COLORADO OFFICE OF EMPLOYMENT FIRST
--- Work Elevated ---

Annual Performance Report
State FY20
Annual Performance Report
July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020

The Colorado Office of Employment First (COEF) is housed under JFK Partners, the state’s University Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, a program of the University of Colorado School of Medicine, which was envisioned by the Colorado Employment First Advisory Partnership (EFAP). EFAP is a multi-state agency and stakeholder-led collaborative that recommended the development of COEF to the legislature. COEF was made possible, in part, by funding from Health Care Policy & Financing and the Colorado Legislature generously matched through the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE), Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). The broad focus of COEF is to implement recommendations put forth by the EFAP.

Cover: Cesar Majalca rides his bike to his job in Alamosa where he works as a maintenance assistant. His position was the result of Customized Employment approaches delivered by his service provider Margaret Sanderson and in partnership with DVR.

The employment stories highlighted throughout this report represent the success of people with disabilities, service providers, family members and others who are shining a light on competitive integrated employment in Colorado.

employmentfirstcolorado.org
Message from the Employment First Advisory Partnership Tri-Chairs

On behalf of the tri-chairs of the Colorado Employment First Advisory Partnership (EFAP), we celebrate the first annual report of the Colorado Office of Employment First. The EFAP recommended creation of this office in 2017. It became a reality in 2019 with support from the Colorado Legislature and a strong collaborative approach by the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, and JFK Partners at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

An Office of Employment First Advisory Committee was formed to guide initial staffing and office operations. This committee met regularly and contributed significantly for 15 months to clarify the role and scope of the office and contribute to the hiring selection of the new director, Patricia Henke. Patricia joined JFK Partners on November 1, 2019 and has been razor-focused ever since on staffing as well as developing an extensive and impressive array of training products and approaches. She and her team have branded and marketed the new office and have led a number of critical Employment First initiatives. COEF procured and initiated the development of Colorado Disability Benefits 101 (DB101), a web-based employment and benefit resource tool. Other initiatives include an employment services rate methodology study and the development of communication products specifically designed for youth and families.

Realizing real work for real pay in Colorado can’t happen without considerable effort involving many state agencies and partners. Our Colorado Office of Employment First provides the coordination and technical expertise needed to move our state forward. We hope you’ll take some time to review the significant accomplishments of the office over the past year. More importantly, we hope you will stay connected to what’s coming as we all work towards a common vision of competitive integrated employment for Coloradans with disabilities.
Message from the Director

Dear Coloradans,

Thank you for the unprecedented opportunity to lead the Colorado Office of Employment First (COEF). It is an honor and a privilege to initiate operations for the COEF under the leadership of JFK Partners at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

I would like to specifically thank my colleagues with the Colorado Legislature, Colorado Employment First Advisory Partnership, Health Care Policy & Financing, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, and JFK Partners for your support and for creating the Interagency Agreement that operationalized COEF.

I am invested in the vision, mission and goals of Employment First in Colorado and dedicated to the highest level of collaboration, systems innovation, training excellence and technical assistance.

My initial weeks in the new director role were centered on recruiting and hiring the talent who believe in Employment First principles and have the passion and skills to deliver high quality training, technical assistance, program evaluation and systems innovation efforts expected by our partners and stakeholders. The COEF team is made up of thought leaders in employment topics such as Customized Employment, Individual Placement and Support, Benefits Counseling, and Youth and Family Supports -- along with subject matter experts in the areas of grant writing, evaluation and procurement. Please read more about the COEF team later in this report.
By early 2020, the team was fully assembled, curriculum was developed, training workshops for service providers were underway, measurable targets were identified, and contractors to advance the work of COEF were secured.

Then, the COVID-19 pandemic surfaced, and our day-to-day work lives were altered. Sadly, many people with disabilities who were charting the course for competitive integrated employment experienced employment losses and economic challenges. Service providers had to pivot swiftly to deliver services in new ways to maintain Colorado’s stay-at-home requirements and later, safer-at-home guidelines. And finally, spring events left all of us reckoning with systemic inequality and racial injustice in Colorado and throughout the nation.

What came next illustrated the power of a committed and perseverant team. We set up our home offices, assessed our training technology options, and returned to a modified, business-as-usual approach that has kept the EFAP’s vision of enhanced infrastructure for career seekers with disabilities moving forward. We are prioritizing diversity, equity and inclusion practices for all people in all workplaces and to further influence systems change in these areas. And, in this first performance report, we are proud to share accomplishments, project updates, and stories of success. These accomplishments are attributable to the dedicated partners in Colorado that share a vision of employment for everyone.

