



DDS System Transformation Support Final Report

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Document Overview

This document summarizes the STEP Support Team's activities in collaboration with DDS to design and execute the Department's STEP Plan. This effort and the associated activities outlined in this report took place between October 2022 and June 2024. The report is organized chronologically. In this report, you will find information regarding:

- **Current State Assessment:** How the STEP Support Team reviewed selected states and their intellectual disability (ID) programs to identify leading practices and key insights for DDS.
- **Initial Wave of Providers:** How the STEP Support Team coordinated with interested providers to submit STEP Plans and learned from their experiences.
- **Stakeholder Input:** How the STEP Support Team collected and reported input from individuals and their families, DDS staff, and providers to validate the findings in the Current State Assessment.
- **STEP Plan:** How the STEP Support Team developed a vision and plan for DDS STEP efforts based on previous findings and input from DDS.
- **Phase 2:** How the STEP Support Team developed trainings, materials, and information sessions to launch STEP more broadly and the technical assistance it provided.
- **Implementation Plan:** How the STEP Support Team coordinated with DDS staff to develop a long-term plan to implement STEP and achieve milestones.

This document is not an exhaustive list of all activities performed by the STEP Support team but provides details of the key initiatives and work products. All STEP Support Team activities were overseen and guided by DDS staff.

Summary of Project Activities

1.0 Current State Assessment

1.1 Background

The Current State Assessment informed an approach for STEP. The STEP Support Team researched efforts related to **home and community-based services (HCBS) for populations with intellectual disabilities (ID) nationally and in Connecticut**, focusing on innovations and new programs related to American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. The resulting document outlines existing policies, service delivery, and reimbursement methodology with an emphasis on transformational initiatives across five states and Connecticut.

A total of **12 states were identified as candidates** for the Current State Assessment in consultation with DDS and national experts. **Of those 12 states, DDS selected five** using the following criteria:

- States similar in total population size to Connecticut and/or with programs of similar size to Connecticut.
- States seeking to innovate supports for adults with ID, especially regarding community integration, residential and day/employment supports, and assistive technology.
- States that have undergone HCBS transformation efforts that could lend lessons learned to Connecticut.

The selected states were **Arkansas, Delaware, Maine, Missouri, and Pennsylvania**. Once DDS selected states, The STEP Support Team interviewed points of contact at the organizations listed in the figure below:

Connecticut Partners Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Department of Social Services Favarh The Arc ECT Midstate Arc	 Arkansas Division of Development Disabilities Services	 Delaware Division of Development Disabilities Services
Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services, Developmental Disability and Brain Injury Services 	Missouri Division of Developmental Disabilities 	Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs 

Fig. 1- State Interviews

1.2 Findings

Based on the research and findings of the Current State Assessment, **The STEP Support Team developed considerations and recommendations** to help DDS prioritize planning efforts for STEP. These considerations and recommendations were organized in **six thematic categories** identified through the research and discovery process:

1. Individuals who receive supports as the primary focus
2. Residential supports
3. Employment supports
4. Provider engagement
5. Assistive technology and remote supports
6. Payment methodologies

These considerations include lessons learned from states that embarked on similar transformation efforts. Recommendations focus on ways DDS can encourage increased adoption and availability of existing approaches that emphasize independence and choice.

A selection of leading practices identified through the Current State Assessment are included in the following table; a full list of the considerations and recommendations can be found in the [Current State Assessment Report](#).

Category	Leading Practices
Individuals who receive supports as the primary focus	• Improve/enhance training for DDS case managers to emphasize alternative service delivery approaches highlighted by Moving On • Leverage informed risk documents from MFP and integrate as part of person-centered planning for individuals transitioning
Residential supports	• Encourage providers to adopt and expand clustered and supportive housing, remote supports, and Shared Living • Build on and expand housing voucher programs through partnerships with state and local resources
Employment supports	• Encourage providers to adopt Project SEARCH and other internship programs, remote supports for Customized Employment, and time-limited vocational preparation programs • Offer volunteer opportunities to help individuals learn skills that are needed in the workplace in a lower stress environment before fully transitioning to paid employment • Consider a dedicated rural or underserved areas employment services staff person
Provider engagement	• Provide non-financial recognition and incentives to exemplary providers to motivate through competition and achieve improved service delivery • Host facilitated calls where providers can share staffing updates related to Moving On efforts to identify and spread promising approaches
Assistive technology and remote supports	• Provide a trial period for remote supports adoption and consider beginning implementation early and slowly with transitioning youth • Create a technology task force to develop tailored education materials and improve implementation practices statewide
Payment methodologies	• Consider providing payment incentives to HCBS providers that collect and submit outcome and activity quality data for future value-based payment benchmarking • Consider extending some of the transition incentives pending success of the Moving On Program

DDS used the considerations and recommendations outlined in the Current State Assessment to inform the design of STEP. [Stakeholder Input Sessions](#) with providers, individuals that receive supports and their families, and case managers validated recommendations from the Current State Assessment and gathered feedback on DDS' approach to STEP more broadly. This maintained a person-centered approach to the planning and design process for STEP, while creating an opportunity for stakeholders to share their thoughts and concerns based on the findings. The Current State Assessment outlined 17 considerations and 27 potential recommendations across the six thematic categories.

2.0 Initial Wave of Providers- Phase 1

2.1 Background

The Initial Wave of Providers (Phase 1) served as a pilot for provider development of STEP transformation plans. It began in December 2022 and ended in March 2023. This phase provided an opportunity for interested providers to submit a transformation plan as early as December, while enabling DDS to incorporate feedback from participants and other stakeholders to inform the approach for [Phase 2 of STEP](#).

Phase 1 focused on creating and distributing the initial STEP Transformation Plan templates, developing a standard process for DDS to review Transformation Plans and training review teams, and providing technical assistance (TA) to providers considering participation in STEP. The STEP Support Team gathered input from regional reviewers and other DDS leaders to refine and revise the initial Transformation Plan templates and to create the review process.

