



# Researching Provider Solutions in Florida

Deliverable 4: Final Report for the  
Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.

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## Acronyms

|         |                                                                            |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AI      | artificial intelligence                                                    |
| APD     | Agency for Persons with Disabilities                                       |
| ARPA    | American Rescue Plan Act                                                   |
| CMS     | Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services                                   |
| DSP     | direct support professional                                                |
| DSPaths | Direct Support Professional Advancement through Training in Human Services |
| FDDC    | Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.                           |
| HCBS    | home and community based services                                          |
| IDD     | intellectual and developmental disabilities                                |
| NADD    | National Association for the Dually Diagnosed                              |
| NADSP   | National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals                         |
| RPS     | Researching Provider Solutions                                             |
| SUNY    | State University of New York                                               |
| TAP     | Training Assessment Program                                                |

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## Executive Summary

### Background

In 2023, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. (FDDC) contracted Mathematica to conduct the Researching Provider Solutions (RPS) project. RPS project goals are to help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families find and retain their own direct care support and to address challenges faced by the direct support professional (DSP) workforce. Building on our prior work, Mathematica conducted a mixed-methods study in Year 4 of RPS to identify DSP training programs in a variety of settings both in Florida and nationally. The Year 4 study addresses the following research questions:

1. What existing DSP training programs are available in Florida and nationally?
2. What characteristics of DSP training programs would most effectively support workforce recruitment, service quality, and retention in Florida?
3. Which DSP training programs are most appropriate for implementation in Florida?
4. What strategies could the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) use to support the funding and implementation of DSP training programs in Florida?

### Scope and approach

As part of the RPS project, Mathematica conducted an environmental scan, interviewed experts, and held stakeholder work groups to understand Florida's current DSP landscape, identify promising workforce development approaches, and draft recommendations for strengthening DSP training and retention in Florida. The findings highlighted successful approaches and considerations for adapting workforce strategies to meet Florida's needs.

### Key findings and recommendations

The training programs identified through the environmental scan and expert interviews reflected a range of approaches to DSP workforce preparation and professional development, including registered DSP apprenticeships, DSP credentialing programs, supervisor credentialing programs, college certification programs, internship programs, and non-credential DSP programs.

DSP training programs can take many forms, but all require decisions about six core elements. These elements and recommended design characteristics for each to best address workforce needs and priorities in Florida are outlined below:

- **Intended audience:** Prioritize existing DSPs for retention and professional development and ensure DSPs in different employment settings can access training opportunities.
- **Training responsibility:** Understand who is responsible for designing, procuring, and/or administering the training component of a program.
- **Training curriculum:** Align training with nationally recognized DSP competency standards and established curricula.

- **Training mode:** Balance accessibility of the location and medium with which students access training (online modules, in-person classes, or a hybrid option), with opportunities for mentorship, peer interactions, and career development.
- **Certifications:** Offer certifications to support career development.
- **Incentives:** Pair training and certifications with meaningful incentives, including increased compensation.

Based on the research findings, we recommend implementing two program models in Florida: (1) a DSP credentialing program and (2) a college certificate program. A DSP credentialing program would give DSPs a way to earn and demonstrate credentials, providing them a structured pathway for professional advancement. A college certificate program would provide a pathway for developing and recognizing DSP skills while creating opportunities to connect workforce training to college education and career advancement.

Our recommendations also include a road map for successfully implementing a DSP training program in Florida. This includes building relationships and consensus with key stakeholders, piloting the program, and creating pathways to sustain and expand the program through Medicaid rate add-ons, value-based payment strategies, and other funding mechanisms. Additional strategies include proactively engaging employer partners, providing strong supports for program participants, and collecting data to measure program success.

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## I. Introduction

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have the right to live in a community setting if their care can be reasonably provided in that setting (Olmstead v. L.C., 1999). To live in a community setting, people with IDD often require direct support services, such as housekeeping, medication management, or transportation to appointments. In addition to family members and friends, people with IDD rely on paid direct support professionals (DSPs) to provide direct support services. DSPs play an integral role in the personal care, safety, and social integration of people with IDD.

