Vision Quest Replication Guide: Using Collaboration and Aligning Resources to Achieve Systems Change within State Government

Task 2: Federal Policy Analysis

Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy

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I. Introduction

In 2011 and again in 2012, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported on forty-five programs administered by nine federal agencies that focused on employment for people with disabilities and found these programs were fragmented, and often disconnected from the ultimate outcome of supporting job seekers with disabilities in obtaining and keeping competitive, integrated employment.[1] To many practitioners, this result was not surprising, since the same pattern of fragmentation trickled down to the associated state programs, resulting in low rates of employment for people with disabilities. These GAO reports were important, and necessary to begin the process of revamping and improving the training and employment systems for people with disabilities. Eventually, the problems the GAO identified would become part of the draft legislation included in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, (WIOA) enacted in July 2014.

However, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) at the U.S. Department of Labor knew that effective systems change requires more than just the alignment of services. It requires tackling the misinformation about who can work in competitive integrated employment (CIE) and the many state policies and procedures that were not aligned and in some cases impeded the expectation that all individuals, regardless of the significance of their disabilities, can and should obtain CIE As ODEP designed its goals under the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Project (EFSLMP), it was clear that a consistent and unified approach to analyzing these types of policy issues would be necessary to ensure all people with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, had the opportunity to pursue CIE.

Furthermore, a process that could help states build consensus regarding needed system improvements was paramount in creating and sustaining change. Rather than simply asking states to work together, ODEP utilized a process that would become known as Vision Quest (VQ), a three-phase approach rooted in the values of shared decision-making, continuous quality improvement, and measurable systems change. It should be noted that the VQ process is a tool, one that can be applied to any issue requiring policy analysis. To that end, this guide can be applied to various systems, including, but certainly not limited to, Veterans services, justice, housing, TANF, and apprenticeships, and can be initiated locally, regionally, and nationally.

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[1] Employment for People with Disabilities: Little Is Known about the Effectiveness of Fragmented and Overlapping Programs-GAO-12-677: Published: Jun 29, 2012. Publicly Released: Jun 29, 2012

II. History

ODEP invests in systems-change efforts that result in increased competitive, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. This priority reflects growing support for a national Employment First movement, a systems-change framework that is centered on the premise that all individuals, including those individuals with the most significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in CIE and community life. Under this approach, publicly-financed systems are urged to align policies, regulatory guidance, and reimbursement structures to commit to CIE as the priority option with respect to the use of publicly-financed day and employment services for youth and adults with significant disabilities. Many states have formally committed to the Employment First framework through official executive proclamation or formal legislative action, but have struggled to effectively implement key components necessary to effectuate a comprehensive Employment First vision.

ODEP recognizes that many states desire to align their policy and funding in support of an Employment First approach but may not yet possess the knowledge, skills, abilities and/or resources necessary to lead and facilitate such change. To address this need, ODEP has initiated the EFSLMP, a cross-disability focused, cross-systems change initiative. EFSLMP is providing the impetus for selected states to pursue systems change to fully implement the Employment First approach to facilitate policy reform, funding alignment, service coordination, and capacity building across state government agencies and external stakeholders vital to promoting CIE options for individuals with significant disabilities.

III. The Three Phases

What follows is a replication guide to using the three-phase, Vision Quest approach. Adopters of this replication manual will find it useful to first read through the phases, noting the steps outlined by month, along with the resulting outcomes of each phase. Along the way, we offer **EXAMPLES of PROGRESS** and **TIPS** for each phase of the process, gathered from state-level leaders, national Subject Matter Experts and those practitioners who have used the Vision Quest policy analysis approach to shape and create a diverse set of outcomes. State teams have used the VQ process to create written policies, perform rate studies, design demonstration waivers, form training and technical assistance initiatives, test pilot projects, write Employment First legislation, and work on numerous other deliverables that span across disabilities, funders, providers and geographic areas.

It has been noted by several early adopters of the Vision Quest policy approach that discussing the phases and expected deliverables is useful before a group begins its work, as the shared knowledge can create an elevated awareness of current policies, which will act as an undergirding during the inevitable challenges that lie ahead. It is also critical that each partner come to the table knowing how this process will be beneficial in concrete terms to the job seekers they serve. Systems change—real and fundamentally significant, with associated outcome deliverables—is not an easy undertaking, and therefore having a common structure, language, and set of expectations is a necessity for sustainable

improvements. In fact, using the Vision Quest process is invigorating, and conducive in creating team energy and buy-in.