In addition, The STEP Support Team disseminated a provider interest survey to understand which providers were considering participation in STEP, which program(s) they were considering transforming, how much planning they had done, and whether they intended to submit a Transformation Plan for Phase 1 or later. This information enabled the STEP Support Team to provide focused TA and respond to provider questions throughout Phase 1 more effectively. Twelve provider agencies submitted Transformation Plans for STEP in Phase 1, and DDS approved all 12 plans. Details for each plan and agency are listed below.

Submitted Transformation Plans – Phase 1		
Provider Agency	Transition Type	Number of planned transitions as of initial approval
Abilis	Day	2 (Day)
Ability Beyond	Day and Residential	10 (Day), 1 (Residential)
Community Resources, Inc. (CRI)	Residential	3 (Residential)
Dungarvin	Residential	16 (Residential)
Favarh	Residential	3 (Residential)
Kuhn Employment Opportunities	Day	10 (Day)
MARC, Inc. of Manchester	Day	19 (Day)
MidState Arc	Day and Residential	25 (Day), 3 (Residential)
STAR, Inc.	Day	10 (Day)
The Arc of Eastern CT	Day and Residential	4 (Day), 3 (Residential)
The Arc of Southington	Residential	3 (Residential)
UCP Eastern CT	Day	4 (Day)

2.2 Transformation Plan Template

To be eligible for STEP incentives, providers were required to submit a plan using the Transformation Plan Templates. The primary objectives of the templates were to:

- Standardize the information providers included in STEP Transformation Plans,
- Create standard criteria for DDS to use when evaluating plans across regions, and
- Streamline the review process with standard formatting.

In Phase 1, six templates were created using DDS input and guidance:

Template	Description
Transformation Plan Instructions	Step-by-step directions for developing and submitting a STEP Transformation Plan
Transformation Plan Template Part A: Residential Transitions	Form for providers planning residential transitions to complete
Transformation Plan Template Part B: Day & Employment Transitions	Form for providers planning day and employment transitions to complete
Transformation Plan Template Part C: Restructuring to Support Individuals with Significant Needs	Form for providers planning to restructure programs to support individuals with greater behavioral or medical needs to complete
Transformation Plan Template Part D: Financial Considerations	Document that includes instructions for completing the <i>Budget Sheet</i> , a form with a narrative section to outline financial sustainability of the proposed transition plan, and a section for the agency's authorized representative to sign
Budget Sheet	Excel spreadsheet to project incentive totals and capture transition-related costs

2.3 Reviewer Training

The STEP Support Team and DDS developed a set of standard criteria for reviewing provider STEP Plans. Each region identified a regional review team, led by the Regional Resource Administrator, to review plans and communicate with providers about requested updates and/or plan approval status. Review teams include resource management, case management, and regional leadership to support the review process. Review teams either approve provider plans or request necessary revisions in a collaborative process. STEP Plans can be updated even after approval. As informed by provider input through technical assistance, DDS anticipated that there would be adjustments particularly in the number of individuals transitioning or the specific individuals and their supports. The review process developed by the STEP Support Team and DDS is as follows:

1. Providers submit plans to the Resource Administrator, and regional staff will review plans
2. A plan must have all “Meets requirements” for approval. For plans with “Revision Necessary” sections, the region will set up a meeting between the region and the provider to provide guidance and discussions can go back and forth as necessary.
3. Within two weeks of the meeting, the provider will revise the necessary responses and resubmit for the region to review.
4. Once the provider resolves all issues and concerns, the region will decide on whether to approve or ask for amendments to the plan.
5. The Assistant Regional Director or Designee will communicate the plan status to the provider.
6. When approved, the region will email the approval to the provider and designate a staff member to act as the liaison with the provider.

To help support DDS’ transition to this new process, The STEP Support Team hosted a training for regional review teams on 1/12/2023. This training focused on:

- Briefing regional review teams on the purpose and goals of STEP
- Reviewing the STEP Transformation Plan Templates

- Outlining the process for submission, review, and approval of plans
- Identifying best practices for regional review teams
- Walking through a sample transformation plan to demonstrate how the regional review criteria should be used during reviews

TRANSITION PLAN REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS

Template Review: Key Points to Remember

- Close coordination between providers and regional staff
- Transition Plans are organizational restructuring plans, not individual service plans
- Plans can be approved while final transformation information is being finalized

Fig. 2- Sample slides from Reviewer Training

2.4 Technical Assistance

Technical assistance (TA) was available to all providers considering participating in STEP. Providers could request one-on-one TA using a form linked in the Transformation Plan Template instructions. Group office hours launched in February 2023. The STEP Support Team provided TA on an ongoing basis and was available to answer questions about STEP, the types of transitions eligible for incentives, how to complete a transformation plan, and to help providers think through transformational changes at their agencies among other topics.

Providers could receive TA by attending weekly Office Hours, by completing a survey requesting one-on-one TA, or by emailing the STEP Support Team directly. DDS promoted TA via Everbridge communications, the STEP Support Team sent reminders to providers that had completed the interest survey, and providers were encouraged to use TA as a resource throughout their planning and implementation efforts. The STEP Support Team kept a record of attendees and the questions asked.

Month	Number of TA Office Hours Attendees	Number of Individual Sessions
February	31	6
March	6	5

Overall, TA was very successful in helping providers submit plans for STEP and in managing complications in the planning process. More than 50% of providers that submitted approved STEP plan attended at least one TA session, with several providers engaging in both one-on-one TA and Office Hours. Providers that received TA in Phase 1 shared the following testimonials:

Agency 1: “The technical assistance team demonstrated clear expertise on the transformation initiative and were able to assist us in streamlining our conceptualized ideas into a more comprehensive transformation strategy. We would highly recommend that provider agencies interested in transitioning their services through the transformation initiative, schedule an individual session with the technical assistance team.”