On behalf of the COEF team, we appreciate your support, collaboration and continued resilience and perseverance for the Employment First movement in Colorado!

Patricia Henke, MS, CRC
Director
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The COEF Advisory Committee was convened with membership from the Colorado Employment First Advisory Partnership to provide guidance and technical assistance on staffing, programming, budget and the COEF annual work plan. This committee was instrumental in COEF’s first year of start-up operations.

**Co-Chairs:**

Marilee Boylan, State Rehabilitation Council  
Bob Lawhead, Colorado Developmental Disability Council & State Rehabilitation Council

**Committee Members:**

Caitlin Adams, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Alia Andrews, Office of Behavioral Health  
Katherine Carol, parent of a person with a disability, State Rehabilitation Council  
Christina Carrillo, Department of Higher Education  
Karen Ferrington, MINDSOURCE – Brain Injury Network  
Meghan Greene, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Augusta Klimek, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Tom Knost, Continuum of Colorado  
David Mank, PhD, COEF Contractor  
Katie Oliver, Department of Education  
Corry Rosenberg, PhD, RN, JFK Partners  
Adam Tucker, Department of Health Care Policy and Financing  
Josh Winkler, Colorado Lt. Governor’s Office
About the Colorado Office of Employment First

Our vision:
A culture of inclusive, meaningful, and competitive employment for all people.

The mission that guides our work:
Leading Colorado toward equitable employment reaching all people with disabilities through –

Collaboration * Systems Innovation * Training Excellence

COEF is about changing perspectives on what it means to work, de-mystifying processes, promoting barrier-reducing policies and practices, highlighting innovative technologies, and helping employment providers implement the most effective strategies.
Office Start-Up and Operations

Beginning in July 2019, a series of important steps led up to the start of COEF. An Interagency Agreement between CDLE/DVR and JFK Partners at the University of Colorado School of Medicine was achieved along with the formation of the COEF Advisory Committee (COEFAC). The COEFAC was instrumental in the initial personnel planning process and the recommended hiring process for the director position.

On November 1, 2019, Patricia Henke assumed the leadership role over the office and hired and onboarded six key staff positions to fulfill training, program development, grant writing, evaluation and procurement functions.

Office space for the COEF staff was secured at CDLE/DVR, University policies and procedures were learned, and University contracts were developed for a number of essential organizational and program needs including school systems supports, communications and website development, branding and marketing, formal program evaluation, Employment First leadership and mentoring, and rate structure/rate methodology analysis and consultation. In addition, the vendor selection for Colorado’s first employment planning tool and benefits estimator was determined resulting in a contract with Disability Benefits 101, part of the World Institute on Disability.
Curriculum Development & Training

COEF curriculum development centered, in its first year of operations, on the following topics:

- Employment First Practices and Principles
- Customized Employment
- Individual Placement & Support
- Youth and Families
- Benefits Counseling

Subject matter experts were recruited to fill four trainer positions at COEF and the first several weeks of the 2020 calendar year were spent developing curriculum focused on evidence-based and evidence-informed principles along with the state-of-the-art approaches. Initial in-person trainings were quickly paused by the COVID-19 stay-at-home followed by safer-at-home orders in Colorado.

When it became clear that remote training would be an ongoing necessity, COEF acquired a virtual platform for use with one-time as well as multi-day training sessions.

LOOKING AHEAD: COEF is initiating the process to become certified through the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE). Once certified, COEF will begin to offer Basic Supported Employment Services training.
Training Reach

The COEF Statement of Work established the goal for reaching 100 people per session for 10 training sessions with diverse audience members to include people with disabilities and their families, services providers and educators. Interested learners and sought after training topics helped COEF reach 200% more participants.

Training Participant Goal (Year One) = 1000
Training Participants Reached (Year One) = 3077
The COVID-19 pandemic and Colorado’s associated stay-at-home requirements and later, safer-at-home guidance, resulted in a modified but successful approach of engaging learners through remote technology. COEF brought together subject matter experts from national and state agencies, CO-APSE and Colorado communities to deliver a variety of high priority topics. From April through June 2020, 1490 attendees participated in webinars. Most of the offerings were specifically developed in response to the pandemic and the economic, vocational, and psychosocial impacts.