Figure 1. Three Phase of Vision Quest
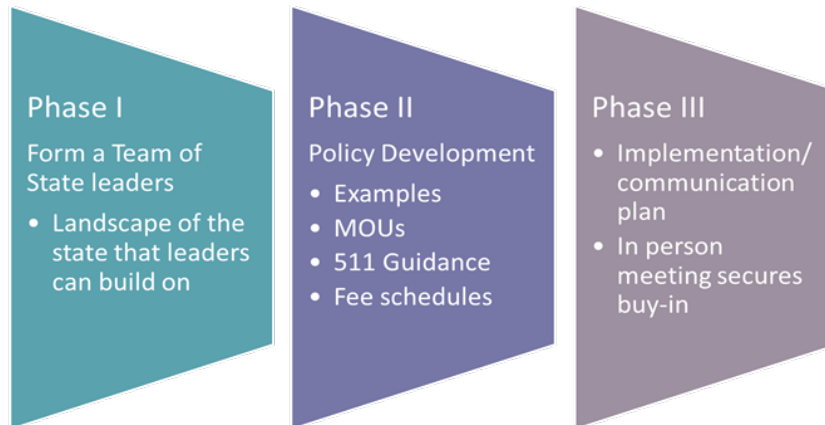
Phase I – Policy Analysis

Once a facilitator, sometimes also referred to as a Subject Matter Expert (SME), has been chosen, several introductory steps are important to establish a communication routine, meeting schedule, and team expectations during Phase I. This is important for the internal state team relationships, but also with the broader VQ group, including sister states working on similar issues. The facilitator/SME should be someone the group agrees can assist them with their specific area of policy analysis and systems change. For instance, if a state were committed to working to improve its employment outcomes for a specific disability group, such as mental health, they would be wise to ensure the facilitator/SME has a background that is recent, respected and rooted in up-to-date best-practices. Most importantly, however, is that the facilitator/SME have the necessary people skills to support a diverse group of stakeholders. If the team needs guidance in selecting a facilitator/SME, it is recommended that they seek help from ODEP and state leaders that have used the guided Vision Quest process themselves.

1st Month

- <u>Initiate Orientation Call/Webinar with VQ Team</u>
  The best state-level teams are diverse and usually made-up of members from vocational rehabilitation, intellectual/developmental disabilities, mental health, Medicaid, education, workforce, managed care entities, and others. It is important to be mindful of the roles of each member, since some will be capable of making decisions and others will need to seek approval from

their supervisors. To make certain the Vision Quest process is clear it is advantageous to have as much high-level buy-in as possible.

Once the team is created, the initial orientation call and/or webinar should include an overview of the Vision Quest process, along with some associated outcomes achieved by other participating states. At this point, if the team feels there is a missing member (i.e. advocates, staff from specialized projects, such as housing, grants, and university personnel) there should be consensus on offering an invitation.

An introduction of each member is important, as well as the team gaining an understanding of the facilitator/SME's background and style of working with a group on policy issues. It's recommended that the orientation call/webinar end with at least 20-30 minutes of an open Question and Answer period**. (Since this kick-off call/webinar is essential to the state team's Vision Quest process, please see the Checklist for topics that should be covered and completed)**.

- Set Schedule for Monthly Calls & Quarterly Meetings
  One of the most common problems with a diverse state-level work group is scheduling. Spending time trying to accommodate everyone's schedule can be arduous and frustrating. Striving to agree on a day and time that is held "sacred" is the first step in the team developing a strong working relationship and helps bond the team to the VQ process. It's important to keep in mind that systems change requires risk, and we all are more apt to help when we are respected, consulted, and listened to. When planning the monthly calls and quarterly meetings, make sure the timeframes allow for at least thirty minutes before and after what is scheduled, providing time for people to bond and not be rushed. One of the goals of pursuing work under Vision Quest is to develop social capital between state entities.

- Set Expectations for the Work Group
  It is easy to identify topic areas immediately after convening the work group, but participants in the VQ process should try to remind one another that the first phase is intended to obtain a broad, landscape assessment of the state's current policies, practices, barriers and successes related to the specific state's training and employment systems for people with disabilities. Reminding the team that the VQ process is rooted in shared-decision making can help establish the expectations. The team should understand each phase, the monthly commitments, and the overall intention of the work, including milestones and deliverables. While the team may not be able at this point to be specific about the end-result, it *can* be made aware of the expectations of participation, timely communication and necessary timelines.

- Identify Date(s) for any Onsite/In-Person Meetings
  To better facilitate the VQ process, it is advisable to have a kick-off meeting in person with the facilitator/SME. This allows for the development of social capital, and trust, and puts a face to the person whose role is to keep the team focused and moving forward. This is also an excellent time to have state leaders, who may not be involved in the day-to-day work, meet the facilitator/SME to

further commitment to the process. Usually, an hour and a half meeting with an associated presentation on the VQ process is useful. This time can also be utilized to strategically link other state-initiatives into the VQ process, and develop an overall understanding of how Vision Quest can support additional systems change work being done outside of the state team.