Agency 2: “Each session was relaxed and beneficial and just a place to ask a question or share an idea. Each question was answered by experts as best as they could. Technical Assistance is beneficial as a forum to brainstorm or get an answer prior to submitting a proposal.”

Agency 3: “As our agency began the process of developing our Transformation/STEP Plan we had many questions. Knowing that the [STEP Support Team] was available to assist made this process easier. We were able to join in the pre-scheduled TA sessions as needed, but also able to schedule individual sessions for issues specific to our agency. Additionally, when multiple providers had the same questions the [STEP Support Team] was able to work directly with DDS to get the answers or clarification we needed. This support was much appreciated!”

2.5 Lessons Learned

The STEP Support Team and DDS recorded and synthesized feedback from Phase 1 to inform the approach and design in Phase 2. The lessons learned from Phase 1 fall into three categories: streamlining the STEP Transformation Plan Templates, approach to providing TA, and communications.

Streamlining STEP Transformation Plan Templates

As providers completed STEP Transformation Plans, they shared feedback on potential improvements that the STEP Support Team addressed for Phase 2. Many providers felt that the templates were repetitive and required them to input the same or similar information, either within the same template or across multiple. This feedback was especially relevant for Form C (Restructuring to Support Individuals with Significant Needs). Providers also found they were not ready to share the requested level of detail. Form C was ultimately condensed and incorporated into Forms A and B as an optional section. Additionally, many providers were confused by the complexity of the budget sheet and the purpose of Form D. To address this, the STEP Support Team updated the Budget Template to include hover tips and detailed instructions for each element directly in the sheet instead of in a separate form and focused multiple office hour sessions on walking through sample budgets.

The STEP Support Team shared this feedback with regional review teams, confirmed they were comfortable with the edits, and updated the STEP Transformation Plan Templates for Phase 2.

Approach to providing TA

During Phase 1, it was clear that providers had different goals and expectations for TA. Some agencies attended multiple Office Hours, brought specific questions, and scheduled one-on-one TA to work through the details of their planning efforts. Alternatively, many providers preferred to join Office Hours

and learn from the questions of others. To accommodate both types of TA participants, the STEP Support Team adjusted the approach to TA Office Hours in Phase 2 by releasing a TA calendar that specified a theme to discuss during the session such as:

- Budget Template walkthroughs
- How to use STEP incentives for transformation
- Examples of provider innovation
- Residential or Day/Employment template walkthroughs

Each session began with a short presentation on the weekly topic and transitioned to open Q&A where providers could address any questions or concerns related to their plans. Additionally, throughout Phase 1, TA Office Hours were held weekly on Friday mornings. This window seemed challenging, so the weekly cadence was adjusted in Phase 2 to fall on Tuesdays with a rotating biweekly morning or afternoon timeslot. More detail on Phase 2 TA is available in [Technical Assistance for Phase 2](#).

Communications & STEP Informational Materials

In Phase 1 and beyond, DDS focused on communicating clearly about STEP to individuals who receive supports and their families, DDS staff, and providers. DDS's communications approach has evolved over time based on feedback from the above groups. One of the key shifts was prioritizing distribution of materials, surveys, and other messages to providers and case managers before sending directly to individuals that receive supports and their families. Providers and case managers reported that previously, they had felt unprepared to answer questions from the people they work with about STEP because they didn't have the latest guidance. By proactively sharing resources with them in advance, DDS was able to improve transparency and create room for more productive conversations. This included providing advance notice when any communications or messages were being shared with individuals and their families.

In addition to the sequencing of communications, the STEP Support Team gained a better understanding of the types of information and materials that would be most helpful for providers and DDS staff in Phase 2. Based on provider questions in TA sessions, the STEP Support Team developed an FAQ for providers, and later developed an FAQ for case management. The STEP Support Team also developed an example Transformation Plan with Budget and other materials in response to feedback from Phase 1 providers and DDS staff. Additional details on these materials can be found in [Phase 2- STEP](#).

3.0 Stakeholder Input

3.1 Background

Throughout the process of designing STEP priorities and initiatives, DDS emphasized gathering input from a variety of stakeholders to make STEP as person-centered as possible. DDS focused on gathering the perspectives of:

- Individuals who receive supports and their families
- DDS case managers and staff
- Providers

Information and feedback was gathered and compiled through surveys and input sessions for each audience.

3.2 Virtual Stakeholder Input Sessions

Based on the results of the Current State Assessment, DDS solicited stakeholder input on selected opportunities and considerations from the report to inform development of STEP. **Six stakeholder input sessions** were held in January 2023 to collect detailed feedback from diverse stakeholders in small group settings. These sessions included the following groups:

- Individuals receiving day and employment supports and their families
- Individuals receiving residential supports and their families
- DDS Self-Advocate Coordinators (SACs)
- Residential supports providers
- Day and employment supports providers
- DDS regional staff, including case managers

To recruit individuals and families for these sessions, DDS posted the event description and registration information on social media. Additionally, DDS worked through The Arc, CTFSN (Connecticut Family Support Network), and DDS case managers to provide event descriptions and registration links to individuals and families. The STEP Support Team attended a Self-Advocate Coordinator (SAC) meeting to gather feedback and input from the SACs. Providers were invited to participate in sessions via communications sent through Everbridge. For the DDS staff input session, DDS sent out event descriptions and registration links via internal email communications and targeted a variety of roles such as Transition Advisors, Quality Review Specialists, and case management.

DDS prioritized having representation from all three regions (North, South, and West) in each input session, and DDS leadership did not attend the sessions to help participants feel more comfortable speaking candidly.

3.3 Stakeholder Feedback Survey

DDS supplemented feedback gathered in the virtual input sessions with a series of stakeholder feedback surveys. These surveys were sent to:

- 9,100 legal representatives for individuals receiving supports, including individuals who are their own legal representatives, **(1,702 responses)** by mail
- 1,565 DDS staff **(533 responses)** by email
- All DDS providers **(38 respondents)** via Everbridge message

Each survey focused on different elements based on the audience. **Individuals and their families** were asked about their awareness of STEP, attitudes about independent living, and preferences on receiving information from DDS about STEP. **DDS staff** were asked about their awareness and attitudes about STEP, what changes to the DDS system would help encourage STEP participation, and the anticipated impact on those who participate. **Providers** were asked about primary

2022 DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES SURVEY

1. The Connecticut Department of Developmental Services (DDS) is creating a Moving On plan for people to live and work more independently with the support they need.