However, low pay and benefits for DSPs have resulted in high turnover and an unskilled DSP workforce, leading to a shortage of qualified DSPs (Ipsen, 2025). In Florida, this DSP shortage has created challenges for people with IDD and their families as they struggle to find assistance to assure their health and well-being. To ensure people with IDD can remain in the most integrated setting possible, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. (FDDC) made increasing the pool of certified DSPs for families a priority in its Five-Year State Plan (2022–2026).

In 2023, FDDC contracted Mathematica to conduct the Researching Provider Solutions (RPS) project. RPS project goals are to help people with IDD and their families find and retain their own direct care support and to address challenges faced by the DSP workforce. In Years 1–3 of RPS, Mathematica conducted several research tasks to generate information and identify possible policy solutions.

- **In Year 1**, Mathematica conducted a [review of articles in peer reviewed journals, government reports, and relevant websites](#) to locate information about strategies that could help people with IDD and their families recruit and retain DSPs. The summary includes information about the evidence and solutions implemented. Mathematica also worked with FDDC to complete a [mixed-methods research study](#) to understand how people in Florida access personal supports from DSPs when they are not receiving home and community based services (HCBS) from Medicaid. Mathematica surveyed and interviewed individuals with IDD and their family members to understand how they recruited and retained DSPs. This research focused on three groups: (1) those receiving services through Florida’s Consumer-Directed-Care Plus program, (2) those pre-registered with Florida’s Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) who were not yet receiving services, and (3) those unknown to APD.
- **In Year 2**, Mathematica conducted a scan of recently passed legislation in Florida and other states that focused on strengthening the DSP labor force. Mathematica also conducted focus groups with people with IDD and their caregivers to gather community reactions about potential solutions described in the legislation. This research resulted in a set of recommendations to enhance the DSP workforce in Florida.
- **In Year 3**, Mathematica developed a [mixed-methods research report](#) on DSP experiences in Florida. We surveyed agency-employed DSPs about their training, compensation, experiences on the job, and impressions of some potential reforms. We also conducted focus groups with consumer-directed DSPs to learn how their experiences might differ and hear their perspectives on recruitment and retention in their field.

## A. Year 4 research activities

For the current RPS year (Year 4), Mathematica built on its prior work to conduct a mixed-methods study to identify DSP training programs in a variety of settings both in Florida and nationally. The Year 4 study addresses the following research questions:

- What existing DSP training programs are available in Florida and nationally?
- What characteristics of DSP training programs would most effectively support workforce recruitment, service quality, and retention in Florida?
- Which DSP training programs are most appropriate for implementation in Florida?
- What strategies could the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) use to support the funding and implementation of DSP training programs in Florida?

Drawing on a national environmental scan of DSP programs and interviews with DSP program leaders and experts in Florida and other states, Mathematica submitted a preliminary findings report to FDDC describing DSP training program characteristics and implementation strategies.

Building on our preliminary findings, this final report synthesizes program characteristics and provides recommendations for FDDC implementation of DSP training programs in Florida. These recommendations, if implemented, should result in DSP training that supports FDDC's goals of retention and professionalization. Over time, a stronger DSP workforce will expand access to services for people with IDD and their families and caregivers.

## B. Report road map

For this report, we organized our research findings and recommendations as follows:

- **Chapter II (Methods).** We describe the research methods for the environmental scan, interviews with DSP training program leaders, and the stakeholder work groups.
- **Chapter III (Findings).** We discuss the research findings. We provide an overview of the national DSP training program landscape and common DSP training program models, such as registered DSP apprenticeships, DSP credentialing programs, supervisor credentialing programs, college certification programs, internship programs, and non-credential DSP programs. We also identify promising program design components, including intended audience, training responsibility, training curriculum, training mode, certifications offered, and incentives.
- **Chapter IV (Recommendations).** We provide recommendations for each program design category (intended audience, training responsibility, training curriculum, training mode, certifications offered, and incentives) to most effectively support workforce recruitment and retention as well as service quality in Florida. We also recommend two potential training models: (1) a DSP credentialing program and (2) a college certificate program. For each model, we discuss advantages and disadvantages, conditions for feasible implementation in Florida, and different options for specific program design features. We also include case studies from other states. In addition, we include an implementation road map with recommended strategies for supporting the funding and implementation of DSP training programs in Florida. We also highlight effective implementation strategies, including building

relationships with stakeholders, supporting program participants, and collecting and reporting program data to measure success.