2ⁿᵈ Month

- <u>Gather and Review Existing State Policies, MOUs, Practices, Funding and Other Pertinent Information Related to Initial Policy Focus</u>
As the team moves from establishing rapport and an understanding of how their respective systems interact and rely on one another, the facilitator/SME guides the team through a process of gathering and reviewing existing frameworks related to the state's initial policy focus (i.e. WIOA implementation, rate restructuring, school-to-work transition, etc.) This portion of Phase I is important because the analysis relies on a landscape survey, which includes multiple written documents, available data, ancillary metrics, and numerous policies and procedures. Each member should identify their specific system's related information, making certain to return to their office to inquire about the pertinent documents and practices. Often, team members are surprised to find information they were not aware of, and this information should be clearly understood before it is forwarded to the full team, and the facilitator/SME. This allows for all members to put the material into context. Information will also be gathered by the facilitator/SME, from sources such as VR state plans, waiver protocols, SAMHSA National Outcome Measures data for mental health systems, National Core Indicators for ID/DD systems, and other applicable data sets that might be useful during this critical part of Phase I.

  As the information is processed by the facilitator/SME, the team members should be available for follow-up questions and clarifications before and after regularly scheduled face-to-face meetings and/or teleconferences. Special attention should be paid to any legislative study committees that are currently underway within a state related to Medicaid, Employment First, and state agency alignments. Often, these types of study committees can be useful to partner and collaborate with, and should be made aware of the team's focus and contributions in examining systems change.

3ʳᵈ Month

- <u>Create a Detailed Analysis of the Existing Opportunities, Challenges, and Gaps</u>
The facilitator/SME will synthesize the materials that have been reviewed and create a DRAFT analysis to be considered by the team. Generally, this document is 10-15 pages long, and includes data, metrics, synopses of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), funding configurations, and an overview of pertinent policies and procedures. It is important at this stage for the entire team to commit to reading the document prior to having a formal meeting to discuss the findings. Often, a

facilitator/SME will include a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis, which can be used by the team to prioritize system improvements and focus the team on the most pressing issues. Since this analysis examines challenges and gaps in the training and employment systems for people with disabilities, it is important to make sure all team members are comfortable with the findings. Simply because the analysis includes areas to improve, team members should not view their respective areas as the "problem," rather, the team as a whole should be reminded that the Vision Quest process is collaborative, and the team shares accomplishments as well as needed-improvement as part of policy analysis. If needed, a brief team discussion regarding the tools of Continuous Quality Improvement can be facilitated.

- <u>Provide a Comparison of State Public Policies vs. Federal Policy</u>
  To fully understand the scope and intent of the Phase I analysis, it is imperative that a state team measure itself against federal policy. Gaps between policy issues related to WIOA implementation, funding reimbursements, Home and Community Based Service rules and regulations interpretation, and a wide array of additional aspects of a state's performance are necessary to compare and contrast, and will usually lead the team to review how other states have interpreted and implemented similar policies. While it is useful to be comprehensive in this comparison, state teams have also found it helpful to remain focused on their specific area of improvement. The Vision Quest process can begin again for additional areas of concern and/or interest.

- <u>Outline a Specific Set of Observations and Recommendations for Improvement</u>
  The facilitator/SME includes concrete, actionable recommendations for improvement. These are derived from the landscape analysis, and are established by a thorough understanding of three areas: 1) the gaps between state and federal policy, 2) the state team's makeup, and 3) the overall legislative and funding priorities within the specific state. While several recommendations are made, the state team must work together to rank and select those which are deemed appropriate for the stated focus of the Vision Quest team, while considering the improvements most likely to be turned into policy deliverables. Obviously, these conclusions will look different for each state. Usually, the set of observations included in the analysis can be used at a later date, or perhaps by other state-led initiatives, such as short and long-term planning, grant writing, and by groups determining legislative policy priorities. At this point, the state team should consider the observations and recommendations in DRAFT form. Further facilitated discussion and thoughtful debate should be arranged so the state team can begin to finalize their work in Phase I.

- <u>Quarterly Work Group Meeting</u>
  It is advantageous for state teams to work with and learn from other states pursing similar focus areas (i.e. Mental Health, School-to-Work Transition, and Rate/Reimbursement Restructuring). Facilitators/SMEs work with co-facilitators from other states, along with participating state teams to schedule quarterly group teleconferences. Usually, these quarterly meetings happen amongst two to five states. To ensure maximum participation, the co-facilitators establish a schedule for the

quarterly calls during the first month. Once the schedule for quarterly group teleconferences has been established, areas of interest and topics of additional training and technical assistance should be logged for potential subjects of discussion during the quarterly calls. These interstate collaborative opportunities create communities of practice (CoPs) and connections with state colleagues doing similar policy and systems change work. The co-facilitators (SMEs and state leads) are responsible for developing the agenda, preparing any necessary presentation materials or information in advance. Time for open Q and A is imperative and often provides a list of possible topics for upcoming quarterly calls. When possible, sharing amongst states the DRAFT Phase I assessment can be useful for cross-state collaboration.

