

# North Dakota Comprehensive Employment Systems Strategic Plan



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## Introduction

North Dakota (ND) has made significant progress over the past five years in building relationships, creating systems change and removing barriers so that people with disabilities in ND have opportunities for employment. The North Dakota Comprehensive Employment System (NDCES) grant has worked with people with disabilities, state agencies, advocacy organizations, businesses and service providers to develop a plan for a truly comprehensive employment system in ND.

The purpose of this strategic plan is to embrace the work ND has done to remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities and to build a comprehensive employment system for people with disabilities in ND.

The overall goals of the CES project are to develop a unified strategic plan for ND to maximize employment of people with disabilities; increase employment related outcomes for people with disabilities through training, dissemination, and benefit planning assistance; increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities by improving the availability and expertise of qualified service providers; and develop and implement an outcome and evaluation measurement system for tracking data related to employment of people with disabilities in ND.

### *State of the State*

The economic forecast for ND is excellent. While most states are operating with a budget deficit, ND is one of the few states with a budget surplus. Governor Hoeven indicated in his 2005-2007 Budget Address that in 2005 ND gained more than 640 new businesses, and more than 7,000 new jobs. He also indicated for the 2007-2009 biennium revenues total about 2.29 billion and outgoing costs total about 2.28 billion while maintaining a 400 million reserve. In September 2006, the unemployment rate for ND was 3.1% compared to the national unemployment rate of 4.6%.

Current state leaders are very optimistic about ND's economic future. Eric Hardmeyer, President of the Bank of North Dakota, feels the state is poised for economic activity and development that the state has not seen for many years. Energy activity is currently expanding in the state; bio-diesel, wind energy, and products derived from those entities are forecasted to

drive ND's economy to new levels (Eric Hardmeyer, personal communication, 2005). Agriculture, the state's major industry, is also expanding as new markets open to producers and as opportunities expand in both value-added and production agriculture. The growth of the service sector is forecasted to outpace the agricultural sector as the economic paradigm shifts from industry-based to information-based. Between the years 2000 and 2010, 12,893 jobs are forecast to be created in the service industry (Rathge, 2001).

According to the 2003 ND Employer Survey, 50% of employers in ND anticipate difficulty finding qualified employees in the next five years. Three leading trends are influencing the state's anticipated labor shortage: rural depopulation, selective out migration, and an increasing proportion of elderly.

Rural communities in ND face a declining workforce as residents move to larger cities. Population losses, which reduce community size, force residents to face rising costs, increased travel times, and decreased availability of goods and services (Rathge, 2001). Depopulation is especially detrimental for individuals with disabilities who may have difficulty obtaining the services and supports they need in the state's rural communities.

Between 2003 and 2004, the state experienced net domestic out-migration of 1,367 people (Rathge, 2005). Out-migration combined with a shifting labor force has resulted in a shrinking entry level labor pool and a larger concentration of workers in mid-career and early retirement years. Persons age 20-34 account for less than 20% of the state's population. While this number is forecasted to decline by 10% over the next 20 years, the number of individuals 65 and older is projected to increase to 23% of the state's population (Rathge, 2001). People with disabilities are a potential resource for employers facing out-migration, depopulation, and the aging workforce. There are 38,241 individuals with disabilities age 21-64 in ND. The employment rate for these individuals is 48.7% which is higher than the national average of 37.9%. Although individuals with disabilities in ND work only 1.3 weeks per year less on average than individuals without disabilities, they make \$4,871 less per year (American Community Survey, 2003).

## Vision & Mission

The process of developing a grassroots vision and mission was to give people from each of the eight regional stakeholder meetings the opportunity to communicate what they felt were *elements* of a mission and vision statement. A compiled list was kept throughout the process. From this list, a number of draft vision and mission statements were presented at the Regional Representative Stakeholder meeting. Upon review of those drafts, the representatives worked through a consensus based process to develop a vision and mission for a Comprehensive Employment System Strategic Plan. The agreed upon statements are as follows:

### **Vision Statement**

*North Dakota is a state where people of all abilities have equal access and opportunity in employment.*

### **Mission Statement**

*To develop a unified community of empowered, well trained employees and employers who identify and remove employment barriers to address the needs of an ever-changing world and workforce.*

## Guiding Principles

The state of North Dakota, through a collaboration of state and community based partners, is committed to enhancing competitive employment in integrated settings for individuals with disabilities through the CES grant. The following principles serve as a guide in those endeavors:

- There must be a mutual benefit to the employee with a disability and the employer.
- All employment options must be available from entry-level jobs to the most advanced occupations.
- Individuals have the right to choose their employment and employer.
- Employers have the right to choose whom they hire.

## Overall Goals and 2007 Priorities

The CES goals were developed through direct discussion with regional representatives at regional meetings as well as resource mapping and analysis of the existing workforce services and supports in North Dakota. The Leadership Council (LC), identified overarching goals for an inclusive system and future work of the CES. The overall goals guide the formulation of Strategic Priority Areas that are developed annually under the advisement of the LC. Furthermore, the goals will direct the activities of the CES grant staff and respective collaborators throughout the life of the grant.