Have you heard or read anything previously about the Moving On plan?

☐ Yes (ANSWER QUESTION 1a and 1b) ☐ No (SKIP TO QUESTION 2)

1a. How much have you read or heard about the DDS Moving On plan?

☐ A Lot ☐ Some ☐ Just a Little

1b. Where did you hear of the DDS Moving On plan? _____

2. How do you feel about the Moving On plan providing more technologies and supports to people supported by DDS?

Like very much ☐ Like a little ☐ Dislike a little ☐ Dislike very much ☐ Not sure ☐

3. What is the main reason you like or dislike the Moving On plan? _____

4. How much do you think you could benefit from DDS supports and technologies that help you to live, learn and work on your own?

A Lot ☐ Some ☐ Not too much ☐ Not at all ☐ Not sure ☐

5. Below is a list of statements. In thinking about the Moving On plan, please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each statement: (PLEASE CHECK ONE FOR EACH LINE)

	Strongly Agree	Agree a little	Disagree a little	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
Great chance for me to be more independent	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Concerned that this may be bad for me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. The goal of the Moving On plan is to allow you to be more independent in your living, learning or work. How much do you think this would change your life?

Greatly Improve ☐ Improve a little ☐ Worsen a little ☐ Greatly Worsen ☐ Not sure ☐ TURN OVER →

Fig. 3- Excerpt from Stakeholder Feedback Survey

concerns, alternative service conversations, and DDS support. For more information about the specific responses from stakeholder groups, please reference the [Stakeholder Feedback Summary Report](#).

3.4 ARPA Committee Feedback

As part of ongoing coordination with stakeholders, DDS and the STEP Support Team regularly engaged with the ARPA Committees to incorporate their input to inform the direction of STEP. At various points throughout the planning process, DDS and the STEP Support Team updated and solicited feedback from:

- The ARPA Advisory Transformational Committee
- The ARPA Day Transformational Committee
- The ARPA DDS Engagement Transformational Committee
- The ARPA Individual and Family Engagement Transformational Committee
- The ARPA Residential Transformational Committee

DDS used input from these committees to inform efforts, for example soliciting suggestions on states to include in the Current State Assessment and gathering feedback on the guidance materials, STEP Plan, and ultimately the STEP Implementation Roadmap. The STEP Support Team also used the public committee meetings as a route to provide updates on STEP efforts to attendees and participants.

3.5 Stakeholder Feedback Summary Report

To capture the key takeaways and recommendations from the Stakeholder Input Sessions and Stakeholder Input Surveys, the STEP Support Team developed a summary report. This document organizes feedback from across stakeholder groups by thematic area and includes direct quotes as well as summaries of survey responses. Qualitative feedback from the Stakeholder Input Sessions is organized thematically. There were four themes identified through stakeholder feedback: communications, individualization of supports, workforce recruitment and retention, and transportation. The report is organized thematically, and each section includes:

- A summary of the theme
- Insights from participants
- Ideas and solutions from participants

The complete Stakeholder Feedback Summary Report, executive summary, and an appendix of raw survey responses and detailed session summaries can be found on the [Provider Gateway](#). The Stakeholder Feedback Summary Report was direct input into the STEP Plan which outlines DDS's priorities and approach for organizational transformation.

4.0 Communications Plan

The STEP Communications Plan guided communications and messaging efforts for providers and DDS staff. It outlines processes for timely and appropriate distribution of program information and is comprised of two documents:

1. Word document that provides an overview of the communications approach and goals
2. Excel spreadsheet to track the status and estimated timelines for planned communications.

The STEP Support Team primarily focused on communications to providers, DDS staff, and the DDS ARPA Committees. In parallel, a communications vendor led communications for individuals who receive DDS supports and their families. The STEP Support Team coordinated with the communications vendor as necessary throughout the process.

The STEP Communications Plan outlines the targeted audiences, potential communication delivery methods, and review processes. This enabled the STEP Support Team to create a longer-term plan for upcoming communications and efficiently respond to new communications requests. The Excel spreadsheet was a key tool that DDS used to track the intended audience of a communication, the estimated timeline for dissemination, who needed to review a document, and the document status (e.g., first draft, under revision, revised draft, final draft). There were 11 potential reviewers for communications and related work products, so this tool was essential for coordinating reviews across multiple stakeholders given the volume of communications that were developed to spread awareness about STEP. DDS used this tool to get a full picture of what communications were planned across audiences while tracking who needed to review each document.

5.0 STEP Plan

5.1 Background

Based on the results of the Current State Assessment and feedback from stakeholders on the recommendations and takeaways, the STEP Support Team, in coordination with DDS leadership, developed a comprehensive STEP Plan to clearly outline outcomes, goals, and actions. The STEP Plan defines each of these elements as:

- **Actions:** Concrete implementation steps taken by DDS in collaboration with various stakeholders to achieve systemic changes.
- **Goals:** Specific strategic targets that encompass several Actions and that lead to positive outcomes for individuals.
- **Outcomes:** The desired results of achieving STEP Goals that have direct impact on individuals receiving supports.

Overall, the STEP Plan was designed to provide a roadmap to carry out DDS's commitment to supporting interested individuals to move from congregate settings to more individualized, community-based supports and to build independence based on their vision for a good life. The STEP Plan is also a transformational roadmap for DDS as an agency, outlining future priorities based on feedback, research, and stakeholder input. Once the plan was developed, DDS and the STEP Support Team used it to create an Implementation Plan to drive progress and accountability for realizing STEP outcomes.