- Complete VQ Phase I DELIEVERABLE: Policy Analysis & Recommendations
Once all the state team members have read and reviewed the document, and edits have been made, it is advised the document be dated, and saved as a PDF. This allows for a reference point for those reading the document for the first time, and helps with sharing it through email. Some states opt to include a point-of-contact and associated phone, email and address for those who may be reviewing and have questions or feedback. It is up to the state team to decide how far and wide to disseminate, but possible channels include the ID/DD Network (DD Council, UCEDD, Protection and Advocacy), state leaders across funding systems, parent and advocacy coalitions, state APSE chapter, rehabilitation graduate programs, researchers, legislative committees and other groups or taskforces. Making time to respond to and further enlist other partners is a fitting end point for the work in Phase I of Vision Quest. Below, we provide tips for Phase I and some examples of progress. These are helpful to consider before, during and after the completion of each phase of Vision Quest.

Tips for Phase I

- Take time to build relationships with team members by finding ways to host the regularly scheduled meetings in a consistent location.
- Hold your meetings where there is the ability to use a virtual tool such as Google Hangout so you can see your facilitator.
- People bond over food. Finding ways to provide snacks and/or a meal as part of the meetings helps connect people.
- Remind state members that this is an opportunity to be part of a dynamic team, to support one another, without blaming or resorting to old patters of turf protection. Be open to new approaches.
- Realize that nine months is not very long to create a policy from start to finish so there may need to subgroups that work on items between meetings.
- Commit to reading all the documents provided in the Phase I assessment; it helps with systems change!
- Select a standard meeting time and stick to it; people tend to retract commitment if they are confused about the regularity of a standing meeting.

- Have two people from each state agency as part of the Vision Quest team, which allows for backup should someone leave, transfer or otherwise be made unavailable.
- Provide a list of acronyms from each state agency; people usually will not ask about something they don't know.
- Participate in the Quarterly Work Groups with other states. Often, making connections and building rapport inside and outside one's state is one of the most beneficial outcomes of pursing policy analysis and systems change.

Examples of Progress in Phase I

- An inclusive team made up of state partners from VR, ID/DD, MH, Medicaid, Workforce, Education, and others.
- Identification of a standard meeting time and place, with a state team lead and a facilitator/SME.
- A repository of current policies and procedures, MOUs/Memorandums of Agreements (MOAs), funding agreements, data sets, and other materials reviewed for Phase 1 assessment.
- Partners and social capital from other states engaged in policy analysis and systems change.
- A completed Phase 1 Assessment suitable for dissemination, complete with a set of observations and recommendations.
- A thoughtful discussion on what the policy focus will be and how it will be advantageous to all partners.
- After strategic discussions, the state lead and partners begin to develop potential ideas for the specific policies that can be modified or developed. Please refer to attachment A for a more specific state example.

The Vision Quest process was helpful to the Maine agencies who participated, in that it provided a structure to help us work together to better identify and address the barriers and changes needed to truly improve competitive integrated employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities.

-Betsy Hopkins, Director, Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Phase II – Policy Development

In Phase II, the Vision Quest process moves into supporting the state team as they focus on opportunities that can align polices to create momentum for Employment First, and address the weaknesses and possible threats identified in the SWOT analysis. Phase II is critical in moving from assessment to action and implementation. It is helpful in this Phase for the state team to remain open and flexible regarding prioritizing the policies to be developed, focusing on those areas that can reduce fragmentation, ease barriers to services and supports, and place an emphasis on creating an environment for effective Employment First policies. During this phase, SME facilitators will work with each state's VQ team to translate recommendations on how to address the policy issues identified in Phase I into at least one specific policy product for the topic the state is working on in VQ. The policy deliverable may include but not be limited to the following: suggested changes in regulatory language and administrative policy implementation guidance, suggested funding reimbursement methodologies/designs, draft state plans, memorandums of understanding, interagency agreements, contract templates, waiver amendments, etc.

4th Month

- Conduct Onsite/In-Person Meeting with VQ Work Group
  The state team should decide the timing regarding a face-to-face visit from the facilitator/SME. The state team should consider factors that will enhance the possibility that the in-person, on-site visit will be most impactful. Ensuring state leadership across all participating agencies is key. Some state teams have found it beneficial to coordinate the facilitator/SME's on-site visit with pertinent state conferences and/or board meetings, while others have taken the opportunity to build a schedule around the on-site visit that makes it the centerpiece of the Vision Quest process. In either case, the visit should be well-thought-out and planned, with key partners meeting to review the landscape assessment, allowing time for both formal and informal meetings. In addition, to accommodate state agency leadership, some states have opted to schedule several smaller meetings with a larger stakeholder meeting that might include trade group representation, heads of advocacy agencies, and/or key legislative leaders working on issues related to health and human services, labor, and education. It may also be advisable to have the facilitator/SME meet one-on-one with certain state leadership personnel, especially those who have not been involved in the day-to-day work of the Vision Quest team over the last several months. The point is, planning is the key for this crucial on-site visit, and the state team should make time to consider what will work best for their own political environment, with a mindset toward inclusivity and flexibility. Typically, an overview of the VQ process along with a context of both state and federal drivers will help make the visit productive and responsive to identifying deliverables and timelines, as well as eventual implementation.