April 2020

- Adapting Employment First Efforts to COVID19 Situation – Dr. Lisa Mills
- Providing Employment Services to People with Behavioral Health Disorders During COVID-19 – Meghan Greene, Rachel Hoard, Alia Andrews, Adam Tucker

May 2020

- Benefits Planning and COVID-19 – Melanie Honsbruch, Anne Christensen
- Resources for Families/Residential Providers Supporting Job Seekers – Teresa Nguyen, Katherine Carol
- Intro to COEF and COVID-19 Response – COEF Team

June 2020

- Leading Colorado in Discovery Services – Brian Dean, Lee Sylvester, Samantha Sweet, Lizzie Elliot, Darby Remley
- Trauma Informed Care in Uncertain Times – Rebecca Kase
- Transition from Higher Education to Employment - Perspectives of Recent Graduates & Families – Shelby Bates, Jon Dumas, Mia Barone, Ashley Mabry, Kacie Bush, Lisa Bush

All webinar recordings can be found at:
https://employmentfirstcolorado.org/general-training-information/
Employment First is an effort adopted by states to change systems and create a reality of meaningful work for all people with disabilities, including people with significant and complex disabilities.

Helping Coloradans understand Employment First philosophy and begin to understand the practices is a primary function of COEF.

In FY20, 728 individuals attended Employment First sessions.

In these trainings, participants also gain an understanding of what it means to be competitively employed in an integrated setting. Competitive integrated employment is:

- real work for real pay
- for people with disabilities who perform their jobs alongside people without disabilities
- having opportunities to advance or be promoted just like everyone else
**Individual Placement and Support Model**

*Program Lead: Deirdre Sage*

The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model is an evidence-based, international, supported employment approach for people with serious mental illness and its application is expanding throughout Colorado. In FY20, three cohorts of IPS Employment Specialist training were completed.

Colorado was selected to join five other states to collaborate with National IPS Employment Center, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) to provide technical assistance to states wanting to implement IPS. The partnership will provide practical information and specific tools to state mental health (MH) and vocational rehabilitation programs to enhance collaborations at the local and state levels in order to increase competitive, integrated employment outcomes for individuals with mental illness.

**IPS Training Participant Goal (Year One) = 40**

**IPS Training Participants Reached (Year One) = 190**

"The IPS training was extremely beneficial and informative! My team and I were able to learn about the IPS model from skilled providers, and we feel more confident in our ability to provide IPS services that meet fidelity. Our clients are clearly benefiting from the IPS model and this success was due, in no small part, to the training provided by COEF."

**Figure 2 - FY 2020 Participants of Individualized Placement and Support Model Training (N = 190)**
Customized employment is a cross-disability, evidence-informed practice resulting in positive competitive integrated employment outcomes. The practice of Customized Employment comprises two phases: Discovery and Customized Job Development. Colorado is adding a third enhancement phase, Systematic Instruction.

COEF, in partnership with Marc Gold & Associates and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, offer training and certification in each area.

The performance-based certification includes Mentorship from a qualified Mentor who is certified in Discovery, Customized Job Development, and/or Systematic Instruction.

Employment Specialists must complete performance-based certification to be qualified to provide these services through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Medicaid Home & Community-Based Waivers for Discovery, Customized Job Development and/or Systematic Instruction.

Certified providers are eligible for enhanced rates through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. COEF has partnered with Marc Gold & Associates to deliver three training cohorts in FY20.

"Discovery brought a whole other perspective of the way I think who should work, or can work. I now believe EVERYONE is able to work in their own way."
More Performance-Based Certifications

Discovery Services:
- There are currently 30 employment specialists pursuing certification in Discovery Services.
- There are currently 12 employment specialists registered to begin Discovery Performance-Based Certification in October 2020.

Customized Job Development:
- There are 21 employment specialists who will begin their performance-based certification in Customized Job Development upon completion of their Discovery performance-based certification.

COVID-19 Impact
Systematic Instruction Training

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the Systematic Instruction Training and Performance-Based Certification. Systematic instruction uses a hands-on approach. Therefore, the training must be conducted in-person to ensure attendees fully obtain the knowledge and necessary skills to move forward with the performance-based certification.