5.2 STEP Plan Development

The STEP Plan itself is a document aimed at providers, DDS staff, and individuals that receive supports and their families to explain the purpose of STEP and how it impacts each of these groups. The STEP Support Team used elements of the Charting the LifeCourse framework to ground STEP in familiar terms and explained clearly how STEP builds on existing DDS priorities. STEP's desired Outcomes are outlined below:

1. Individuals and families considering transitions have **the outreach and support** they need to make informed decisions
2. Providers have the resources and relationships to connect individuals to **diverse employment options**
3. Individuals have more access to **assistive technology (AT) and remote supports**
4. Individuals have increased opportunities to strengthen existing and develop new **community connections**

5. Providers are **financially and strategically supported** to be creative in transformation efforts

Throughout development of the STEP Plan, DDS and the STEP Support Team worked closely with the ARPA Committees and the Executive Management Team (EMT) to refine the priorities and implementation strategy of STEP. To effectively implement STEP, DDS was cognizant of the level of effort required to realize each recommendation outlined in the Current State Assessment. In March 2023, the STEP Support Team met with DDS leaders from the regions and central office to prioritize the activities and desired outcomes of STEP based on the research from the Current State Assessment and stakeholder input. Through this process, activities were streamlined and reframed to focus on the key STEP outcomes.

Following this meeting, the STEP Support Team combined these activities into one document, the STEP Plan, and shared it widely on the DDS website. To drive accountability, DDS used the STEP Plan to develop the STEP Implementation Plan and Tracker which assign DDS owners and timelines to each of the Action Steps.

6.0 Phase 2 of STEP

Background

In Phase 2 of STEP, the STEP Support Team worked with DDS to determine areas for improvement to streamline the transformational planning and review process, to spread awareness more widely about STEP and STEP incentives, and to boost participation in TA.

Guidance Materials

As part of Phase 2 efforts to provide TA, the STEP Support Team developed a series of guidance materials intended to help providers in the plan development and submission process. These materials included:

- [The STEP Guide](#)
- [STEP Case Manager FAQ](#)
- [STEP Provider FAQ](#)
- [Provider Innovation document](#)
- [STEP Incentives QUICK Guide](#)

The STEP Guide was developed to provide an overview of STEP, as well as context around the ARPA funding and associated incentives. The document includes a section with a detailed breakdown of each incentive, including eligibility requirements, payment amounts, limits, and other considerations. In addition, there is information around:

- Applying for one-time funding as part of STEP
- Example community-based supports options to integrate throughout the planning process
- Provider Transformation Plan overview
- Plan approval process details
- Necessary transition safeguards
- Reporting requirements
- Expected results and desired outcomes

The STEP Support Team updated the guide on an iterative basis following the release of new guidance and policies.

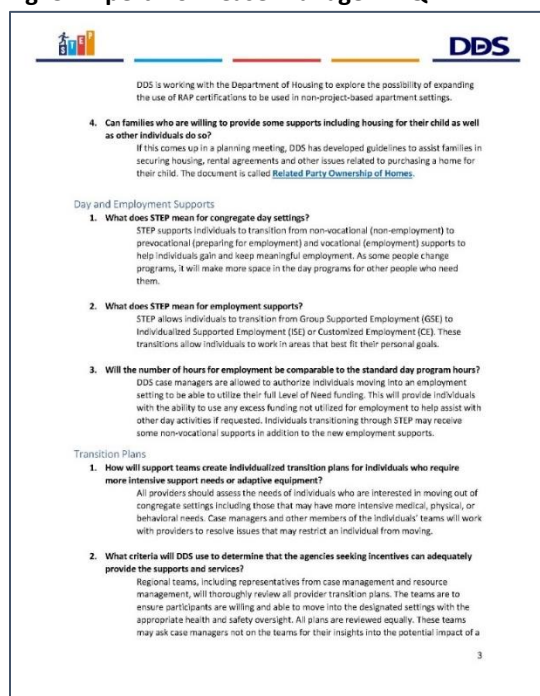
The STEP Support Team created two FAQ guides, one for providers and one for case managers. For providers, this guide was developed based on questions received during TA Office Hours and one-on-one sessions in collaboration with DDS. As TA continued, the STEP Support Team maintained the FAQ document by adding additional questions and revising previous answers as additional guidance was shared. For case managers, questions were sourced from stakeholder input sessions and other forums where DDS staff voiced questions or concerns.

Lastly, the STEP Support Team developed a STEP Innovation and Examples document to explain the STEP transformational process to providers, and to share innovative approaches and resources to help them in their planning efforts.

Fig. 4- STEP Innovation



Fig. 5- Expert from Case Manager FAQ



Educational Materials

To supplement Guidance Materials and Informational and Training Sessions, the STEP Support Team developed and released a series of Educational Materials for Case Managers and Resource Managers, providers, and DDS staff. These materials are brief overviews of upcoming STEP priorities as well as a clear distillation of each group's role and expectations for implementation.

For DDS staff, the materials make specific reference to DDS sub-teams including the Executive Management Team, PRAT, Quality and Systems Improvement, and Abuse and Neglect. In addition to the role specific responsibilities, the materials outline expectations for collaboration and participation in forums across roles.

Informational Sessions

The STEP Support team prepared materials for and facilitated a series of 90-minute STEP Informational Sessions in May 2023. The purpose of these sessions was to provide an overview of STEP and directly address questions about DDS and provider roles and expectations as part of the effort. These sessions included details around the desired STEP Outcomes and the associated benefits for people that DDS serves to contextualize some of the broader STEP efforts. These Informational Sessions were overall very well-attended, and attendees shared in a feedback survey that felt they came away with a greater understanding of STEP.