- Identify Policy Deliverables and Timeline for Completion
  In this step, the state team along with the facilitator/SME should determine which policy deliverables will be the focus moving forward into Phase III. Sometimes, to aid the state team in deciding on a particular focus, it is useful to engage in a "reverse engineering" exercise as a method to predict the needed timeline for completion. For instance, if the policy deliverable is to be an updated and more robust MOU between two state agencies, the state team might query their respective legal departments to determine the timeframes needed for review and work their way back from that date to other necessary milestones, such as having a draft MOU, a state team review period, and so on. (It's important to mention here that the state lead may need to educate agency attorneys about the initiative and the critical role they play in helping the policy aspect of systems change move forward.) This allows for the team to thoroughly estimate what time and resources are needed to be successful. Once this is done, state teams have found it useful to keep a timeline available to all members through a file sharing application, allowing for edits, input and on-going dialogue. This fourth month in the VQ process is one that sees a great deal of state team interaction and if possible, all should recognize this fact so that scheduling and workloads can be adjusted.

5ᵗʰ Month

- Secure Political Buy-In and Full Implementation of the Phase I Recommendations
  As Readers of this guide will know all too well how quickly things can change within state government. Elections, legislative sessions, new cabinet appointments, along with state budget issues can all be put into play at a moment's notice. Therefore, securing political buy-in related to the Phase I recommendations is something that should be strategically planned for but fluid, since if there is any constant in state politics and budget priorities it is change. Often, it is helpful to attach assignments to each member of the state team so that there is a path forward to secure political buy-in. With this in mind, the state team along with the facilitator/SME should be thinking about buy-in from the onset of the VQ process, but it is also recommended during the close of the fourth and the start of the fifth month that the members regroup to decide upon a course of action for obtaining buy-in, paying attention for any late-breaking changes since the start of the VQ process. For some states, this naturally occurs through the chain-of-command (i.e. moving up the organizational chart of each state agency) but for others the required and most immediate buy-in needs to come from a study committee, trade organization, advocacy group or elsewhere. Thinking this through using the facilitator/SME can help identify any weak points, areas of strong leadership, and lay the groundwork for a more comprehensive mapping of stakeholders.

- External Stakeholder Mapping
  While some of the stakeholders in a state may have been identified in the landscape assessment during Phase I, it is useful to spend some time discussing the topic further with the state team members. Members may be unaware of the groups, associations, advocacy entities and committees that are in existence in their state. This step also provides the opportunity for the state team to

begin to create a more diverse network of partners dedicated to improving services and supports for employment. Each member of the state team should provide a list of known entities for review. This allows for further defragmentation and provides a better understanding of how to go about creating messaging for specific groups. It is helpful to create headings, such as: Trade Groups, Conferences, Parent Associations, Legislative Committees, 501(c)(3) Agencies, University Centers, Business and Employer Groups and the like. This step is often enlightening to members and assists in understanding that systems change impacts many other people and organizations than what is represented on the state team. Brainstorming tools can be facilitated by the team lead or SME and can help with moving the stakeholder mapping into developing effective messages and designing a communication strategy.

- Effective Message Development
Ideally, work on this step should be done in collaboration with state agency personnel focused on the areas of communications, public relations and media engagement. Each state team member should reach out to their respective representatives from the areas stated above and gauge interest and expertise. Sometimes, invites are made for these staff to attend the monthly meeting so that they may be briefed on the long and short-terms goals of the state team. For some states, an Employment First taskforce or committee may already be issuing monthly and/or annual reports; in other states, the messaging may need to be highlighted in newsletters, websites, and board reports. Just as external stakeholders have been identified and mapped, so too should the various "audiences" the state team wishes to reach through their messaging. Spending time with existing personnel working on these topics will help further buy-in and allow the state team to access expertise around media and messaging that the members themselves may not possess.

- Designing a Communications Strategy
As with other steps in the VQ process, developing a written plan is critical in taking the message of Employment First more fully into various venues. Crafting specific messages for the external stakeholders is necessary to ensure the language used is the most effective for their particular mission and vision. Once again, this step looks different for each state, and for each policy deliverable. For instance, enlisting buy-in from the business community is different than getting provider agencies on board, and parental concern in ID/DD may be more prevalent than in MH, and so on. The key here is to make sure the communications are rooted in easily understood language, with a focus on the external rather than the internal. Setting aside time for a planning session facilitated by the state team leader, SME, and/or associated state agency personnel from public-media relations can be a way to create a communications strategy for the various internal and external stakeholders. As with most aspects of the VQ process, the communications strategic plan can vary in scope, length and intensity based on the state's policy deliverables and political environment. States have reported that their strategies have varied from the less intensive (i.e. memos, presentations, and newsletters) to more intensive (i.e. annual reports, policy directives, web site design, and commissioned videos). In either case, it's important for the state to arrive at a

consensus by prioritizing the most pressing external stakeholders they wish to impact, with associated outcomes linked to the efforts.