The goals are:

- I. To develop a lifelong, flexible, responsive and individualized service system and funding source that actively encourages and enables everyone to obtain training, employment and personal growth.
- II. To build a system that encourages natural supports and incentives to people based on their needs and capabilities.
- III. To ensure the NDCES strategic plan is fully integrated into the business/employment community and to develop a statewide marketing campaign to educate and engage employers.
- IV. To link and collaborate existing employment entities and services to prepare people to access employment through established channels of employment.
- V. To develop a pool of qualified and dedicated job seekers.

### *Strategic Priority Areas For 2007*

In order to achieve the broader overarching goals for a comprehensive employment system in ND, Strategic Priority Areas are reviewed annually by the CES LC and staff. The activities under the Strategic Priority Areas are more specific and intended to be accomplished within a period of one year. The overall goals, combined with the work of Regional Representatives and the direction of the LC, the following six strategic priorities for 2007 were established:

**1. To ensure the NDCES strategic plan is fully integrated into the business/employment community and to develop a statewide marketing campaign to engage employers and provide them with resources they identify to facilitate employment of people with disabilities.**

Potential Outcomes:

- A decrease of 5 percent or more in the unemployment rate of people with disabilities.
- Businesses report increased awareness of job opportunities for people with disabilities through a survey in 2008.
- Increased earnings and job satisfaction for people with disabilities.
- Businesses will know where to access resources and assistance in employing people with disabilities.
- Increased number of businesses that hire a person(s) with disabilities for the first time.
- Increased number of businesses that hire a person(s) with disabilities from under represented populations.

Activities 2007:

- NDCES grant staff will collaborate with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Job Service (JS), Regional Chambers of Commerce (CoC) and the ND Society of Human Resource Managers to enhance and disseminate an employer tool-kit for businesses when hiring people with disabilities including information regarding liability and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) issues, incentives for hiring, and examples of reasonable accommodations, etc.
- NDCES grant staff will interview employers of people with disabilities and employees with disabilities and write articles and profiles of positive, successful employment outcomes. Further CES staff will encourage wide publication of the articles in chamber newsletters, newspapers, human resource newsletters, and other publications which employers are likely to read.
- NDCES grant team will set up an “employer resource center” at Marketplace for Entrepreneurs, Tech Expo, and other related business conferences.
- Offer workshops/seminars to college and university human resource classes typically 1-1 ½ hours in length. Presentations may include topics such as discrimination, accommodation, disability etiquette, ADA compliance and incentives for hiring.
- Support collaboration between VR, JS, community colleges and other providers to build a network with the purpose of sharing job opportunities and cultivating relationships with businesses.
- Identify target regions/communities with greatest projected employment needs.

Resources Needed:

- On-going support from the CoC who participated in NDCES grant sponsored business forums
- Dedicated NDCES staff time and VR staff time to review, update, and disseminate the existing tool-kit.

- CoC and JS data to determine regions of greatest employee shortages.

Technical Assistance Needs:

- Assistance with the development of a concrete approach for working with ND businesses.
  - State-to-state exchanges with Oregon & Wisconsin who have had success with engaging businesses and developing resources and tools.
  - Assistance with supporting a collaboration between VR, JS and other service providers to maximize available job opportunities for ALL job seekers in ND .
2. **To educate the general public & the school system about disabilities with the focus on changing stereotypes, stressing integration and acceptance, & focusing on abilities, capabilities, and availability.**

Potential Outcomes:

- Improved attitude and acceptance of people with disabilities in the workplace.
- Increased the number of transition age students who enter work or higher education.
- More businesses offer internship opportunities for transition age youth and adults.

Activities 2007:

- Collaborate with state entities to develop and implement a public awareness campaign to educate the general public with a focus on changing stereotypes, integration, and focus on abilities to include various media forms (billboards, radio, TV).
- Create a training program targeting teachers and parents about person-centered planning and how to integrate these concepts into day-to-day work with students with disabilities transitioning from school to work.
- Implement person-centered planning training in one region of the state, targeting the region with high numbers of youth in transition. These trainings will be done in conjunction with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI), local school districts, and families.
- Develop and disseminate a benefits planning package for transition students age 14 and older.

Resources Needed:

- Support and collaboration from NDDPI.
- Support and collaboration with parent organizations.
- Support and collaboration with local school districts.

Technical Assistance Needs:

- Adapting existing person-centered planning curriculums for a ½ day training for targeted populations such as educators and parents.

- Access to nationally trained experts in benefits planning, person-centered planning, and related topics.
- 3. To link and facilitate coordination between existing employment entities & services to prepare people with disabilities to access employment through established channels of employment.**

Potential Outcomes:

- A system that encourages natural supports and incentives to people based on their needs and capabilities.
- Enhance communication among service providers.
- Increase the number of individuals with disabilities receiving benefits planning.
- Increase usage and availability of Qualified Service Providers (QSP) through a common database.
- Increased participation in state and federal work incentives for people with disabilities.
- Increase the number of individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) employed in integrated settings
- Increased number of transition aged youth and adults in internship/mentor programs.