- **Chapter V (Other Interventions).** We describe other promising interventions beyond DSP training programs that could improve DSP retention and quality of care in Florida.
- **Chapter VI (Conclusion).** We conclude the report with future considerations for FDDC.

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## II. Methods

### A. Environmental scan

Mathematica conducted an environmental scan from December 2025 through February 2026 to identify DSP training programs and initiatives available through state agencies, high schools, postsecondary institutions, professional organizations, and provider agencies within and outside of Florida. We used a three-pronged strategy for the search: (1) a targeted search of organizational websites, (2) a broader artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled search to identify additional state-specific programs and offerings not captured in the targeted organizational search criteria, and (3) a targeted review of programs accredited through the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) and programs identified through prior RPS research, the FDDC, or the RPS Work Group of organizational representatives and community members. See Appendix A for details about the environmental scan search strategy, including search terms, websites, and features of the AI-enabled search.

We screened for training programs or initiatives that met the following criteria:

- Located in the United States
- Offered within the past five years
- Designed for individuals who work as DSPs or in analogous roles (excluded social workers, case managers, support coordinators, and certified nursing assistants)
- Not limited to meeting minimum state qualifications or employment requirements

We identified 38 programs that met these criteria. We then reviewed publicly available information on each program and entered the details into a spreadsheet for analysis. The spreadsheet captured information about program description, intended audience, program content, delivery mode, cost and time to complete, funding mechanisms, outcomes, and other quality indicators.

This report summarizes the environmental scan findings, including program models, program curricula, intended audiences, implementation partnerships, funding streams and incentives, and program quality and outcomes. See Appendix B for a summary of each identified program (organized by program model).

### B. Interviews with program leaders and implementation partners

Building on our findings from the environmental scan of existing program models, we conducted seven one-hour, semi-structured interviews in May through June 2026 with program leaders and implementation partners of DSP training and certification programs. Through these interviews, we gathered information and feedback to better understand program design and implementation. We then analyzed this interview feedback to assess the feasibility of implementing and supporting similar approaches in Florida.

For this process, Mathematica prioritized learning about programs that had (a) evidence of effectiveness, (b) piloted multiple approaches, and (c) been sustained or expanded after demonstrations. The seven DSP training programs selected for program leader and implementation partner interviews fell into the following four categories:

1. DSP credentialing programs
2. Supervisor credentialing programs
3. Registered DSP apprenticeship programs
4. DSP internship programs

We contacted program leaders and their implementation partners for potential interviews through email using communications approved by FDDC. Interview discussion focused on three topics: (1) program design and structure, (2) implementation, and (3) outcomes and effectiveness. This included discussions about the DSP training program's target populations, curriculum and training delivery, program history, funding, challenges and facilitators during implementation, and approaches to measuring outcomes. See Appendix C for the interview protocol Mathematica used to guide these discussions.

Additionally, in June 2026, Mathematica held three, thirty-minute conversations with state agency partners (identified in partnership with the FDDC) to build on findings from the program leader and implementation partner interviews.

In Exhibit II.1, we present information on the DSP training programs represented in the interviews, including program category, number of programs in each category, and state characteristics where the program is implemented. We conducted 10 interviews with stakeholders representing several DSP training program models and a geographically diverse set of states. We describe each state the program operates in by geographic location, rural/urban classification, and the percentage of the population with public or private health care insurance coverage, which demonstrates the size of the uninsured population with potentially unmet health needs in the state.