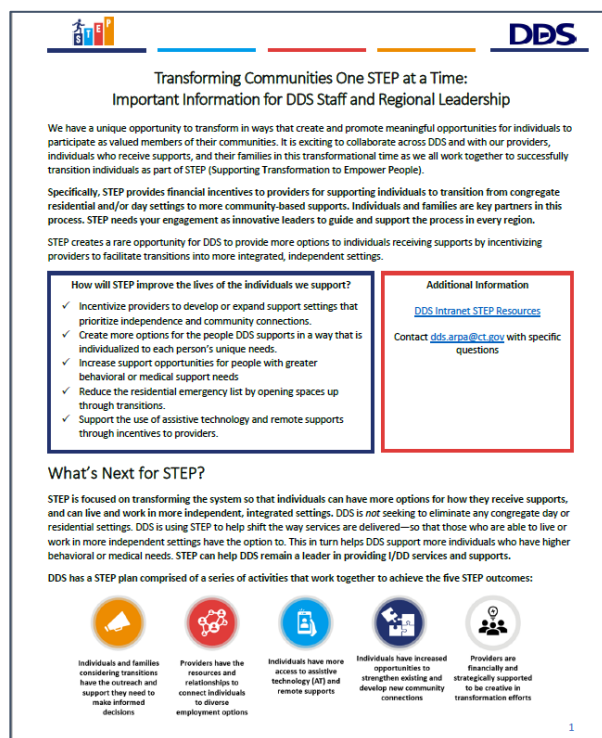


Fig. 6- - Excerpt from Educational Materials

Audience	Date	Attendees
General DDS Staff	5/15/2023	92
Case Managers and Resource Managers	5/17/2023	223
Providers	5/18/2023	42

Provider and DDS Training Sessions

To follow up on the Informational Sessions and continue momentum for STEP implementation, the STEP Support Team prepared materials for and facilitated six 60-minute Training Sessions for providers and DDS staff. Each training was focused on a specific topic, which allowed for participants to pick and choose which session they preferred to join.

STEP Provider Trainings

Session Title	Date	Attendees
Strategic Planning and Innovative Approaches	6/14/2023	62 (34 agencies)
Day Services	6/26/2023	71 (36 agencies)
Residential Services	6/29/2023	36 (21 agencies)

STEP DDS Staff Trainings

Session Title	Date	Attendees
What's the Next STEP?	6/14/2023	163 registrants (attendees not available)
Reviewer Training	6/26/2023	132
How to Support Provider Creativity	6/29/2023	180

Technical Assistance for Phase 2

As part of Phase 2, the STEP Support Team aimed to increase participation in TA from agencies that had previously expressed interest but not yet submitted a plan. The STEP Support Team used survey responses from the initial STEP survey to identify these providers and conducted individualized outreach to each agency via phone call and emails. Additionally, there was an emphasis on supporting providers that had approved plans with implementation efforts and collecting and sharing promising practices learned in implementation. From June 2023 to the end of the calendar year, the team continued to offer weekly TA Office Hours. Based on dwindling attendance at these sessions however, the approach to regular TA shifted from this model to a topic-focused webinar approach starting in January 2024. Each 60-minute session focused on a specific topic or area of interest for providers and incorporated relevant guest speakers to enhance discussion and provide peer support. The Deloitte team continued to provide one on one TA to providers throughout, ranging from brand new potential participants to agencies working through implementation challenges. In total over the course of STEP implementation, the STEP Support Team provided one on one/office hours TA support to 41 unique provider agencies, and reach over 60 unique agencies through TA Webinars.

Submitted Transformation Plans		
Provider Agency	Transition Type	Number of planned transitions
Abilis	Day	2 (Day), 3 (Residential)
Ability Beyond	Day and Residential	10 (Day), 1 (Residential)
The Arc of Eastern CT	Day and Residential	4 (Day), 3 (Residential)
The Arc of Southington	Residential	3 (Residential)
CCARC	Residential	5 (Residential)
Community Resources, Inc. (CRI)	Residential	3 (Residential)
Dungarvin	Residential	16 (Residential)
Favarh	Residential	6-10 (Day), 3 (Residential)
The Kennedy Collective	Day	41 (Day)
Kuhn Employment Opportunities	Day	10 (Day)
The Light House	Day	8 (Day)
MARC Community Resources	Day	20 (Day)
MARC, Inc. of Manchester	Day	19 (Day)
Marrakech	Day and Residential	16 (Day), 15 (Residential)
MidState Arc	Day and Residential	25 (Day), 3 (Residential)
Opportunity Works Connecticut	Day	45 (Day)
STAR, Inc.	Day	10 (Day)
UCP Eastern CT	Day	3 (Day)
Vinfen	Residential	9 (Residential)

TA Calendar

To create more transparency around TA Office Hours, the STEP Support Team developed and shared a comprehensive TA calendar each month specifying the topic of each weekly session in advance. These topics served as a kickoff each week, and then the sessions opened up for Q&A from participants.

 				
TA and Support Calendar: December For TA sessions, each week will kick off with the topic listed and then transition to open questions. All TA Office Hours are held on Tuesdays in the morning or afternoon, according to the calendar below.				
M	Tu	W	Th	F
	Click here to join TA Office hours Use this form to request 1 TA support			12/1
12/4	12/5	12/6	12/7	12/8
	TA: Individual Success Stories and FAQ Review 3-4pm			
12/11	12/12	12/13	12/14	12/15
	TA: Stakeholder Engagement and Informed Choice 10-11am			
12/18	12/19	12/20	12/21	12/22
	TA: How to use STEP incentives for agency transformation 3-4pm			
12/25	12/26	12/27	12/28	12/29
	No Session			

Fig. 7- Example of TA Calendar Layout

STEP Plan Summary Document

Throughout one on one TA sessions and office hours, the STEP Support Team heard from providers and DDS staff alike the desire for a document that summarized the approach and details of the approved STEP plans. To respond to this interest, the team reviewed each approved plan in detail and created a template to provide a one-slide snapshot of each agency's transformation. These summaries include:

- An overview of the transformation
- Key data points associated with the plan (programs transformed, individuals transitioning)
- Highlights from the plan