Activities 2007:

- Collaborate with Rehab Services (RS)--a private provider, VR, and other related services to establish a state-wide benefits planning network comprised of Social Security Administration funded benefits planners.
- Collaborate with providers who are committed to investing in their staff to develop more capacity.
- Coordinate a single, state-wide benefits planning training session led by experienced benefits planners and trainers specifically for agencies providing employment related services to people with disabilities.
- Facilitate discussion among employment service providers regarding ways to enhance the present service system and to better meet the needs of individuals seeking employment.
- Convene a work group in Region 4 (Grand Forks) that will develop an accessible online data system for QSP's.
  - Pilot and evaluate the data system after a period of 6 months in Region 4 (Grand Forks)
- Explore ways to blend resources to better mesh vocational supports with long-term supports to individuals with developmental disabilities and mental illness.
- Explore other states who have demonstrated successful, innovative ways to competitively employ individuals with developmental disabilities and mental illness.

Resources Needed:

- Participation and collaboration with VR.
- Facilitation support from the Consensus Council, Inc.

Technical Assistance Needs:

- Support in implementing and convening the state-wide benefits planning training session.
- Facilitation support for work with employment and training providers.
- Support for development and implementation of the Region 4 accessible online data system.

**4. To develop a system that will provide ongoing evaluations of programs and services, to create a database of statistical information that can be used to assess the current situation, circumstances, and baseline and develop measurable criteria for proposed outcomes.**

Potential Outcomes:

- Publication of a technical report detailing present collection methods, analysis, and suggestions for more consistent and ongoing data collection.

Activities 2007 – June 2008:

- Analyze existing data regarding transitional age students to identify potential areas of need.
- Research and analyze current data collection methods of employment service providers within ND.
  - Identify strengths and weaknesses of present collection models in ND
- Review data collection methods and best practices from other CES grant states.

Resources Needed:

- Access to data about transitional age students.
- Access to social SSA data.
- Access to VR data.
- Access to JS data.

Technical Assistance Needs:

- Access to best practices and models from other CES states.
- Data analysis support.

**5. To have an accessible, user friendly, responsive, dynamic, comprehensive information database relative to employment options and opportunities.**

Potential Outcomes:

- Develop a coordinated database of employment opportunities, services, and supports.
- Create a checklist for agencies to use in the dissemination of information to the public.

- Accurate and consistent message across service providers.
- Available in alternative formats.
- Accessible to people with disabilities and their families
- Uniform description of available services and supports.
- Identify agencies that are a source of qualified job seekers.

Activities 2007:

- Review existing employment related databases and referral agencies in ND to identify gaps in information or services.
- Develop a process to review consistency in messages to consumers (i.e. people first language, readability, multiple means of contact).

Resources Needed:

- Collection and review of existing publications.
- Collaboration with JS.

Technical Assistance Needs:

- Assistance with reviewing aspects of accessibility, user friendliness, and accuracy.
- Facilitate discussion and learning from other states like Oregon who are addressing the same issues.

**6. People with disabilities in ND will have affordable accessible transportation to and from work throughout all eight regions of the state.**

Potential Outcomes:

- Documented progress by one regional task force to improve transportation to and from work for people with disabilities.

Activities 2007:

- Coordinate with Small Urban and Rural Transit Center (SURTC) and Upper Great Plains (UGP) on access to existing partnerships and information.
- Assess current transportation data and, if necessary, CES staff will complete a thorough resource map on transportation in one of the eight regions of ND.
- Explore funding possibilities within the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA).
- Organize and create one regional partnership between non-profit, for profit, ND Department of Human Services (NDDHS), North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT), consumers, universities, and all other entities who have a stake in transportation.

Resources Needed:

- Access to documentation and/or working groups who have worked on transportation needs from 1996 to 2006.

#### Technical Assistance Needs:

- Identification of promising practices and transportation models within ND and from other states.
- Resource mapping support.
- Assistance in planning and implementation of local and regional task forces.

#### *Sustainability*

This strategic plan is aimed to increase competitive employment of people with disabilities while improving employment outcomes. The strategic planning process acknowledges strengthening the infrastructure so employment strategies and partnerships can be sustained to ensure success beyond grant funding years.

Project staff will continue to maintain relationships with partnering agencies and the LC to ensure project activities have the vital linkages to building sustainability throughout the life of project and beyond. For example:

- The work of project staff will be structured to ensure ways that contribute to the sustainability of employment of people with disabilities.
- As needed, LC and partners will recommend policy changes at the state level to rework programs to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

#### *Leadership*

The leadership structure that has emerged in North Dakota through the strategic planning process has both a statewide and regional focus. This structure will allow the state to develop sound policy recommendations at the state level and to create buy-in for each of the eight regions of the state. At the statewide level, the structure consists of a high-level leadership council.

The evolution of the NDCES LC developed from committees that existed during the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) Initiative. The North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (NDCPD) was awarded funding through the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services in January 2002 to implement a MIG. The Steering and Implementation Committees provided support and direction for the duration of the funding (January 2002 to April 2005). These groups worked on legislative issues and promoted the benefits of the MIG initiatives.