LOOKING AHEAD: COEF and DVR are continuing their partnership with Marc Gold & Associates for FY21. MG&A will conduct gateway trainings and performance-based certification opportunities for each phase: Discovery, Customized Job Development, and Systematic Instruction.
ABOUT ME
I love living with my four roommates and doing stuff like taking mini vacations with them, doing cool stuff with my Supported Community Connectors, going to work at Cosmos Pizza and spending time with family, friends and neighbors.

LIFE BEFORE EMPLOYMENT
I like pizza and I like to spend money. I learned about jobs at a pizza place and my vocational rehabilitation counselor, Lori, helped put all the pieces together.

"I knew you could do it!"
(what I tell my pre-employed self)

LIFE AFTER EMPLOYMENT
My roommates all have jobs and I do too. Cool people work at Cosmos Pizza. I get a paycheck every other week, a slice of pizza and a large Diet Coke and tips every shift.

It makes me feel good about myself. Learning new skills, learning how to use a bank, spending money for what I like. I’ve made friends with some of my coworkers. Free pizza! My boss likes me.

MY JOB QUEST
I like my boss and coworkers and I like making pizza boxes, keeping things stocked, and other jobs. I like my job consultant, Keefe. He’s a good guy and works with my boss to make sure she is happy with my work. Keefe has worked out some accommodations for me to be safer during the pandemic and lots of other things that help me learn my job.
Benefits Counseling
Program Lead: Melanie Honsbruch

Benefits Counseling is a service that helps people with disabilities and families understand how employment and other life decisions will impact their benefits.

In FY20, several statewide webinars and tailored training sessions were delivered about Benefits Counseling. COEF in partnership with DVR and Colorado APSE Benefits Subcommittee also developed COVID-19 Quick Guides on Benefits Counseling.

A contract to initiate Disability Benefits 101 (DB101), a web-based employment and benefit resource tool, was initiated in FY20 with an objective to finalize and disseminate the tool by Fall 2021.

DB101 will include benefits estimators which will encourage exploration of how work and benefits interact.

“HOLY CATS!! Thank you so much for all of this information. I am almost finished listening to the entire webinar and can’t thank ya’ll enough for this email. I couldn’t wait to share it with my team and several parents of students/young adults with disabilities. Wonderful webinar! Thank you!!”
LIFE BEFORE EMPLOYMENT

I am a single mom to a 9 year old boy, and Colorado has been my home for 28 years. I left my abusive husband when I was seven weeks pregnant. When my son started preschool, I started college with help from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation because I knew I could not support us on minimum wage.

I finished my internship hours with Connections for Independent Living, and they hired me full time.

LIFE AFTER EMPLOYMENT

My job gives me the flexibility to make all of my appointments for my mental health and physical health.

I was on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) when I started at Connection for Independent Living, but I managed to work my way off after receiving benefits counseling. When I was on SSDI, I was supporting my son and I on about $900 a month. Now that I am working, I actually earn enough that I was able to buy my first-ever, brand new car in 2018 and get off of welfare.

Employment has shown me that I can be a productive member of society even if I have a mental illness. I still have down days. I still have up days. And I get on-going support from an Employment Network program at the Center for People with Disabilities in Boulder. I have made some great coworker relationships since I've been at Connections.

TO MY PRE-EMPLOYED SELF, I SAY:

"You can do it! Working will make you feel so much better about yourself and you will be able to afford little things that you couldn’t afford before."
COEF and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) partnered in FY20 to build capacity in youth services by securing a transition-focused consultant to align COEF's work with state agencies, schools, families and youth to ensure consistent messaging and training was occurring throughout the state.

The importance of this work was emphasized in the EFAP Strategic Plan recommending that Colorado prepare students and youth with disabilities for the world of work through CDE. Specifically, the plan calls for the development of practices that reflect a presumption that all persons with significant disabilities are capable of full participation in competitive integrated employment and community life and promote a vision and a culture throughout CDE. Local Education Agencies (LEA's) are expected to cultivate best practices by educators that result in the outcomes of individual competitive employment or enrollment in post-secondary options.

In FY20, Jennifer Stewart of Breaking Expectations, LLC, collaborated with COEF, CDE and DVR to understand the barriers and the needs of preparing youth with disabilities for employment by facilitating a series of community listening sessions. The goal of the sessions was to gather input and develop a strategic plan to address the gaps where schools, families, and other partners need more support. Participants included parents, advocates, educators, state agencies and community providers.