Fig. 8- Excerpt from Stakeholder Feedback Survey

Abilis <i>Abilis is working with two individuals who have successfully acquired competitive employment positions in the past but were unable to retain these placements and returned to their original DSO program. Both individuals continue to be interested in competitive employment, and Abilis will support them to build skills through STEP by shifting to supports that work towards employment.</i> <i>Abilis has also worked with their region and DDS to include a new residential portion of their plan that will be transitioning three individuals from CLA and CRS settings to IHS supports.</i>		Plan Highlights: Approved by agency on 1/29/2024	
Individuals Transitioning: Day/Employment: 2 Residential: 3 Programs Involved: CLA, CRS, DSO, Project SEARCH, IHS, ISE Restructuring Setting(s) No		BUILDING SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT Because these individuals have already been employed and had difficulties completing tasks, Abilis is working directly with them to identify areas for growth. The transitional program is slated for 12 months with training throughout, culminating in support to submit a job application and complete an interview. Abilis hopes that the individuals will have secured and been successful in a new role within the 12-month window with reduced support in ISE. RESIDENTIAL TRANSITION PREP During the transition process Abilis will assist individuals in building skills and comfort in regulating their unsupervised time and managing their health and safety. Supports prior to the transition will generally focus on building independence and working on the confidence of the individual while ensuring they are prepared to live in the community. The individual will begin this process in their current CRS or CLA prior to transitioning. TEAM ENGAGEMENT Abilis is taking an iterative approach to training where individuals' teams are kept informed on which modules have been completed throughout the process. Teams then have the opportunity to provide input into additional areas of trainings to address specific areas of need based on past challenges.	

The STEP Support team presented this resource to representatives from The Arc and the Alliance in December 2023, and these summaries were then shared widely with providers via Everbridge and were also highlighted during topic-focused TA webinars in January 2024. The STEP Support team updated the

document as DDS approved additional plans and coordinated with DDS to upload the resource and share the updated version with providers.

Topic-focused TA Webinars

When the new Appendix K was approved in July 2023 with new incentives and eligibility requirements for STEP participation, the STEP Support Team prepared materials for and facilitated a webinar with interested providers to highlight the changes. In 2024, based on waning participation in office hours and the success of the Appendix K session, the team replaced weekly office hours with webinars. In total, Deloitte prepared materials for, coordinated with guest speakers, and facilitated 9 TA webinars in 2023 and 2024.

Session Title	Session Description	Date
Residential Plans Walkthrough	Live walkthrough of plan summaries for approved residential providers	1/9/24
Day/Employment Plans Walkthrough	Live walkthrough of plan summaries for approved day/employment providers	1/16/24
Investing STEP Incentives	Conversation about how approved providers have used their incentives and plans for future investment	2/14/24
Earning STEP Incentives	Overview of STEP incentives and how to qualify for them	3/13/24
All Things Restructuring	Overview of restructuring efforts in STEP, new templates, and a presentation from a provider with an approved restructuring plan	3/21/24
Brushing Up on Benefits	Review of how to access and use benefits counseling resources with a presentation from BRS benefits counselors	4/9/24
Building Family Buy-in	Spotlights on providers that have been successful in using materials and forums to build family buy-in for STEP transitions	4/16/24
Creating Community Connection	Featured discussion with a provider who has implemented a business development council to create relationships with employers, followed by a discussion on best practices for creating long-term sustainable business connections for individuals	5/29/2024
Sustainable Independent Living	Discussion with the DDS Director of Housing to highlight opportunities and resources available to individuals and families to make transitions to independent living sustainable in the long-term	6/17/2024

TA Topics and Themes

In Phase 1, TA Office Hours and one on one sessions often focused on the administrative side of STEP, particularly regarding the expectations for an approved plan, how to complete the template and budget documents, and what kinds of transitions and initiatives are eligible to receive STEP incentives. Many of these questions continued into Phase 2 as new provider agencies, and new staff at engaged agencies, became active in STEP. The STEP Support Team consistently received questions about restrictions on

funding as well; whether funds had to be spent in a certain way, whether there were additional reporting requirements for providers, and whether the funds had to be spent within a period of time.

In general, providers were concerned throughout the TA process about transition details, including the timing, the requirements for a “successful” transition, the types of transitions eligible for STEP incentives, and the rules around filling program vacancies created by transitions. Common questions, or questions leading to revised DDS guidance, resulted in updates to the FAQ document and in some cases, changes in overall protocols shared at the regional level on how to evaluate and approve STEP plans.

Day and Employment transitions included initial gray area regarding incentive eligibility. For example, providers with new or existing Project SEARCH programs wanted to include individuals transitioning from GSE or ETS into Project Search in their STEP transformations. Ultimately DDS shared guidance that transitions from a congregate employment support into Project SEARCH are not incentivized, but any competitive employment a Project SEARCH participant achieved following the program would count for incentives.

With the release of the updated Appendix K in July of 2023, providers had questions on the new incentives, most prominently with restructuring settings to support individuals with greater behavioral or medical needs. Many providers expressed concern that the incentive total would not be sufficient to cover the costs of restructuring; in these cases, the STEP Support Team directed providers to additional sources of one-time funding, and non-STEP ARPA funding pools to supplement their plans.

An additional theme that surfaced in TA sessions with providers was the sustainability of transitions long-term beyond the STEP incentives. Providers especially were concerned in the context of moving from CLA settings into independent housing supports where rent, meals, and other expenses included in CLA supports would become the individual’s responsibility. This ultimately dissuaded some providers from submitting plans, but many others took full advantage of the opportunity with the understanding that they would work with DDS to find other avenues to fund their placements. In response to some of these concerns, DDS released additional guidance regarding alternative funding sources and resources including rent subsidies.

7.0 Implementation Work Plan

Background

Once the STEP Plan was finalized and distributed, the STEP Support Team prepared an Implementation Work Plan to support ongoing efforts to realize the outcomes and activities detailed in the plan. It consists of two separate documents to support implementation planning: a, Excel tool DDS staff update and use to track progress quarterly, and a PDF document with relevant background information, selected measures, and resources for implementation owners.