Upon ratification of MIG legislative initiatives, the Steering and Implementation Committees were reorganized and the Advisory Committee was established. This group worked from April 2005 to January 2006 on strengthening MIG initiatives. CES funding was awarded in January 2006 and the Advisory Committee determined a more diverse, high-level group would better suit the requirements of the grant. Subsequently, the NDCES Leadership Council was formed.

The LC is comprised of 16 administrators from diverse backgrounds. Four organizations and two individuals with disabilities transitioned from the MIG Advisory Council to the CES Leadership Council. Transitioning organizations include: the NDCPD, the ND Disabilities Advocacy Consortium (NDDAC), Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living, and the North Dakota Protection and Advocacy (NDP&A) Project. As a next step for council membership, entities in North Dakota with existing statewide strategic plans addressing employment were invited to join the Leadership Council. These entities included: Transition Services within the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, the North Dakota Workforce Development Council, Job Service North Dakota, the State Council on Developmental Disabilities, and Vocational Rehabilitation. In an effort to build a working relationship with the North Dakota State Legislature, representatives from the Senate Human Services Committee and the House Appropriations Committee were asked to join the Council and accepted. Members from the North Dakota Department of Labor and the Human Resources Division within the North Dakota University System added a strong base of knowledge on labor laws and regulations. Representatives from the North Dakota Retail Association and the North Dakota Community Action Association were added to the configuration in order to provide a more rounded perspective and to include the business sector.

At the regional level, representatives were selected at each of the eight regional meetings to represent their regions at a comprehensive statewide planning meeting held in August 2006. This comprehensive statewide meeting was comprised of two or three participants representing each of the eight regions of the state. This group delineated the elements of the strategic plan including the vision and mission statement and the strengths, trends, opportunities, success indicators, and accountability measures pertaining to the increased employment of people with disabilities.

The LC realizes it plays a critical role in the implementation and sustainability of the plan to employ more people with disabilities. The LC provided oversight throughout the planning process, assured alignment with other state plans, assisted in mid-course review of the strategic planning process. Their commitment is shown in an increasing attendance at meetings and their desire to meet more frequently to provide feedback on the big picture, long term planning, implementation, and sustainability of employment for persons with disabilities.

### **Leadership Council Members**

Amy Armstrong, ND Real Choice Rebalancing Grant Project Director  
Gerry Teevens, Department of Public Instruction  
James Hirsch, ND Workforce Development Council  
Jim Moench, North Dakota Disabilities Advocacy Consortium  
Larry Bellow, ND House of Representatives  
Lisa Fair McEvers, Commissioner of Labor  
Randy Spitzer, Job Service ND  
Mike Butts, Consumer  
Nathan Aalgaard, Freedom Resource Center  
Richard Brown, ND Senate  
Rita Lindgren, ND University System  
Teresa Larsen, Executive Director of ND Protection and Advocacy Project  
Tom Wallner, State Council on Developmental Disabilities  
Yvonne Smith, Disability Services Director DHS

### **Methodology**

NDCPD received word that ND was awarded the Comprehensive Employment Systems grant in November of 2005. The project immediately began the planning phase to develop the process for creating a truly comprehensive strategic plan to employ people with disabilities in ND.

The grant secured agreements/contracts with three organizations to assist the project in developing its strategic plan. Those organizations are:

The Consensus Council, Inc (CC)  
North Dakota Disabilities Advocacy Consortium (NDDAC)  
National Consortium for Health Systems Development (NCHSD)

## *The Consensus Council*

Founded in 1990, the CC is a non-profit organization that custom designs processes to bring diverse viewpoints together for the purpose of seeking common ground at local and international levels. CC facilitators and staff provide many services to support the building of public policy agreements. Under the trusteeship of a diverse board of directors, the CC operates with support from foundations, service contracts, and contributions. CC subject areas have included disaster mitigation, economic and rural development, education, environment and natural resources, government restructuring and reform, health care, human services, and law.

The CC believes the purpose of strategic planning is to help an organization to focus its energy. Beyond helping to facilitate a long range planning process, the CC uses a strength-based approach to help an organization or group do the right thing to creatively and proactively position itself for a changing future. A key to this approach is for the neutral third party facilitator to actively engage stakeholders.

The facilitator works to keep the process disciplined, focused, and productive. Issues are linked with the organization's strengths to develop creative and proactive strategies. Participants guided through a process will leave the planning session with an understanding of who does what, by when, and a shared understanding of the direction of the organization.

### **Scope of Work:**

The CC provided statewide strategic planning services, including pre-meeting planning, on-site meeting facilitation and follow-up documentation, for the MIG project, pursuant to CES development, to achieve the following goals and products:

### **Goals:**

- To work collaboratively with the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Project Director and staff to assure proper methodology to meet the federal grant requirements;
- To conduct strategic planning in eight geographic regions of North Dakota (See map – *Appendix A*)
- To conduct comprehensive strategic planning among selected regional participants.

**Products:**

- A shared understanding and agreement on the planning process as it relates to the needs of the project and the requirements of the federal funding;
- Strategic planning results and documents based on the unique and similar needs of each geographic region in North Dakota; and
- Contribution to one comprehensive plan for guidance and project implementation.