**Youth Listening Sessions/Planning**

In the month of April 2020, over 140 people participated in 4 virtual community listening sessions to get input from stakeholders around employment supports and services for youth with disabilities during the high school years.
Three key areas were identified among several themes that emerged in the sessions and these resulted in a roadmap for COEF efforts in conjunction with the Colorado Department of Education and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

- **Expectations of Employment** -- facilitate the expectation of work among younger students as well as their families
- **Transition and Employment Expertise** -- build capacity of transition expertise within schools and districts
- **Coordination of Services** -- achieve clarity on who and how services and supports are coordinated

Since the Community Listening Sessions, COEF has participated in efforts by CDE and DVR to coordinate a state level team to sequence services and outcomes for students with disabilities. The goal is to promote systems improvement, collaborate to create, disseminate and align best practice resources and systems knowledge to ensure each and every student with disabilities have individualized access to any and all available tools and resources to achieve successful post-school outcomes. Through this statewide team, COEF is disseminating youth and family brochures and promoting training for educators around high expectations for competitive integrated employment.
Family Engagement Workgroup

In FY20, COEF helped to initiate development of a pilot to form a family engagement workgroup in Denver, CO. The concept involves getting resources to families of youth and young adults with disabilities that may have limited exposure to Colorado systems leading to competitive integrated employment. COEF, state agency partners, EFAP and community partners convened to consider target audiences for initial surveys to better understand gaps in services and knowledge of services.

Youth and Families Initiatives

COEF partnered with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and contributed to development of strategic partnership goals for their economic mobility state public health priority and Maternal Child Health plans. They will be adding disability employment into their economic mobility priority.

And in FY20, COEF staff partnered with the Children’s Hospital Transition Leadership Team to plan for the development of a parent and family facing website for transition resources. COEF will be contributing by recommending content about community employment resources and facilitating these conversations in the healthcare setting.

Number of FY20 Youth & Families Training Participants

437
GROWING UP AND MY WORK EXPERIENCES
My mother always told me I had to work. When I was sixteen I began working summer jobs. My first job was at the Botanical Gardens in Denver. I used my communication device to answer questions kids would have as they toured the Children’s Garden.

MY EMPLOYMENT QUEST
My mother was a huge help. She learned about setting up a PASS Plan for me with the help of David Hammis from Griffin-Hammis, LLC. Later, Molly Sullivan for GHA, helped me and my mom navigate those benefits. My mom hired me into her consulting business and that is when I started traveling around the country presenting at all kinds of conferences about transition and technology. I was well paid for my speaking and often sold my line of bracelets along the way. I received some help from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to purchase my computer, and I received job development support through the Supported Living Waiver.

MY EMPLOYMENT TODAY
I continue to adapt to the changing world. I’ve had help to set up a podcast and website, www.TheShiningBeautifulSeries.com. I like to work and make money! Getting some cold, hard cash for my creations is one of the best feelings ever! Because of my work, I have better healthcare coverage. When people first meet me they only see my disability. But, once I give them a business card and my podcast postcard, my disability disappears and we talk business. Love that.

"I was lucky. I just grew up with high expectations and big goals."
Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

COEF provides technical assistance on Employment First in three categories: individual, organizational and statewide. While technical assistance topics are very broad, a few examples of 2020 technical assistance provided include:

- Individuals -- people with disabilities and family members, service providers
- Organizational -- community service providers, DVR Competitive Integrated Employment unit
- Statewide -- IPS conference planning, Communities of Practice

Figure 5 - COEF Technical Assistance by Type (N = 102)

Service providers for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) have been frequent recipients of COEF technical assistance particularly in the areas of sub-minimum wage, competitive integrated employment and Customized Employment implementation. In addition, community mental health centers and community services providers requested technical assistance on Individual Placement and Support (IPS), IPS expansion, evidence-based and evidence-informed practices and benefits counseling.
Coordination, Evaluation & Monitoring

Convening state agencies and partners on policies and practices is essential to achieve an Employment First vision in Colorado. In its role, COEF is able to utilize and capitalize on state resources and funding to create new opportunities as well as efficiencies. As an example, through COEF and HCPF collaborative efforts, service providers are now able to receive reimbursement for becoming trained in IPS.

