

STEP TA Webinar: Investing STEP Incentives

STEP Technical Assistance Summary

February 14, 2024

Session Description

This session focused on how providers are using and planning to use STEP incentives to support strategic planning for transformation to a more person-centered, community-based approach to supports.

The two main categories of how providers can invest are:

1. Enabling and accelerating STEP transitions and growing related programs.
2. Enhancing individual choice and independence in other agency efforts.

Participants shared how they are using or planning to use STEP incentives. The group also discussed challenges and how funding could help.

Poll Results

To open the session, participants answered a poll asking, “**How far along are you in the STEP planning process?**” Most participants are actively implementing STEP Plans with others still considering whether or not to participate. See details in the table:

Haven't Started	In Progress	Submitted	Submitted and Approved
6	0	1	12

Insights from Participants



1. Staffing

SUMMARY: Providers are using STEP incentives to enhance staffing.

- Increasing staff hours and/or hiring additional staff plays a key role in supporting individuals to be competitively employed and participate in a transition program.
 - A provider shared that individuals have greatly benefited from increased staffing to support their transitions.
 - A provider plans to hire a job developer and a community liaison. These staff will provide critical links to support people to transition to integrated employment.
- Participants shared concerns about staffing shortages as a challenge to increasing staffing.
 - A provider shared their success in leveraging existing staff by moving or borrowing them from well-staffed programs to support the STEP efforts.

- Incentives can also support staff training, and DDS offers additional incentives to support some training.
 - Providers are using the training incentives to support staff through customized employment and assistive technology training. These staff are then better equipped to support STEP transitions.
 - The additional training incentives do not require an approved STEP Plan.
 - One provider shared they used incentives to develop training manuals for staff and individuals in Individualized Home Supports to consult for specific situations. An example situation is the toilet overflowing. These manuals will remain useful beyond the incentive period.



2. Transportation

SUMMARY: Providers are using incentives to address transportation challenges.

- Transportation remains a major challenge for individuals interested in transitioning to more independent and individualized supports compared to congregate supports that often include transportation.
- Providers have included purchasing a transportation van as a cost in STEP budgets in approved plans.
- Providers also plan to use incentives to support education and training for individuals on public transportation.



3. Sustainability

SUMMARY: Providers shared concerns about sustaining new efforts beyond the STEP incentives.

- An agency shared their approach to supporting transitioning individuals to become as independent as possible. They can then return to typical, or even lighter, staffing and support hours.
- Participants noted that in some cases STEP transformation builds on existing agency plans, so the incentives are a bonus even though they are time limited.
- The Technical Assistance Team noted that incentives can support program start-up costs or additional transition support. However, as providers consider their long-term plans, it is important to design programs that can be sustainable through rates.
- Assistive technology is an opportunity area where upfront investments in technology and training enable sustainable use of the support.



4. STEP Incentive Details

SUMMARY: Providers who have started using STEP incentives and the Technical Assistance Team shared advice related to the logistics and coordination.

- Providers shared that STEP does increase administrative work. Tracking transition timeframes and requesting different kinds of funding can be confusing. Working closely with regional resource managers helps.
- STEP incentives offer significant flexibility.
 - Providers may use incentive funds for any use allowable by OPM standards. They are similar to funding received for delivering services and do not require special documentation demonstrating how funds were invested.
 - Agencies will include transition costs in their STEP Plan budget. Generally, providers will not need to update these costs even if there are changes to estimated costs.
 - If a provider anticipates needing more funding than the total of their planned STEP incentives to implement their STEP Transformation Plan, they may request an additional one-time payment. Providers receiving these additional payments may need to provide additional documentation or updates to the budgeted costs.
- The incentives have to be earned by March 2025. Transitions are considered complete 60 days after the individual begins receiving the new support. Agencies do not have a deadline to spend STEP incentives.



5. Individual Employment Obstacles

SUMMARY: Providers shared that transitions to individualized supported employment (ISE) face specific challenges.

- It can be challenging for individuals to find jobs, especially jobs that are a good fit.
 - Improving education to businesses on the benefits of hiring people receiving ISE can help.
 - One provider is using STEP incentives to run a group that builds relationships with community businesses. This helps encourage them to hire people with disabilities and creates new ideas for educating other businesses.
 - DDS started a database of employers who hired, or are interested in hiring, individuals receiving ISE. This is in progress.
- Group day supports and group supported employment have routine hours for at least 30 hours a week while individual employment often starts with fewer hours and can be on weekends or evenings.
 - Families can be resistant to transitions to individual employment because of limited hours or scheduling concerns.
 - Group homes rely on individuals being out of the home during weekdays.
 - Under STEP, individuals who are transitioning to ISE may still receive other day supports during remaining hours. This helps mitigate concerns about limited supports.
 - Providers have more difficulty finding staff for ISE on evenings, weekends, and holidays, or when schedules are less consistent.
- Moving from a group support to an individual one reduces social options, but providers are looking for ways to support individuals to maintain friendships from congregate supports and build new relationships.