As part of the information gathering phase, the CC and the project staff conducted eight strategic planning meetings across the state of North Dakota. In order to get a true reflection of the needs in the eight regions the process and proposed agenda was consistent for each meeting. That process included:

**Strategic Planning Meeting Goals:**

- To review the history of the MIG funding in North Dakota and the transition being made to a CES focus;
- To review the governance structure of CES and available resources to assist the initiative;
- To review the regionally-based strategic planning purpose, timeline and roles of participants;
- To review the elements of consensus-based decision-making and proposed meeting ground rules;
- To develop elements of a mission and vision for CES in North Dakota;
- To identify strengths and trends affecting employment opportunities for people with disabilities;
- To identify and prioritize potential opportunities (goals) for development of a responsive CES;
- To develop indicators of success and measures of accountability; and
- To identify a communication flow process and next steps in planning and implementation.

**Strategic Planning Meeting Products:**

- A shared understanding of MIG and CES for North Dakota, from the past to the future;
- A shared base of knowledge of available resources;
- A shared understanding of the regional strategic planning process, timeline and participant roles;
- Agreement on use of consensus as the rule of decision and establishment of meeting ground rules;
- An inventory of elements of vision and mission for the CES initiative;

- An inventory of strengths and trends affecting employment opportunities for people with disabilities;
- An agreed upon, prioritized inventory of opportunities (goals) for development of a responsive CES;
- An agreed upon inventory of indicators of success and measures of accountability; and
- A shared understanding of the future MIG/CES communication flow process; and
- Agreement on the next steps in planning and implementation.

Upon completion of the eight strategic planning meeting, representatives from each region convened over a two-day period for the Regional Representative Stakeholder meeting to develop the following products:

- A shared understanding of the MIG and CES processes for North Dakota;
- Agreement on the use of consensus as the rule of decision-making and establishment of meeting ground rules;
- A shared understanding of the logic model of strategic planning;
- A vision and mission statement for the CES initiative;
- An agreed upon set of prioritized goals/opportunities for development of an effective CES in North Dakota;
- An agreed upon set of goals, rationale, accountability, specific measurable outcomes, and key activities; and
- An agreement on the next steps in the planning and implementation of the CES Strategic Plan and the continuing communication/feedback process.

The Regional Representative Stakeholder participants were divided into four working groups to produce specific goals within the following categories:

1. Employment: meaningful, accessible, living wage
2. Empowerment: consumer-driven, consumer-chosen, opportunity for training and growth
3. Education: ready and able workforce, diversity, bottom line, advantages to hiring people with disabilities
4. Equality: can work, want and need to work, have a right to work, flexible benefits

The intent and general definition of each of the four groups was explained to the participants and they were informed that the group assignments were arbitrary. Each group was assigned specific tasks and activities to complete and finalize the strategic plan. They were provided with time to work on these tasks and at the completion of each of the working sessions each group presented a report on their efforts. The group reports were reviewed and discussed by all participants. A worksheet that outlined the tasks and activities was distributed, explained and discussed with the participants. Each group agreed to submit a

completed worksheet for each of their respective goals at the end of the working sessions. A staff person was assigned to each group to provide assistance, guidance and direction and a CC facilitator served as a resource when needed or requested. The groups addressed the following tasks:

- Goal Identification and Prioritization;
- Identification of Critical Issues and Rationale;
- Identification of Key Activities and Measurable Outcomes; and
- Identification of Primary Accountability and Resources.

To review all meeting summaries, see *Appendix B*.

### *North Dakota Disabilities Advocacy Consortium (NDDAC)*

NDDAC is an independent group of North Dakota organizations interested in advocating for public policy that will benefit North Dakotans with disabilities and their families.

NDDAC and NDCES have worked together to educate policymakers and others on the needs of people with disabilities. The strength of the consortium depends on each member communicating openly, working together, and being willing to compromise for the good of all people with disabilities.

The mission of NDDAC is to advocate for public policy that ensures all people with disabilities and their families are fully integrated into the mainstream of society. NDDAC works to improve the quality of life through greater independence, empowerment, and self-determination; guarantee the freedom to exercise rights and responsibilities as citizens of North Dakota, including the option of receiving services in the least restrictive environment; and promote universal accessibility in all aspects of life.

The purpose of this contract was to collaborate CES and NDDAC efforts to better identify and document employment systems for people with disabilities in North Dakota through the process of Resource Mapping.

#### **Scope of work:**

1. NDDAC reviewed a draft version of a resource inventory which was completed by CES staff and made recommendations.
2. NDDAC and CES staff identified evaluative criteria which will be gathered during the Regional Stakeholder Meetings.

3. NDDAC and CES collaborated to identify appropriate methods of information gathering and collected additional information for the strategic planning process.
4. NDDAC was responsible for summarizing the process and identifying what is working, what is not working, and what is missing. NDDAC also verified that the resource mapping findings are accurate and that the information matches the existing conventional wisdom about programs and services.
5. NDDAC was responsible to write policy recommendations identified throughout the resource mapping process and make recommendations to the CES Leadership Council.