**Exhibit II.1.** Programs selected for interviews and program category: Program type and state characteristics

| Program category                                              | Number of interviews | State characteristics of selected programs                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DSP credentialing and supervisor credentialing program leader | 2                    | A northeastern, urbanized state with a high level of health insurance coverage.<br>A midwestern, moderately urbanized state with a medium level of health insurance coverage.        |
| DSP credentialing program leader                              | 2                    | A western, moderately rural state with a low level of health insurance coverage.<br>A southern, moderately urbanized state with a relatively low level of health insurance coverage. |
| Registered DSP apprenticeship program leader                  | 1                    | A southern, moderately rural state with a low level of health insurance coverage.                                                                                                    |
| DSP internship program                                        | 1                    | A western, moderately urbanized state, with a high level of health insurance coverage.                                                                                               |
| Registered apprenticeship and DSP internship program leader   | 1                    | A southern, moderately urbanized state, with a medium level of health insurance coverage.                                                                                            |

| Program category                      | Number of interviews | State characteristics of selected programs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DD council members and state partners | 3                    | <p>A western, urbanized state with a medium level of health insurance coverage.</p> <p>A midwestern, moderately rural state with a medium level of health insurance coverage.</p> <p>A southern, moderately rural state with a low level of health insurance coverage.</p> |

Source: [Urban and rural](#) status derived from 2020 Census data. [Health insurance coverage](#) derived from 2024 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year data.

DSP = direct support professional; FDDC = Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.

## C. Work groups

To gather feedback on the project analyses and findings, Mathematica formed a work group involving organizational representatives and community members. In collaboration with the FDDC, we identified and contacted potential work group members, including self-advocates, caregivers, and representatives of DSP employment agencies. Starting in 2023, work group members received email messages once per quarter about project activities and participated in virtual meetings once per quarter.

In Year 4, the work group held three meetings to gather input about the research and recommendation development process. Based on their professional and lived experiences, work group members reviewed and provided feedback on Mathematica's research methods, findings, and final recommendations to FDDC. These meetings took place between December 2025 and August 2026. (See Exhibit II.2.)

### Exhibit II.2. Summary of work groups held in Year 4

| Year 4 work groups           | Work group agenda items                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| December 2025: Work group #9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gathered work group input on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental scan focus and scope, including specific programs to include</li> <li>Training program components that should be considered to determine program quality</li> <li>Factors that would make a training program effective in Florida</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| March 2026: Work group #10   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussed environmental scan findings on DSP training programs and solicited work group feedback on our interpretation of the findings</li> <li>Gathered work group input on plans for upcoming interviews, including training models to prioritize and the focus of interview questions</li> </ul>                                                       |
| August 2026: Work group #11  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gathered work group feedback on three potential DSP training program ideas, including tradeoffs involved with specific design considerations</li> <li>Discussed implementation concerns and considerations for potential training programs in Florida</li> </ul>                                                                                          |

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## III. Findings

### A. Overview of DSP program landscape

The training programs identified in the environmental scan and the expert interviews reflected a range of approaches to DSP workforce preparation and professional development. Though program models vary in structure and implementation, many draw from common competency frameworks and combine training, work experience, and credentialing in different ways. We identified six common models of DSP training programs, which are described below.

- 1. DSP credentialing programs.** This approach provides DSPs a structured pathway to demonstrate their experience and skills and earn professional credentials. Such programs typically combine the training curriculum with a process for demonstrating competencies through exams, self-assessments, or documentation of work experience. Some of these programs serve primarily as a credentialing framework, establishing competency requirements and assessing DSPs who complete training through approved training providers. Others combine training and credentialing; they provide the curriculum DSPs complete as part of their credentialing process. Many programs align with nationally recognized competency frameworks, including the NADSP Competency Areas and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Core Competencies for the Direct Service Workforce (CMS Core Competencies). DSP credentialing programs often focus on DSPs with previous workforce experience and are designed to support professional development, retention, and career advancement. Some offer tiered or stackable credentials that allow DSPs to progress through multiple certification levels.
- 2. College certificate programs.** These programs offer structured DSP education through community colleges, technical colleges, or other postsecondary institutions. Participants complete a defined set of courses and, depending on the program, earn a certificate, college credits, or both. Programs may operate independently through a college or be developed in a partnership between colleges, state agencies, and provider agencies or industry groups. Although college certificate programs share characteristics with other DSP credentialing programs, we categorize them as a distinct model because their training is embedded in a postsecondary education system and can provide participants with credits that contribute to additional certificates or degrees.
- 3. Supervisor credentialing programs.** These programs extend the credentialing model to frontline DSP supervisors. They typically supplement core DSP competency training modules with training on the competencies needed to supervise and support DSP staff, including leadership, staff development, coaching, and service quality. Such programs may serve current frontline supervisors or experienced DSPs trying to move into supervisory positions. They can operate as stand-alone programs or as part of a broader credentialing pathway that offers DSPs opportunities to advance into leadership positions.
- 4. Registered DSP apprenticeships.** These programs combine paid employment with structured on-the-job learning and classroom-based education. They are registered with the U.S. Department of Labor and must meet federal apprenticeship requirements and applicable state requirements. They are also reviewed and approved by the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP). Apprenticeship programs may require established hours of on-the-job training or use competency-based approaches. They typically involve employers in training, supervision, and mentorship. In