In FY20, COEF led collaborative efforts in the areas of IPS, Customized Employment and Benefits Planning within Colorado and nationally.

COORDINATION

IPS Leadership Team

The delivery of sound and effective IPS services requires consistent roles and uniformity of service delivery based on model principles. COEF brought together the IPS Leadership Team and facilitated decision making on roles/responsibilities for training, technical assistance, and fidelity reviews across state agencies.

Customized Employment Community of Practice

A Customized Employment Community of Practice was initiated to assure on-going learning for trained & certified providers. The Customized Employment Community of Practice is held every 45 days for employment specialists pursuing certification in Discovery and Customized Job Development. The Community of Practice is facilitated by COEF, in partnership with two
Coordination, Evaluation & Monitoring

employment specialists, who are certified in both Discovery and Customized Job Development and are in-training to become Customized Employment Mentors for Colorado.

Benefits Counseling Collaborative

COEF continued to convene the Benefits Counseling Collaborative, a bi-monthly meeting of certified benefits counseling professionals. This Collaborative has the purpose of providing a technical assistance opportunity for providers, discussion of effective and efficient service provision through the DVR system, and discussion of “what is happening” in the field of Benefits Counseling within Colorado.

Rate Structures/Rate Methodology

COEF has contracted with a national subject matter expert to focus on rate structure and methodology development to align with Employment First strategies and approaches. This project will help fulfill recommendations from the EFAP Strategic Plan. In FY20, 25 service provider organizations were engaged to initiate this Colorado study.

EVALUATION & MONITORING

EFAP Strategic Recommendations

COEF, in its role of tracking EFAP recommendations, has met with all state agencies to document progress on their strategic recommendations and strategies. Additionally, in collaboration with an EFAP workgroup, COEF conducted a review of the shared EFAP strategic recommendations to inform future planning.
Coordination, Evaluation & Monitoring

Data and Outcomes Workgroup

COEF staff worked with state agencies and partners in FY20 to gather baseline data and develop data collection strategies for the six targeted data measures as specified by the Joint Budget Committee:

- Increased number of individuals working in competitive integrated employment
- Decreased number of individuals working in sub-minimum wage employment
- Decreased number of individuals working in non-integrated employment settings
- Increased number of skilled and competent staff that are knowledgeable about Employment First principles and practices
- Increased number of partners, families, and other stakeholders trained in areas of supported employment and benefits counseling
- Increased number of new contracts implementing Individual Placement and Support (IPS) in new disability populations, such as Intellectual and Developmental Disability and Traumatic Brain Injury (or co-occurring)

For specific details on the targeted data measures including baseline data points and quarterly updates, visit the Data and Reports page of the COEF website.

COEF facilitated investigation into opportunities to develop data sharing agreements with EFAP state agencies to maximize efficiency in data collection and analysis.
The COEF team is committed to the Employment First initiatives in Colorado being sustainable. The full COEF Sustainability Plan and Report can be viewed here. The report includes contributions from Dr. David Mank, the COEF Team, an EFAP Sustainability Brainstorming Discussion, the COEF Program Evaluation Report and the DVR Finance and Operations Team. The report outlines the importance of each of the following areas:

1) Focus on a Strategic Vision
2) Documentation of Internal Training, Technical Assistance and Projects
3) Personnel & Contractors
4) Finances / Budget
5) Creating Value & Evaluation of Progress
6) Awareness / Responsiveness to External Factors

The following are Employment First sustainability efforts that occurred through June 30, 2020 and were not highlighted in the COEF Sustainability Plan and Report:

- Visionary Opportunities for Integrated & Competitive Employment (VOICE) project through Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) – Colorado received national subject matter expertise to advance infrastructure and align systems for Supported Employment Services for individuals with Behavioral Health and Co-Occurring Disorders. VOICE project partners included:

  - Health Care Policy & Financing
  - Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
  - Office of Behavioral Health
  - MINDSOURCE - Brain Injury Network
  - Easterseals Colorado
  - Mental Health Center of Denver
  - Aurora Mental Health
  - Jefferson Center for Mental Health
  - North Range Behavioral Health
COEF has focused on growing strong partnerships with other organizations and universities to expand sustainability opportunities. Colorado State University and Children’s Hospital Colorado have submitted grant applications that include COEF in budget narratives.