### *National Consortium for Health Systems Development (NCHSD)*

The NCHSD is a partnership of state agencies working with consumers, state and federal agencies, legislatures, and advocates to build a comprehensive health and service system that supports competitive employment for people with disabilities.

Convened and housed at Health and Disability Advocates, NCHSD conducts a broad range of technical assistance activities, all driven by and tailored to the specific needs of North Dakota.

In 2006, NCHSD provided the NDCES grant with strategic planning expertise to meet their technical assistance needs.

#### **Scope of Work:**

- Resource Mapping
  - Assisted NDCES staff with developing a process and templates for resource mapping.
  - Provided specific resource mapping trainings via conference calls/Power Point Presentations.
- Leadership Council
  - Assisted with development of NDCES grant Leadership Council.
  - Shared best practices about leadership development from other comprehensive grants across the country.
  - Provided materials and collaboration to the NDCES strategic planning team.

## ND Employment and Training Resource Mapping

### *Current Systems of Employment Supports*

The NDDHS provides services to individuals with disabilities through Field Services, Program and Policy, and Economic Assistance Divisions.

Field Services provides individuals with disabilities direct services through eight regional human service centers, the State Hospital, and the Development Center. The Developmental Center served 1,200 people with disabilities in 1965 and 150 people in 2001 (NDDHS). This decrease in population reflects the trend towards community-based services and ND's commitment to assist people with disabilities to achieve employment and community involvement.

The NDDHS Aging Services Division administers Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). In 2005, the Center for Medicaid & Medicare Services (CMS) approved ND's application to include Personal Assistance Services (PAS) to support employment as a part of the state Medicaid plan. However, less than 10% of the NDDHS Long Term Care Continuum budget goes to HCBS, this funding supports all HCBS designed to delay or prevent out-of-home placement, including PAS services. Some individuals with disabilities also qualify for PAS through the Medicaid Waiver for the Aged and Disabled (MWAD). However, the maximum that this waiver pays for PAS is \$2,400 a month (about 6 hours of service per day). Any additional hours, including workday hours, are the responsibility of the individual receiving benefits. The lack of available HCBS funding for PAS and lack of available PAS providers has been identified as a significant barrier to employment for North Dakotans with disabilities.

The Economic Assistance Division offer services including: Medicaid Waiver for the Traumatologically Brain Injured (TBI) and MWAD, Medicaid Provider Information, and Medicaid information and support. The Disability Services Division administers Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Centers for Independent Living (CIL), Business Services, Vision Services, Disability Determination, and the Client Assistance Program (CAP).

VR provides training and employment services to individuals with disabilities. VR partners with One-Stop Career Centers to provide training and supportive services related to employment. Individuals who are not job-ready may receive training to enhance their

employment skills. VR's Rehabilitation Consulting and Services (RCS) inform businesses about the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities and assists them in finding solutions to disability related issues. Centers for Independent Living provides assistance so individuals with disabilities can live and work more independently. In 2004, 7,560 individuals in ND received services through four CILs. Client Assistance Programs provide advocacy, consultation, education, and referral to individuals who are seeking or receiving VR services and/or independent living services. The Interagency Project for Assistive Technology (IPAT) provides education, consultation, and referral regarding access to assistive technology (AT) services and devices to support employment outcomes.

The Department of Commerce (DOC), the state's principal economic development agency, is charged with strengthening the state's economic development efforts (*See Appendix E*). The Division of Economic Development fosters economic growth by attracting new businesses and expanding existing businesses. Eight regional planning councils assist local governments with economic development needs.

The ND Workforce Development Council (WDC), created under the DOC, advises the Governor and ND citizens concerning workforce issues. Services coordinated by WDC are available through the One-Stop Delivery System, operated by Job Service ND. This center provides services to help workers find employment and assists businesses to recruit skilled workers. Services are available both online and at 18 state offices. Job Service also administers the SHARE Network, an Internet-based referral system with services to over 630 members and has 110 service options.

North Dakota Job Service provides a variety of services including: administration of the unemployment insurance program in ND for individuals and businesses; assists businesses in recruitment of potential employees; provides an online labor exchange, which also helps businesses with recruitment; helps job seekers seek employment via an online system that creates a personal profile to help with resume and develop new job searches. It also has the most up-to-date labor market analysis which is accessible to employers and job seekers and has local offices across ND.

In June 2004, a Medicaid Buy-In program called Workers with Disabilities Coverage (WWD) was implemented in ND. This program allows workers with significant disabilities who are employed to pay a prorated premium to maintain their Medicaid healthcare benefits.

Individuals with the coverage must meet certain requirements. These include: must be 16 through 64 years of age, pay a one time enrollment fee of \$100, pay a monthly premium of 5% of the individual's gross countable income, and meet family income guidelines. The total enrollment as of November 2006, was 390 individuals with an average monthly premium of \$57. The 2003 legislative assembly attached a sunset clause to the Buy-In Program in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the coverage. Due to the success of the coverage, in 2005, the sunset clause was removed and coverage guidelines were modified to increase the number of enrollees.

The Greater North Dakota Chamber of Commerce (GNDCC) is the state's largest business organization with 750 members. It develops economic initiatives, advocates for public policy and pro-business legislation, and develops programs and services that are pro-business. One of its goals is to provide businesses with a large and diverse labor pool.