addition, apprenticeships must establish a wage schedule that connects skill development and demonstrated progress with wage increases and opportunities for career advancement; this schedule must include a starting wage and two wage increases tied to specific milestones.

- 5. Internship programs.** DSP internships emphasize hands-on experience and exposure to direct support work, but they typically involve less classroom-based education than apprenticeships and credentialing programs. Unlike registered apprenticeships, internship programs do not need to meet a specific set of federal apprenticeship standards. They generally focus on prospective or entry-level workers, including high school and college students, and provide opportunities to learn about DSP careers through supervised workplace experiences. Some programs link participation to school or educational requirements, creating an entry point into the DSP workforce. This model also includes pre-apprenticeship programs, which prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a registered apprenticeship program.
- 6. Non-credential DSP trainings.** This approach includes training opportunities that build DSP knowledge and skills but do not result in a competency-based professional credential. This model can include individual courses, continuing education units, required workplace training, and multicourse training series. Training can be provided by employers, state agencies, professional organizations, or national training platforms and can be delivered in person, virtually, or through a hybrid format. Some non-credential training aligns with nationally recognized DSP competencies or may later count toward a credentialing pathway, but participants are not necessarily required to demonstrate competencies to complete the training.

## **B. DSP program design components and considerations**

DSP training programs can take many forms, but all require decisions about six core elements: (1) intended audience, (2) training responsibility, (3) training curriculum, (4) training mode, (5) certifications offered, and (6) incentives (see Exhibit III.1). In this chapter, we use these six design categories as an organizing framework. These categories allow us to compare programs with substantially different structures and identify the most important features when selecting and designing a program for Florida. This same framework informs our recommendations in Chapter IV, including the design characteristics we suggest would best address Florida's workforce needs and priorities.

**Exhibit III.1.** Design components for DSP training and certification programs



These design components are closely interrelated. For example, decisions about who a program will serve influence how training should be delivered, which organizations should participate, which supports and incentives are necessary, and which credentials are feasible. Together, the choices have cascading effects on a program, including development and implementation costs, the DSPs and provider organizations willing to participate, participant engagement and skill development, and the ability to advance workforce quality, retention, and professionalization.

No single set of design choices will work best in every setting. Few programs identified in the environmental scan have been rigorously evaluated, and existing evaluations provide limited evidence about the relative effectiveness of individual program components. Appropriate program design therefore depends on program goals, available funding, implementation capacity, and workforce context. In this report, we describe the major options and tradeoffs within each category, drawing on common practices in existing programs, available evaluation evidence, interviews with program leaders and implementation partners, and applicability to Florida and FDDC priorities.



Intended audiences are the individuals that the training model intends to engage as participants. To start, programs need to determine the audience they intend to reach. Audiences can vary by experience level, life stage, and employment type. DSPs at different life stages and experience levels benefit differently from training and certification, which affects program outcomes. Programs must identify the workforce segment they want to reach and consider how program structure, funding, and implementation may include or exclude these DSPs. This foundational design decision shapes many downstream considerations; different audiences require different outreach strategies, participant supports, and training content or on-the-job coaching.