**Colorado Customized Employment**

Colorado is partnering with MG&A to develop an in-state model for training and performance based certification in Discovery, Customized Job Development and Systematic Instruction. MG&A will be training interested, qualified and selected employment specialists to become Colorado Mentors and Trainers in each area.

**LOOKING AHEAD:** COEF will be working closely with JFK Partners in FY21 to expand its involvement in research, publications, and grant writing within the University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs). Additionally, COEF will continue its outreach and collaboration with other UCEDDs and national partners.
Communications & Outreach

During FY 2020, COEF communication efforts focused on initial branding, message development and marketing collateral development along with website planning for an official COEF site as well as Disability Benefits 101 (DB101). The office contracted professional services to accomplish communications and content development as well as creative design and product development.

Deliverables included a staff and stakeholder-led process of defining the vision, mission, and belief statements for COEF, logo development and an associated brand guide, outreach collateral to include rack cards, presentation templates, social media artwork, business cards, email templates, and stand-up banners.

Initial planning for the COEF and DB-101 websites, including vendor selection and project scoping, was accomplished as well as a COEF landing web page and initial content development for a first phase of website launch.

The first COEF newsletter was published in June and highlighted the new brand -- logo, brand colors, and messaging. The platform for newsletter creation was determined as Mailchimp for ease of use, growth potential, and reasonable monthly cost. A Mailchimp registration process was created and added to the COEF landing page.

At the time of the inaugural newsletter launch, the list serve size was 789 and grew roughly 20% to 945 by the end of June. Since June, Mailchimp is used to advertise all trainings and webinars that are open to the public.
The Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) shifted from a planned, national conference taking place in Denver to its first-ever virtual conference in response to COVID.

COEF was a major sponsor of the six-week conference and helped kick off the event in June 2020. Four key sessions were delivered by Colorado Employment First (EF) partners from a variety of agencies, community providers and stakeholders.

- Employment First in Colorado: Effective Partnerships Lead to Innovative Services. Colorado EF Presenters -- Adam Tucker, Meghan Greene & Patricia Henke
- Technology, Employment First, and a Changing Landscape: An APSE Conversation. Colorado EF Presenters: Katherine Carol & Patricia Henke
- Employment First Initiatives developed through Grassroots Advocacy: Colorado’s Story. Colorado EF Presenters: Marilee Boylan & Robert Lawhead
- Creating a Culture Fit for Change. How Diverse Leadership Galvanized Colorado’s Employment First Initiative. Colorado EF Presenters -- Katherine Carol & Kristin Corash

During the conference, the National APSE recognized Bob Lawhead, policy analyst with the Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council (CDDC) and co-chair of the Employment First Advisory Partnership (EFAP), with the APSE Torch Award. This award recognizes the lifetime accomplishments of an individual. The prestigious award isn’t given on an annual basis, only when warranted.
Financial

In FY20, nearly 40% of the COEF total budget was expended despite a delayed director hiring action and subsequent, late operational start. The director was hired on November 1st and the office did not become fully staffed until March 1, 2020. A carry-over option was available to the office and 75% of carry-over funds were fully obligated at the end of April 2020. Initiative concepts for FY21 will be considered with input from EFAP and finalized in order to encumber the remaining budget.

FY20 Total Budget $1,668,380

Carry-Over $871,454

Figure 6 -FY20 Budget and Expenditures
The primary theme throughout this annual report and inside each initiative was **partnership and collaboration**. State agency partners, service provider partners, stakeholder and community partners, including our career seeking partners and their families, helped create the momentum in year one of COEF. Through these collaborations, the office has planned start-up operations, has set targets and benchmarks, has focused on the policies and processes to evaluate and update, and most importantly, has prioritized training that matters to achieve competitive integrated employment for all Coloradans.

Intentional, strategic partnerships and collaborations have led us to this moment in time. Continuing this theme in practice through growing current relationships and building new relationships is essential to the Employment First road forward. With the shared vision of Employment First, moving the needle is not only possible, it is certain.

Thank you for spending time reflecting on year one of the Colorado Office of Employment First in this report, and we invite you to look for ways to become involved and engaged in the mission.

Visit our website: [www.employmentfirstcolorado.org](http://www.employmentfirstcolorado.org)
Check out COEF Facebook and Instagram: [@coeftalk](http://www.facebook.com/)
Subscribe to our newsletter: [http://eepurl.com/g4Ttdr](http://eepurl.com/g4Ttdr)

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.

-- Helen Keller