Getting Started with a Local Employment First Transition Youth Team:
Guiding Questions for Team Development

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Use these Guiding Questions to:
- Get started with the development of a local or County Employment First Team for Transition Youth
- Double-check your plans to implement the Employment First Transition Framework for Youth with Disabilities in your school district or county.

Guiding Question	Considerations
1. BELIEF Do all partners believe that youth with disabilities have the potential and right to succeed in community employment and participation?	**Team members must share the belief that all youth are capable, no matter the extent of individual challenges!** *Employment First is a philosophy of service that presumes that all Ohioans with significant disabilities can and should have opportunities to work in the community.* *It means that individuals with developmental disabilities:* • *Have the right to obtain jobs that are in line with their interests (person-centered)* • *Are in jobs that they feel comfortable doing (self-determination)* • *Are employed in locations typical of that kind of work (community-based)* • *Receive compensation on par with their non-disabled counterparts in like positions (competitive employment)* • *Work alongside co-workers without disabilities (integrated setting)* *Individual team members must understand and embrace each of these principles.* *It is critical that partners base their work on this vision so that the collaborative efforts that result are aligned with Employment First.* *-Adapted from National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities*
2. PARTNERS. Do we have the right partners working together as part of our transition collaborative/ partnership?	**Transition collaboratives/networks require partners within and across all agencies serving transition age youth.** *Effective Transition collaboratives include a diverse core group of partners such as:* • *Families and Individuals with disabilities* • *Local Schools, State Support Teams, and other Educational agencies* • *County Board of Developmental Disabilities* • *Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency* • *Mental Health and Addiction Services agencies* • *County Department of Job and Family Services/local Ohio Means Jobs agency* *Local teams need to determine the additional partners in their community that will be important to include.*

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3. **MISSION.** *Do we have a focused purpose for the team that all members understand and support?*	***Multi-agency groups function best when members have a shared purpose or mission.*** *Clarifying the purpose/mission is critical for the group to form an identity and for individuals to make a commitment to actively participate. The purpose/mission may be multi-pronged and can include functions such as:* • *An opportunity to identify common goals and work to reduce barriers* • *A venue to understand the work of each partner and where the responsibilities align, overlap, create gaps, duplication or confusion.* • *A community partnership that can pool ideas, resources and connections to build capacity so that youth achieve successful adult outcomes.* • *A system for region-wide communication among partners* • *An avenue to exchange agency information and updates* • *An opportunity to gather new resources and ideas*
4. **INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT.** *Would a local interagency agreement provide a foundation for our work together?*	***An interagency agreement can clarify each partner's role in working with transition youth and document an understanding about collaborative practices.*** *Interagency agreements can include details such as how and when systems will share information about youth served by more than one system, and specifies the occurrence of regular communication among systems. The agreement generally explains the mission and goals, as well as captures each agency's commitment to achieving the collaborative goals. One of the responsibilities of a Collaborative Team should be to ensure that colleagues not directly a part of the team know about and understand the Interagency Agreement. It should be reviewed regularly as Team member agencies put in place collaborative practices.*
5. **COMMUNICATION.** *Do we have a method by which we communicate regularly about the group activities and function?*	***Effective communication requires a recognized system of contact and information dissemination and is foundational to ongoing collaboration and achieving goals.*** *A system of communication includes a regular way to disseminate information and receive feedback about the work of the group as well as established methods to share information about specific youth among and between agencies. Team communication may include regularly scheduled meetings, newsletters, email listservs, social media, websites, etc. As teams form, they often require more frequent communication and in-person meetings than when more established.*

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6. STRUCTURE and COORDINATION. Have we identified a team 'coordinator' or 'facilitator? And logistics for meetings?	**Team members benefit from a clear infrastructure for how the team will function.** *A collaborative team can be a catalyst for raising the priority of working with partners when it is viewed as productive and effective.* *A few questions for the team to consider when creating a structure include:* Who will: • Facilitate meetings? • Take notes and disseminate to team • Send out reminders for upcoming meetings? • Prepare meeting agendas? • Follow-up on details or decisions made at meetings? Operations: • How will the team make decisions? • How frequent/long are meetings? • Is there a time of day/day of the week better for most team members? • Where will the team meet? Same site? Different member agencies?
7. ACTION PLAN. Have we developed an action plan that identifies short and long-term goals for the group and activities needed to achieve goals?	**Teams that are sustained have Action Plans to guide their activities and decisions.** *A collaboratively developed action plan charts the course so the team can stay focused on meaningful outcomes and their shared mission. Action planning begins with a process to identify and prioritize the resources and needs. Then the team can set goals and activities. See the Community Investment Tool for Youth at the Employment First website, www.ohioemploymentfirst.org for an example of a needs assessment tool focused on agencies serving transition youth.*
8. DATA-DRIVEN. Are the goals supported by baseline data and do we have a strategy for measuring progress?	**Data provides the team with a clear way to gauge progress and celebrate accomplishments.** *Baseline data provides a factual and objective foundation for the work. A needs assessment (see #7) can generate baseline data for the formation of goals. Baseline data must be measureable so that a team can evaluate and share their progress.* *For example, a broad, but vague, goal such as 'improve post school outcomes for youth' does not include any baseline data or way to measure 'improvement'. However, a goal such as '75% of youth with disabilities will have at least one paid work experience while in high school' provides a clear baseline for collecting data and a standard for determining the extent of progress.*

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9. EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICES AND PREDICTORS. Is the team familiar with the research about strategies, services and supports proven to assist youth with disabilities to achieve success?	**Teams must prioritize and focus on activities and services that have evidence of being effective.** Through research, a set of practices has been identified that are associated with transition youth achieving meaningful adult outcomes. Referred to as Evidence Based Practices and Predictors, they provide transition professionals with research-based strategies useful across all systems to build youth's skills for community employment. See the Employment First Evidence Based Practices and Predictors for Post School Success Tools on the Ohio Employment First website (www.ohioemploymentfirst.org).
10. SUSTAINABILITY. Does the team have in place strategies to ensure that the collaborative work will be sustained into the future?	**Employment First Transition Team efforts must carry on over time, although team members will naturally change over time.** Structures that support agencies to communicate and collaborate must be sustainable in the future. • Team members will change as roles change, however the work of the team must be built on a foundation that does not change with the players. • Efforts that result from the initial enthusiasm of members alone will not sustain the work over time. • Partner agencies must prioritize the work of the team and continue to support participation. • Blending and braiding resources will enhance the ongoing efforts and achievement of goals. • Market the plans and the results of the team's work, both within the partner agencies and the larger community.

Team leaders may use these ten questions to facilitate discussions as members come together to plan. As each issue is discussed, facilitators should take note of the team members' responses and views to help teams recognize the degree of planning and action that has occurred. Teams that take the time to review and discuss these ten questions may find they are well prepared to confront the needs of transition youth with developmental disabilities in their county or region. Or, teams may find areas that have not been addressed or recognized as a priority. In this situation, these discussions become the first step in developing the needed goals and action plans.

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