**Experience level.** DSP training programs can choose to focus on prospective DSPs (those not currently working in the field), new and early-career DSPs, or mid- to late-career DSPs. Based on the environmental scan and interviews, most existing training programs focus on DSPs actively working in the field rather than prospective DSPs. Credentialing programs target both early-career and experienced DSPs, requiring

a minimum level of experience (about six months) to enable DSPs to demonstrate how they apply their training on the job. Apprenticeship programs require DSPs to be employed at an apprenticeship site and can either focus on current employees or recruit prospective DSPs. Apprenticeship programs can train DSPs with varying levels of experience, but the low starting pay and gradual pay increases typically attract new DSPs. College certificate programs generally focus on current DSPs, but some are open to prospective DSPs. Internships and pre-apprenticeship programs typically focus on prospective DSPs only.

Some training organizations offer multiple training pathways depending on experience level. Lighthouse Cove, a training and credentialing program, offers Direct Support Professional Advancement through Training in Human Services (DSPaths) for current professionals, and Direct Support Professional University (DSP-U) for prospective DSPs. Others offer tiered credentials intended to represent the DSP's level of competency and experience.

We identified supervisor credentialing programs as a separate program model, and DSP supervisors are another distinct audience. Based on the environmental scan, supervisor training at the program level was typically included alongside nonsupervisory training. For example, the Massachusetts Council of Human Service Providers offers Human Services Credentials for both supervisory staff and entry-level staff through its eAcademy (Providers Council 2024).

**Life stage.** To support their training or recruitment goals, DSP training programs can also focus on specific age groups. We identified several programs that serve secondary and postsecondary school students. These programs include registered apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeship programs, and internships. Programs focused on young adults expose participants to careers in disability services during key educational and career decision points. One interviewee representing an internship program that engaged high school and college students in internships at employer sites reported that their interns either pursued careers as DSPs or incorporated a disability lens into other career paths. In some cases, these programs help students fulfill school requirements, such as internship requirements for college credits or creating an alternative high school graduation pathway.

**Employment type.** Some program models are limited to DSPs working under specific provider arrangements or certifications. The two most common distinctions are (1) independent versus agency-employed DSPs and (2) Medicaid certification versus services delivered through other funding pathways. Most DSPs are employed through provider agencies or facilities, which provide management and supervision and assign DSPs to clients. Other DSPs are self-employed, operating independently of an organization. Independent DSPs can be family members or other caregivers hired through consumer-directed waiver programs or directly by people with IDD and their families. Independent DSPs are responsible for their own training, whereas provider agencies are responsible for ensuring the DSPs they employ receive required training. Families hiring a DSP through consumer-directed programs are expected to provide DSP training and oversight, but conversations with DSPs indicate that training in this setting may be more limited or variable than an agency would provide (Bajaj et al. 2025).

A program's funding source can affect its ability to reach audiences across employment types. For example, programs using Medicaid funds for DSP training, incentives, and wage increases are only open to Medicaid-certified providers. Programs using a specific Medicaid funding pathway, such as an HCBS waiver, may find their pool of potential DSP participants further limited. For example, Tennessee's E-Badge

Academy Program is only open to DSPs employed at HCBS provider organizations. Although Medicaid tends to be the most robust and sustainable funding source, it limits program eligibility for DSPs who are not Medicaid-certified.

## 2. Training responsibility



Training responsibility is what entity designs, procures, and/or administers the training component of the program. These programs can deliver training to DSPs themselves or delegate training delivery to DSP employers. This design decision affects DSP employers' willingness to participate in the program, the resources required for implementation, and training consistency across settings. In this section, we summarize how programs maintain or delegate training responsibility and the implications for program design and implementation.

**Program-based training.** DSP training and certification programs are delivered by a central coordinating entity, typically a state agency, a contracted organization, or a provider association. In this approach, the coordinating entity is responsible for delivering DSP training. The coordinating entity can provide the training directly or grant DSPs access to a third-party training resource. One example of this approach is the Alaska Training Cooperative. Its training coordinators developed and delivered live, online trainings to DSPs across the state (Alaska Training Cooperative 2025); the Cooperative coordinated with DSP employers to select and support training participants, but employers were not directly involved in delivering the training.

