for long-term funding.
- Six provider organizations in MN received MIG funding for 18 months to support "conversion" from day-treatment to vocational services. Somewhat surprisingly, job satisfaction among mental health staff at those sites has increased! Preliminary data indicates that out of 404 people served, 145 have found jobs at 32 hours of work per week, on average.
- [Click here](#) to view an outline of Minnesota's MIG-related efforts; [Click here](#) to visit their ARMHS website.

Alaska's Experience – Bringing Experts Together in an Employment Summit

- This summer, the Alaska MIG project coordinated a "Mental Health Employment Summit," at which experts from across the country met with state agency personnel, mental health providers, advocates and consumers to discuss ways to reform the mental health system and encourage greater employment for people with mental illness. The group discussed how mental health services could be changed to better support employment and independent living. They have held follow up meetings and developed an action plan to present to directors and governmental leadership.
- Alaska is also exploring ways to help convert staff from day-treatment to vocational positions and has a pilot to use peer navigators in community mental health centers. The team is considering strategies for using the Ticket to Work program to increase funding and provide new incentives to providers.
- [Click here](#) to view an outline of Alaska's action plan to increase employment outcomes.

Ensuring Informed Choice through Sustainable Benefits Counseling Programs

Panelists: Alice Porter (VT), Sara Beckham-Henry (CA); Facilitator: Barbara Otto (NCHSD)

This session focused on both short- and long-term MIG initiatives for sustainable benefits counseling as a necessary component of competitive employment outcomes.

California's Experience – A Focus on Training and Outreach

- The MIG project in California conducts benefits counseling training as an integral part of systems change. Some training sessions meet the varying needs of full-time benefits counselors, while others are targeted to front-line staff such as eligibility workers and rehab counselors. In both cases, the trainings include post-training networking opportunities for participants as well as an evaluation component.
- Training sessions for front-line staff are scheduled, designed and conducted in collaboration with local leaders. The MIG project serves as technical support for the local training sessions.

Vermont's Experience – Using Data to Find Longer-Term Funding

- In Vermont, the MIG project is working to obtain dedicated state funding for benefits counseling. They've developed a focused, data-driven presentation illustrating the value of benefits counseling for key state decision-makers.
- Panelists discussed strategies for obtaining sustainable funding—states can ensure they are providing quality services so that it's clear services are worth it; communicate effectively the value of the services offered; become a "habit" by filling a business need; be indispensable; and, build a customer base.
- [Click here](#) to view the Vermont MIG website.

Bringing Medicaid & VR Together to Support Employment Outcomes

Panelists: Amy Porter (CT), Steve Kozak (WA); Facilitator: Larry Glantz (ME)

This session addressed opportunities for states to improve collaboration between the Medicaid and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies via Medicaid Infrastructure Grant funding.

Connecticut's Experience – The Connect to Work Center

- In Connecticut, the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant partially funds the Connect to Work Center (CTW) within the vocational rehabilitation agency. CTW houses several important employment-related grants, including the MIG and the Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach (BPAO) grant. Through its mission and activities, the CTW serves as both technical assistance resource and organizational force to further interagency collaboration.
- Issues identified as fertile ground for collaboration include the Ticket to Work program implementation, Medicaid Buy In, and nursing facility transition activities. For example, the Connecticut MIG team contacts Medicaid Buy In enrollees when they report having lost employment to offer benefits counseling and vocational rehabilitation services.
- Benefits counseling programs are highly valued by both VR and Medicaid—and may be an additional resource for developing relationships between the agencies.
- [Click here](#) to visit the Connect to Work website.

Washington's Experience – Partner by Identifying Opportunities to Achieve Common Outcomes

- Washington has found that the key to collaboration is trying to understand the other agency's perspective. Projects can repair troubled interagency relationships by learning about potential partners before asking for something or trying to instruct them about your own agency's priorities. MIG funds are flexible dollars that can help in this regard. Don't forget about how consumers can be negatively affected by a lack of coordination!
- Building relationships can include many activities: encouraging partners to come to the table, learning about related programs, meeting staff and working on individual relationships, funding a joint policy position, inviting the agency to be a leader on planning boards or on community outreach efforts, etc.
- The Washington MIG, housed in Medicaid, worked together with VR on extensive outreach for the Ticket to Work program and the Medicaid Buy In program.

Adding Ticket to Work & Customized Employment Opportunities

Panelists Mack Marsh (LA), Amy Armstrong (ND); Facilitator: John Coburn (HDA)

This discussion explored ways to facilitate greater access to non-traditional employment opportunities and non-traditional employment service providers that are often the turning point for people with disabilities who are beginning or maintaining a meaningful career.

Louisiana's Experience – Improving Consumer Access to the Ticket to Work Program

- Louisiana's MIG project is collaborating with Independent Living Centers on consumer workshops and job fairs. Although they weren't traditionally involved in employment issues, the independent Living Centers now view work as a means for consumers to reach their life goals.
- Developing their statewide job fairs has proven to be logistically challenging, but Louisiana has found that they can really serve as an effective way to bring people with disabilities together with potential employers. Employers are sometimes surprised at the quality and number of applicants and applicants' enthusiasm to work! Marketing has been critically important to the success of the job fairs.
- [Click here](#) to view the press release for the Louisiana Job Fairs.

North Dakota's Experience – Ensuring Self-Employment is a Real Option for Workers with Disabilities

- The North Dakota MIG project has developed the Self-Employment Institute—which is a three-part series of two-day intensive training sessions for people with disabilities who are interested or engaged in self-employment. The team contracted with a well-known self-employment expert and author, Dave Hammis, to conduct the training sessions. Participants, many of whom received scholarships from the MIG funds to attend, receive a book on self-employment issues, a resource booklet and follow-up technical assistance as needed.
- One key to the Self-Employment Institute's success is the collaborative strategic planning for the effort, which took place last Spring and included consumers, providers, and staff from Department of Human Services, VR and ILCs. The MIG team also used questionnaires to learn about the interests and training needs of people with disabilities related to self-employment.
- [Click here](#) to visit the Self-Employment Institute website.

Illinois' Experience – Building a Coalition to Improve Policies and Test Innovation

- In Illinois, advocates have developed the Midwest Employment & Training Partnership (METP), which is a multi-state initiative to bring Employment Networks together to build relationships and share promising practices to meet the challenges presented by the implementation of the Ticket to Work program.
- In response to needs identified in METP, Health & Disability Advocates, the Mayor's Task Force on Employment of People with Disabilities, Mayor's Office of Workforce Development and Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services have partnered to test an upfront payment mechanism through the Chicago Ticket to Work Pilot Project.
- [Click here](#) to view the Chicago Ticket to Work Pilot Project presentation.

THANK YOU to all the dedicated and talented people who participated in the conference as presenters and participants!

Remember, you can find detailed notes and presentation materials at www.nchsd.org/Conference