6ᵗʰ Month

- Initiate the Beginning Stages of Activities around Political and External Stakeholder Buy-In
  It is fitting that after six months of the state team working through the Vision Quest process, efforts become more focused on thinking about what is needed to secure more demonstrative buy-in from various stakeholders. This step harkens back to the initial focus in the previous month, and builds upon the buy-in secured for Phase I. The state team has at this point bonded, worked to identify their various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and arrived at a set of policy recommendations. By now, the state team has created the requisite social capital to deepen the commitments needed to marshal long-lasting and sustainable systems change. It is useful at this step to return to any written plans developed in months four and five, reviewing potentially difficult stakeholders that might need extra support to fully embrace the proposed draft policies. This should not be viewed through the lens of confrontation; but rather, the state team should embed their efforts in active listening, problem-solving, and an attitude of collaboration. When approached in this way, often stakeholders will be more open to share concerns, which then can be addressed by modifying the proposed policies, adjusting timelines, and/or revisiting the landscape assessment to review the gaps in state and federal policy expectations. If the vital work has been done over the last six months of the Vision Quest process to make the state team inclusive, most concerns have been planned for, and the necessary support enlisted. If any new study committees and/or state planning initiatives have been undertaken by the state, now is the time to ensure their buy-in as well. Some states have found it helpful at this stage to connect corollary parts of a state system (MH agency, VR program, trade organization, legislative representatives, etc.) to their sister states working on similar issues.

- Quarterly Work Group Meeting
  This is the second work group meeting with states focused on similar issues (WIOA implementation, school-to-work transition, MH, ID/DD waiver rewrites, etc.). Agendas and topics to be discussed should be prepared in advance and state team leads and facilitator/SMEs will often have preparatory calls before the larger teleconference. Making sure the agenda allows for the necessary time to fully address a topic and to share what's working and what's not working in the respective states enables members to get the most out of the quarterly work group meeting. Designating an official note-taker, facilitator, and timekeeper can help keep the meeting from being dominated or otherwise sidetracked. Having a main contact from each state responsible for sharing their documents requested during the call is also helpful and ensures that follow-up is expected. The agenda should allow for some discussion time to plan for the third quarterly call, which can often need to be longer since states will be reporting on their implementation plans in Phase III.

- Complete VQ Phase II DELIVERABLE: New Draft Policy based on Analysis/Recommendations
  By thinking through the pros and cons of specific policy development, and by paying attention to internal and external stakeholders, the state team can finalize the new draft policies that will result in the completion of Phase II of the Vision Quest process. If the state team has put in time, effort and resources, and built social capital amongst the members, this step can be satisfying and result in the essential energy needed to move into Phase III, where the execution of the plans will result in dissemination of policies and practices that bring a state more fully into adopting Employment First systems change. It is a time to relax some, and celebrate the state team's hard work, with an eye toward each member's role during the next few months when the hard work of implementation is ever-present.

Tips for Phase II

- Keep team members engaged by sharing responsibilities (notetaking, follow-up activities, meeting facilitation and idea generation).
- Take the necessary time to plan for the on-site visit. Double-check the reasoning behind each meeting the facilitator/SME is conducting. If needed, arrange one-on-one meetings with internal and external stakeholders that are reticent about change.
- The support the facilitator/SME offers is paramount to the state's success. It can be difficult to connect with all the essential players in one day especially if there are pockets of resistance. In these cases, a state may want to consider using state dollars to fund an additional day for the facilitator/SME. Possible sources of funding can be allocated from similar grant initiatives, such as the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) or Partnerships in Employment (PIE).

Iowa has benefited from the robust discussions with our colleague states, guided by subject matter experts who would challenge our expectations, resulting in strategies that created, facilitated and disseminated core values for Employment First implementation through all levels of service delivery.)

-David Mitchell, MS, CRC, Administrator Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services

- Create a list of the continuous quality improvement tools each state agency uses; do the same for a list of brainstorming techniques. These are useful in generating new ideas for communication strategies and political buy-in.
- Commit to having informal calls with the state lead and the facilitator/SME between monthly coaching sessions. This allows for venting without the other state members becoming demotivated.
- Provide time during each monthly meeting for the state team to celebrate its accomplishments.
- Set aside at least a portion of a meeting to review active listening techniques. This allows for team members to more effectively attend to and understand concerns from external stakeholders.
- Arrange for time to review the state's legislative schedule, with an eye on key dates.

Examples of Progress in Phase II

- The state team has a plan for the on-site facilitator/SME visit that is well thought out, resulting in renewed and additional enthusiasm for the state team's work.
- The state team members have a comprehensive understanding of external stakeholders that results in the state team members working collaboratively on messaging.
- The state team has a better understanding of where fragmentation exists.
- The state team has developed a plan for engaging various state agency public relations departments on the message of Employment First.
- Team members from various states have relationships with their counterparts to engage on a regular basis for advice, feedback and support.
- The state team has completed Phase II draft policies suitable for dissemination, with a set of timelines for each policy.
- The state of (add state name) worked to ensure there was buy-in from leadership before informing the team lead that they wanted to proceed with the particular area of policy development. This resulted in the creation of (name policy). For more information please refer to the state examples in the attachments.