**Employer-based training.** Provider agencies, residential facilities, and other DSP employers have existing minimum DSP training responsibilities. In this approach, participating DSP employers must provide the DSPs they employ with additional training aligned with program requirements. Employers can provide this training directly through in-house staff or grant DSPs access to an online training provider. For example, New York's certification program requires participating employers to ensure their staff have access to a NADSP-accredited training platform (Bershadsky et al. 2025).

Employer-based training offers employers the greatest flexibility but comes with higher costs. These costs can include time and materials to train staff in a specific curriculum, wages for supervisory staff who deliver trainings, licensing costs for specific curricula, and access to online training platforms. During interviews, program staff shared that DSP employers tend to prefer a program that provides training directly due to the lower implementation costs. One apprenticeship program experienced a high level of employer partner dropouts after the program lost funding to provide training directly to apprentices across sites.

However, some DSP employers, particularly those with strong internal training systems, may prefer to use their own existing platforms, curricula, or training providers. Staff and supervisors may already be comfortable using a particular platform, reducing start-up time, or they may prefer to integrate all trainings into a single platform. Additionally, employer-based training offers the flexibility to shape training to an organization's specific context. In two program evaluations, DSPs reported their training could be more relevant to their role or service setting (Bershadsky et al. 2025; Dickinson 2025). However,

some statewide programs prefer to provide a single training platform and curricula to increase training consistency statewide.

### 3. Training curriculum



Training curricula are the subjects, materials, learning objectives, and activities included in a program. Programs must identify the knowledge, skills, and behaviors they want to promote in the DSP workforce through their training content. To deliver on these learning objectives, programs can use or adapt an existing DSP training curriculum or develop a new curriculum tailored to their context. These curriculum design decisions have implications for DSP learning outcomes, implementation timelines, start-up and licensing costs, and credentialing options.

DSP training program curricula typically focus on the competencies DSPs should demonstrate for on-the-job success. Most training programs identified in the environmental scan use nationally recognized DSP competency frameworks—namely, the CMS Core Competencies and the NADSP Competency Areas—as the foundation for their curricula.

Developed through a multiyear research and stakeholder engagement process, the CMS Core Competencies provide a framework for advancing training and quality improvement for direct care workers across long-term care sectors (CMS 2014). Direct care workers are a broader employment category than DSPs, encompassing workers who provide services to individuals with physical disabilities, behavioral health needs, IDD, and aging-related needs. The NADSP Competency Areas build on the CMS Core Competencies and apply them to DSPs, who focus on serving individuals with IDD (NADSP n.d.[a]). The NADSP competencies are divided into 15 areas with specific skill statements for each. Exhibit III.2 provides a crosswalk of the NADSP and CMS competencies, demonstrating how the NADSP competencies place less emphasis on medical care and focus more explicitly on the DSP role in supporting social integration and advancing vocational goals for people with IDD.

Although not commonly referenced, the National Association for the Dually Diagnosed (NADD) also developed a competency framework specifically for DSPs who support individuals with IDD and co-occurring mental health conditions (NADD n.d.).

In Exhibit III.2, we show that CMS and NADSP competencies are closely aligned across key DSP practice areas, though some broad CMS competencies correspond to multiple, more specific NADSP competency areas. These differences primarily reflect how the two frameworks organize and define DSP skills and responsibilities.

New training programs must determine whether to use existing curricula or develop a new, customized curriculum. The primary tradeoff for this decision is start-up resources versus ongoing licensing costs. Using existing curricula has the lowest program start-up cost, though it does require licensing a program or contracting a training provider. Developing a new curriculum requires a much larger investment in terms of staff labor, the time involved from inception to program launch, and ongoing refinement.