Implementation Worksheets

To begin this process, DDS and the STEP Support Team aligned Action Step Owners to each of the Actions outlined in the STEP Plan. The STEP Support Team developed Implementation Worksheets with relevant information each Action Step Owners to review or add including:

- Supporting activities for each Action Step
- Preliminary implementation timelines
- Resources needed
- Support team members
- Relevant reviewers
- Dependencies

Action Step owners then populated the worksheets based on their understanding of the tasks and initiatives. The STEP Support Team coordinated with DDS to collect responses to the worksheets and initiated follow up with Action Step owners as needed.

Implementation Plan Document

The Implementation Worksheets allowed Action Step Owners to have clear input into the Implementation Plan. For each STEP Outcome, the Implementation Plan lists relevant measures of success, each Goal associated with the outcome including key considerations, and support team members and reviewers for each Action Step. This is intended to be a one-stop-shop for Action Step owners. It also gives them an idea of the long-term impact for each of the STEP Goals by putting success metrics up front. In addition to the Goal and Action Step-level breakdown, this document also includes other elements to serve as a reference point for any DDS staff that assume ownership of STEP activities at any point. These elements include:

- **STEP Implementation Governance:** A graphic illustrating the decision-making hierarchy and roles and responsibilities of various stakeholder groups.
- **Communications:** Relevant communications mechanisms available to Action Step owners as they conduct outreach and share updates.
- **High-level Timeline:** A timeline that illustrates the expected completion of STEP Goals from Fiscal Year 2023 to Fiscal Year 2025.
- **Requested Resources:** A goal-by-goal summary of resources requested by Action Step owners to complete their activities.

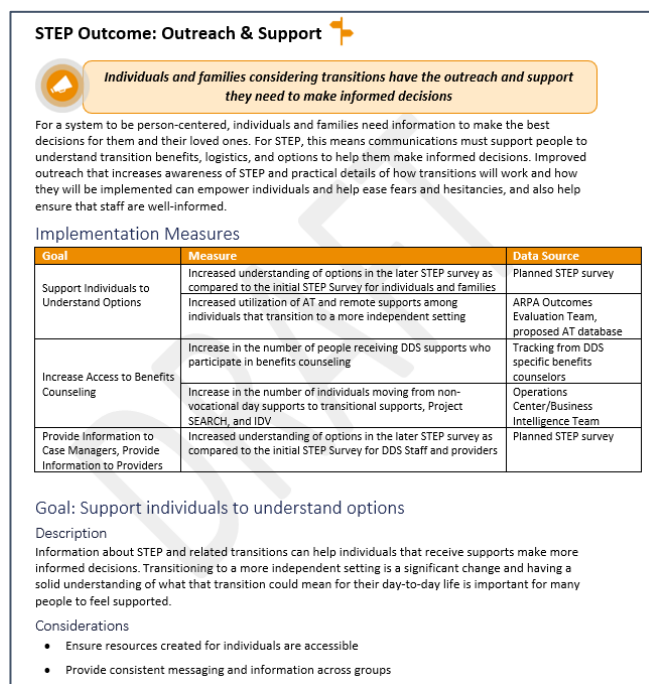


Fig. 9- Sample STEP Goal from Implementation Plan

The STEP Support Team continued to work with Action Step owners to finalize this document, and ultimately removed some Action Steps and activities based on feedback from DDS staff.

Quarterly Implementation Meetings

The STEP Support Team worked with DDS to establish a quarterly reporting cadence for STEP implementation activities. These sessions are 90-minutes long and facilitated by the STEP Lead with input provided by Action Step owners and the STEP Support Team as needed. The time during these meetings is used to:

- Report on progress and completed activities
- Identify risks and roadblocks to completion
- Adjust start and completion dates
- Identify and mitigate dependencies
- Clarify next steps and expectations for the following report-out

These meetings will continue with reduced attendance as Action Steps are completed, but for the duration of the ARPA period. Progress for these meetings and towards implementation goals was monitored through a STEP Implementation Tracker tool that the STEP Lead, in partnership with Action Step Owners, updated regularly. This tracker includes sub-activities with owners to improve accountability.

Reimagining Day Pilot

As part of supporting STEP implementation efforts, the STEP Support team engaged with the DDS Employment and Day Supports (EDS) team in their effort to move forward with the “Employment Club” concept and priority outlined in the STEP Plan. The STEP Support team scheduled and facilitated regular meetings with the EDS unit to provide structure to their efforts by clearly identifying objectives and assigning and tracking action items between meetings.

As the effort progressed, the EDS team prioritized a two-pronged approach: augmenting the existing Peer Supports waiver service and developing new Employment Exploration Opportunity (EEO) and Employment Enrichment Service (EES) models within the existing DSO support. The STEP Support team supported these efforts by:

- Documenting the objectives of the support options
- Identifying DDS’s objectives in moving the support forward
- Outlining the critical steps for implementing a pilot
- Sharing pilot funding options
- Identifying concerns and mitigation strategies
- Developing a one-pager to explain the purpose of the pilot and how to get involved

The STEP Support team worked with EDS to coordinate with the DDS Deputy Commissioner and Health Management Administrator throughout the design process to ensure that these efforts aligned with DDS’s overall priorities.

Provider Peer Learning Sessions

One of the goals outlined in the STEP Plan is to establish a recurring forum for provider peer-to-peer learning that is provider led. The STEP Support Team supported the North Regional Director to design

and stand up this forum by supporting coordination and preparation calls with provider facilitators, creating materials to support facilitation, developing discussion questions, and administering polls to source ideas for future sessions. The STEP Support team worked with the North Region Director to identify milestones and steps for long-term planning and sustainability of the forum, including developing materials templates. The DDS Provider Peer Learning Sessions launched March 22, 2024 with 41 attendees discussing Cluster In-Home Supports (IHS) and Deloitte supported planning for the second session on May 30, 2024.