The ODEP Vision Quest initiative brought together key leaders in Tennessee with a national expert to guide us in carrying out our state's MOU for youth in transition. We were able to blend information and training across state agencies for greater impact at the community level. One product was a cross agency training contact list that is used by all state agencies and their local staff. Silos are a characteristic of large enterprises such as state government; the Vision Quest initiative helped to create more conversation and collaboration across state programs involved in employment for people with disabilities.

- Wanda Willis, Executive Director
Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

Phase III – Policy Implementation

Phase III is the final stage in the process, and it builds on all the hard work and energy that states have invested in understanding their landscape in order to design a proactive policy. This phase focuses on both finalizing the policy and developing a strategic plan for how the proposed policy will be adopted. Frequently in this phase, some team members become wary of the process and can disengage. The reasons for disengagement are numerous: the time demands related to Vision Quest; when the policy being created requires extensive negotiation between agencies or when a policy takes extensive time to complete the policy; the natural pull and demands of team member's job that are not related to Vision Quest. Lastly Vision Quest is a system-change strategy and frequently in system change people take one step forward and two back. Team leads may need to meet personally with disengaged members to help them stay involved. Team leads and the Facilitator/SME need to spend time helping partners evaluate the policy to ensure it address their needs and highlights how it can strengthen the state's efforts with Employment First. This may require slowing down and building support rather than discounting resistance. The role of the Facilitator/SME in this phase is critical in helping state teams maneuver around unforeseen barriers and developing effective strategies. Phase III is exciting because the state team, in a relatively short span of time (nine months), was able to create both an interagency policy and establish strong alliances between partners that lays the foundation for future work.

7th Month

- Continue Work Group Meetings to Finalize Draft Policy

  The state team is on track if it can finalize the draft policy during the first couple of weeks of the month. State leads will send frequent follow-up emails to partners during this stage. To accomplish this, it may take several meetings during the month or meetings that are longer than the usual allotted time. It is essential that there is ample time for a robust discussion on the policy and to build consensus. Team members need to be encouraged to voice any concerns that their agency may have and present possible solutions to address those concerns. Finalizing the draft policy can be very exciting but it can also be tedious as the old expression goes "the devil is in the details." Teams are well advised to remember their active listening skills and realize that concerns a partner may have will also be reflected in the larger stakeholder group. Once consensus is established, each team member should schedule a meeting with their leadership during the last two weeks of the month to obtain buy-in for the policy. Any requested modifications to the policy should be immediately shared with the entire team. The state team's goal is to have a finalized draft policy that has been reviewed and is supported by leadership by the end of the month. In some cases, it will require an in-person meeting with the team, their leadership, and the Facilitator/SME to negotiate an element that needs to be modified. This meeting could be a part of the final presentation to leaders that the Facilitator/SME will deliver during the 8th or 9th month.

8ᵗʰ Month

- Develop Implementation Plan to Achieve Desired Outcomes
Throughout the course of Vision Quest, effective state teams have been considering how to market the changes to achieve the desired buy-in from both external and internal stakeholders. But now, the team needs to have razor sharp focus on the implementation plan. The team, with the support of the Facilitator/SME, needs to think strategically about what is needed for a successful implementation plan. In developing the plan, it is useful to again review the landscape analysis that was completed during Phase I. The analysis can help the team hone in on areas that will build natural alliance and support in the state. Careful thought and pulling all the pieces together into an implementation plan is essential if the policy is to come to fruition. Many fine policies were created but never saw the light of day because this step was overlooked. The implementation plan should include who will develop the messaging for the changes, what the communications strategy is for both external and internal stakeholders, how political buy-in has occurred or will occur, and what are the potential barriers in obtaining additional buy-in. A critical discussion for the team is who will be responsible to ensure the plan is followed. It is important to remember that the implementation plan will vary depending on the policy the state team has created. The implementation plan is not as daunting as it can sound because throughout the entire process there has been discussions about how to achieve the desired outcomes through effective messaging and understanding resistance.

9ᵗʰ Month

- Complete VQ Phase III DELIVERABLE: Policy Adopted with Clear Implementation Plan
The final month of Vision Quest is usually a time for celebration. The state lead has scheduled a time for the Facilitator/SME to present to the state leadership, with the state team in attendance, to explain the policy, the rationale for why the policy is needed, whom it will help, and the associated implementation plan. In some cases, there is a need for additional negotiation to ensure the policy has buy-in from all partners, which can include modifying the timelines in the implementation plan. After the presentation and any necessary negotiation, the policy is signed and widely distributed.

- Quarterly Work Group Meeting
This In the 9ᵗʰ month, the Facilitator/SME will arrange the last quarterly work group meeting with the other states that have been working on the same issues. The purpose of the call is for states to share their policy, what has worked in the process and what has not. Many states have found these calls to be tremendously useful in obtaining additional strategies and supports.

Tips for Phase III

- Realize that some team members will become resistive when the policy is getting close to being finalized because they are concerned about the impact of the change. In these situations, it is useful

to allow the team member to voice his or her concerns and paint a picture of how the policy will address some of their concerns.