The Protection and Advocacy Project (P&A) advocates for, and protects the legal rights of people with disabilities. P&A programs that support employment outcomes include: Developmental Disabilities Advocacy Program, Mental Health Advocacy Program, Assistive Technology, P&A project for Individual Rights, Beneficiaries of Social Security, and Advocacy for Individuals with TBI.

The Ticket to Work-Work Incentive Improvement Act is an employment program for people with disabilities who are interested in gaining employment. There are 16,866 "ticket holders" and nine employment networks located in ND (Ticket to Work, 2005). ND VR has accepted 25 of the 35 tickets utilized by North Dakotans to date (The Work Site, 2005).

The Association for People in Supported Employment (APSE) provides advocacy and education to support integrated employment outcomes; addresses issues that impede employment services, improves, promotes national, state, and local policy development and educates the public and the business community on the value of including persons of all abilities. NDAPSE has been actively involved in NDMIG activities including cosponsoring training for job developers, employment specialists, consumers and families, the Self Employment Network Initiative (SENI) training and advocacy efforts. NDAPSE played an important role in drafting legislation and implementing the Workers with Disabilities program.

Rehab Services (RS) works individually with people to teach interviewing skills and provide job development, job coaching and follow-up after an individual obtains employment. Rehab Services is the ND grantee for Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach (BPAO) projects. This BPAO specialist provides Social Security Administration (SSA) beneficiaries (including transition-age youth) access to benefits planning and assistance services for the entire state. One hundred-thirty consumers received information and technical assistance at 50 presentations during 2004 (Kara Jacobson, personal communication, 2005).

The North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities has successfully developed a wide range of projects and activities that address the employment needs of people with disabilities. Demonstration, development, and research projects have been conducted with national, state, and local partners. Projects include: developing software to support internet-based data entry by adolescents and adults with significant cognitive disabilities, regional transition coordination, and outcomes tracking, and rural Internet-based employment. In addition to leadership in bringing together stakeholders to secure Medicaid Buy-In legislation, NDCPD was instrumental in establishing an APSE chapter in ND, and creating the SENI for prospective business owners with disabilities. The success of these efforts hinged on the partnerships between NDCPD and Minot State University and consumers, advocates, policy makers, and state agencies like the NDDPI, VR, Disability Services, Medical Services, and Aging Services, as well as partnerships through the national network of University Centers of Excellence on Disability.

The NDDPI provides guidance, training, and materials regarding the transition services required by IDEA for students age 16-21 who receive special education. NDDPI collaborates with Disability Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicaid, and Local Special Education Units to enhance employment services for students ages 18-21. Many secondary teachers who work with transition age students lack adequate knowledge about work incentives and may discourage students from seeking employment for fear of the student losing their benefits. Secondary Special Education teachers need additional training on employment options for students with disabilities including gainful employment, self-employment, and job training.

## *Background*

In May of 2006 the NDCES undertook a statewide resource mapping project in an effort to understand the range of programs and supports in ND available to individuals with disabilities pursuing competitive employment and to assess how the current employment and training system is working. The information gathered from the mapping process was intended to serve as background information to enhance findings from the regional stakeholder meetings.

## *The Process*

The first step in the resource mapping process was to identify agencies and organizations in ND providing employment related services to individuals with disabilities. Each agency and organization was contacted directly (approximately 114 agencies & organizations) and information was gathered on what disability populations were served and what employment related services were provided, specifically: job training, job placement, job retention, benefits planning and community living services. Once information was gathered on the employment related services available for individuals with disabilities in each region of the state, key informants from VR, P&A, CILs and Community Rehab Centers were contacted in each region to verify the information gathered. Based on the information gathered from the individuals participating in the process, preliminary trends were identified.

## *Themes Identified in Preliminary Resource Mapping Effort*

- Access and options in training and job placement services are not consistently accessible across ND.
  - VR provides job placement services in each region.
  - Majority of job placement services are provided by Developmental Disabilities (DD) providers and are targeted toward the DD population.
  - In some regions, individuals with disabilities other than DD have limited options in choosing a provider for job placement services.
- There is a lack of consistency in what employment and training services are actually available – range of services varies by region.
  - There is no clear system-wide definition of what services qualify as employment and training. Therefore, it is unclear as to what services people are actually getting. Additionally, there is a lack of information on what kinds of skills are being developed and if those skills meet the needs of the labor market.

- Existing employment and training programs are fragmented and not well publicized – consumers reported they are often referred to several different providers for services. This lack of coordinated referral serves as another barrier to employment.
- Significant attitudinal barriers exist on the part of providers of employment and training services – many respondents reported that they did not believe their customers could work in a competitive environment.
  - In many regions of the state, employment for individuals with DD was primarily in crew or enclave environments.
- Participants voiced concern that mainstream employment and training programs serving the general public are ill-equipped at serving people with disabilities.
- Many of the providers interviewed stated that they provided benefits counseling services.
  - Comments ranged from, “don’t work or you will lose your benefits”, “we help individuals so they don’t lose their benefits when they have earnings” to, “we help people get on benefits.”
- There is a perception that the current employment and training system for individuals with DD is more organized and better funded than services for individuals with other types of disabilities.
  - Informants reported that it is unclear where individuals other than the DD population receive employment and training services.
  - Service providers report that there is a large gap in services for individuals with mental illness (MI).
  - There is a need for additional education and outreach regarding VR services.