- When finalizing the policy, a smaller group of team members could volunteer to wordsmith it so it does not become tedious in the larger meeting.
- Keep leadership informed every step of the way—not only in policy development but also in the implementation plan.
- Phase III is intense. It is better to have a small successful policy that can be built upon than a large change that is too big to pull off in nine months.
- Look for champions for the new policy from all stakeholder groups.
- Review the messaging that has been created and test it to be sure it is clear on how the policy will be beneficial.
- Establish relationships with the other state leads on the quarterly conference calls.

Checklist for Sustainability in Phase III

In Phase III, we provide a checklist rather than examples (as in Phases I and II) in order that the state team can ensure specific steps have been taken. After nearly seven years of work under EFSLMP, state teams, SMEs and other stakeholders have found that using this type of checklist in Phase III will help support sustainability.

Ohio was fortunate to be able to partner with the Vision Quest SME facilitator to develop and refine multi-agency guidance regarding Section 511 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This guidance was distributed to all VR, Education and DD staff in the state to help explain the impact of this new rule and the responsibilities of each entity to ensure successful implementation.

- Kristen Helling, Assistant Deputy Director Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities

Month 7

- By the 8th of the month, a finalized policy draft is reviewed by the team.
- Concerns and/or suggestions from the team are reviewed and changes are made.
- By the 12th of the month, a new policy draft with the changes is sent to the team by the facilitator/SME.
- Partners agree to meet with leadership to discuss the policy.
- A second VQ meeting is scheduled to discuss leadership feedback.
- The goal is to have a finalized policy draft based on leadership feedback by the 20th of the month. Some states may take longer to finalize their document but states should try to have a finalized draft in the seventh month.

- State leads start working on scheduling the in-person meeting with team and leadership to present the policy in month 9.
- By the 30th of the month, Leadership has notified the state team lead of any areas that will require additional negotiation at the in-person meeting.

Month 8

- Team members have again reviewed the landscape analysis from Phase I to determine what can be built on in the implementation plan.
- Facilitator/SME sends samples of implementation plans if the team has never done this type of plan.
- Team lead-invites the marketing and communication supports from the state if they have not been attending the meetings.
- Team has conducted a mapping exercise on who is connected to whom that can help carry the message.
- Design a message that will both resonate and explain how the policy will move Employment First forward.
- Determination is made on whether different messaging strategies are necessary, depending on different audiences.
- Determination had been made where the message will live, i.e. on all state agencies website.
- State team agrees on the implementation plan.

Month 9

- The Meeting with leadership is scheduled.
- Team has provided input on Facilitators/SME's presentation to leadership.
- Team knows what areas will need to be negotiated prior to the policy being signed off.
- Policy is signed.
- Implementation plan is in place.
- State team shares their policy on the quarterly conference call meeting.

IV. Conclusion

Systems change can be difficult but rewarding work. Having a framework such as Vision Quest to address policy issues is an excellent tool, and to that end, states involved in EFSLMP and using the VQ process report they have experienced success where they once thought it either impossible or too overwhelming. In the attachments provided, it is evident that having a dedicated and strong state team—while also utilizing the three-phase VQ process—can yield tangible change and improved outcomes. We hope this guide offers the structure for any interested party to pursue the same, whether the work is centered on Veterans, justice, TANF, housing, apprenticeships, or other systems needing policy analysis and continuous quality improvement.

Policy Examples listed below can found be [here](#)

- Michigan's Super MOU on Transition to Employment of Students and Youth with Disabilities
- Tennessee's School-To-Work MOU Regarding Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities
- Missouri's Mental Health MOU
- Hawaii's Cooperative Agreement
- Iowa's Employment Guidebook
- Pennsylvania's Executive Order2016-03
- Ohio's Section 511 Guide
- Maryland's Equal Employment Act
- Maine's Employment Policy Guidelines

Appendices

Appendix A–Acronyms

ACICIEID - Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities
ACL - Administration for Community Living
APSE - Association for Persons Supporting Employment First
ARS - Arkansas Rehabilitation Services
CESP - Certified Employment Support Professional
CIE - Competitive Integrated Employment
CMS - Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
DHHS - Department of Health and Human Services
DIDD - Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
DOJ - U.S. Department of Justice
DOL - U.S. Department of Labor
DOT - U.S. Department of Transportation
ECF - Employment and Community First
ED - U.S. Department of Education
EFSLMP - Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program
FLSA - Fair Labor Standards Act
HCBS - Home and Community Based Services
HUD - Housing and Urban Development
I/DD - Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities
IPS - Individual Placement and Support
IVRS - Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services
MIG - Medicaid Infrastructure Grant
MOU - Memoranda of Understanding
ODEP - Office of Disability Employment Policy
Pre-ETS - Pre-Employment Transition Services
RSA - Rehabilitation Services Administration
SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SE - Supported Employment
SSA - Social Security administration
USBLN - US Business Leadership Network
VR - Vocational Rehabilitation
WHD - Wage and Hour Division
WIOA - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act