### *Next Steps for the Resource Mapping Effort*

Based on this first step in evaluating the state’s resources for employment and training for people with disabilities, further analysis is needed in the areas of availability and access to employment services and the adequacy of existing employment services. In 2007 the NDCES will conduct additional mapping activities in order to answer the following questions:

- Availability and Access to Employment Services
  - What disability populations need employment and training services? How can the state best meet the needs of these individuals?
  - How do individuals find out about and access VR services?
  - How do people find out about available services in their communities?
- Adequacy of Existing Employment Services
  - Are the publicly funded employment and training services preparing people for the jobs that are available in the state? Is there an emphasis on skill development and career advancement?
  - Is there consistency across regions regarding what is available for individuals seeking employment?

- How can the state maximize the resources within the mainstream employment and training system serving the general population to serve all North Dakotans?
- Do individuals with disabilities have choices in job training and preparation? How are individual choices reconciled with existing labor market needs?
- How can the state support more integrated employment opportunities for people with cognitive impairments?

To review the *Summary Analysis* - North Dakota Employment & Training Resource Mapping Effort see *Appendix C*.

### **Business Focus Groups**

During the extensive statewide process to gather input, suggestions and information and to identify needs for the CES planning project, it became apparent that the involvement of employers and members of the business community was critical to the process. As the eight regional groups held and completed their meetings, an attendance assessment (individual and collective) demonstrated a troubling trend – the noticeable absence of these representatives.

This information was shared with the LC whose members agreed that additional efforts needed to be initiated to involve employers and members of the business community concluding that, not only was their input vital, but their participation and “buy-in” would have a decisive effect on the future success of a comprehensive employment system.

As a result, a plan was developed to gather input from these groups through a series of surveys (person-to-person, telephone and mail-out) and a re-initiation of efforts to meet with employers and business leaders in a format that would be “friendly” to their needs and scheduling constraints.

It was determined that these employer groups should be planned using a focus group format, be held in four areas of the state that reflect the state’s population and economic diversity, enlist the support and sponsorship of local chambers of commerce and be scheduled at times and for durations (breakfast and luncheon) that would accommodate the demands of employers busy schedules.

With these objectives in mind, the Consensus Council, Inc., was contracted to conduct the focus groups that were scheduled in concert with the support, sponsorship and advice of the local chambers of commerce. Invitees were selected at random and invitations were sent

to sample groups in each of the geographic areas. A list of objectives and a list of focus group questions were established to ensure consistency in the process (See *Appendix D*).

As a result of the four focus groups the following observations and themes emerged:

1. It has been consistently difficult to involve members of the employer/business community in activities related to the CES planning process (note the overall focus group attendance levels). The reasons for this seem to vary, but it is evident that any efforts to succeed in the implementation process must continue to focus substantially on the involvement of employers at every level.
2. Employers are generally apprehensive about hiring individuals with disabilities. This seems to stem from a lack of information, previously difficult or negative experiences and/or apprehension about liability and ADA issues.
3. The general employment environment in North Dakota at this time is conducive to active employment opportunities for any individual that has the “hard” and “soft” skills needed to appropriately perform the designated duties of a particular job. In addition, employers indicate a willingness to hire on the basis of ability.
4. Confidentiality and disclosure issues create a sense of “secrecy” and a feeling on the part of employers that they are not going to get the information that they need to make an appropriate decision about hiring an individual with a disability. Conversely, individuals with disabilities and service agencies are apprehensive and uncertain about the type of information that is appropriate to share with potential employers.
5. Incentive and support programs are attractive to employers and should not be discounted. Also, employers are uncertain of where they can/should “go” for ongoing, long-term or crisis support.
6. Employers are busy and do not see themselves as having “extra” time to devote to the training and support of an individual with special employment needs. Their profit margins are narrow and this is a major consideration. However, there is a perceived desire to support the community and its members and this spirit can be a positive resource.
7. Employers place a great deal of value on the information and recommendations of their fellow business professionals. A peer-to-peer approach to recruitment, education, training, support and appreciation/recognition appears to be a viable and accepted potential model for future success in CES implementation.
8. There are stark differences in employment opportunities in different parts of North Dakota. Western communities are currently experiencing great difficulty in filling open positions. In contrast, the eastern part of the state has a much more competitive job market.

9. Employers are generally unfamiliar with the specific services offered by Vocational Rehabilitation and other providers. However, employers are generally willing to make a contact if needed.

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## Appendices

- Appendix A Map of the State of North Dakota
- Appendix B Regional Meeting Summaries
- Appendix C Summary Analysis North Dakota Employment & Training Resource Mapping Effort
- Appendix D Business Focus Group Results
- Appendix E VR/MIG Focus Group Collaboration
- Appendix F An Overview and Recommendations: Medicaid Services in ND

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