**Exhibit III.2.** Comparison of CMS Core Competencies and NADSP Competency Areas

| CMS Core Competencies                                                                                         | NADSP Competency Areas                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>                                                                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person-centered practices</li> </ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitation of services</li> <li>• Provide person-centered supports</li> <li>• Documentation</li> </ul>      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation and observation</li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment</li> </ul>                                                                                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crisis prevention and intervention</li> <li>• Safety</li> </ul>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crisis prevention and intervention</li> </ul>                                                                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionalism and ethics</li> <li>• Cultural competency</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational participation</li> </ul>                                                                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment and advocacy</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant empowerment</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> </ul>                                                        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and wellness</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting health and wellness</li> </ul>                                                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community living skills and supports</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community living skills and supports</li> <li>• Vocational, educational, and career support</li> </ul>        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community inclusion and networking</li> </ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community and service networking</li> <li>• Building and maintaining friendships and relationships</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education, training, and self-development</li> </ul>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education, training, and self-development</li> </ul>                                                          |

Beyond content development and testing, developing a new curriculum can take even more time in two situations: (1) college courses offered for credit require accreditation and approval by accrediting agencies or state education departments and (2) training programs that want to integrate with the NADSP E-Badge Academy require NADSP accreditation.

Despite the challenges involved, creating a new DSP training program offers several advantages. For example, control over curriculum content and delivery allows the program to adapt content to a specific state or organizational context and to adapt the curriculum based on feedback from participants and employers. Creating a new program also fosters innovation and allows state- or organization-specific requirements to be integrated into the same learning system.

Programs considering existing curricula can use NADSP accreditation as a quality indicator. NADSP accredits DSP and supervisor training programs that align with national competency areas, best practices in adult education, professional ethics, and DSP workforce goals (NADSP n.d.[c]). The most used curricula among training programs have obtained NADSP accreditation. Along with being a quality indicator, NADSP-accredited curricula can be used in conjunction with the NADSP E-Badge Academy (see Component 5 [Certificates] for more on the E-Badge Academy).

Several strong DSP curricula, which have all received NADSP accreditation, are currently available (NADSP n.d.[c]). The list below is not exhaustive, but it includes the four most used curricula nationwide along with one curriculum already used in Florida (Lighthouse Cove DSPaths). Each of these programs offers training content for both DSPs and frontline supervisors.

- **DirectCourse College of Direct Support.** This is the online program state DSP training programs use most frequently. It was developed in partnership with multiple research-based institutions focused on

disability, including the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Living. Multiple evaluations of DSP training programs using the College of Direct Support have demonstrated its effectiveness. It has a large catalog of trainings and a strong validation process for each training. The College of Direct Support is specifically focused on the DSP workforce (DirectCourse n.d.).

- **Relias.** This is another online training provider popular with state and other training programs. It offers advanced technology and adult learning practices, incorporating elements such as scenario-based and simulation-based learning. Relias offers built-in knowledge checks and integration with human resources and learning management systems. It also generates training content across multiple healthcare sectors (Relias n.d.).
- **Open Future Learning.** This is another online training provider with a smaller catalog of prerecorded trainings. However, it offers trainings in multiple formats for different learning styles, including long- and short-form videos, interactive auditory learning, and side-by-side modules designed for DSPs and the people they support to learn together. It offers story-driven trainings developed and led by influential leaders in the IDD space. Open Future is specifically focused on the IDD workforce (Open Future Learning n.d.).
- **NADSP.** This organization offers direct DSP training to organizations through in-person workshops or live, online events. It offers a limited selection of trainings focused on broader workforce considerations, such as ethics, DSP competency areas, and career ladders. NADSP also offers an online train-the-trainer curriculum for frontline supervisors; trained supervisors can then share their new knowledge through in-person workshops (NADSP n.d.[c], NADSP n.d.[b]).
- **Lighthouse Cove DSPaths.** This training curricula has typically been implemented in person but is expanding to online options as well. Lighthouse Cove has a strong presence in Ohio, where it originated, and the Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities currently uses the DSPaths training (formerly as a component of its registered apprenticeship, now independently). DSPaths is well regarded by advocates and provider agencies in the RPS work group, but no evaluation results are available beyond anecdotal evidence. Lighthouse Cove is a nonprofit organization specifically focused on DSP career development (Lighthouse Cove n.d.).

#### 4. Training mode



Training mode is the location and medium through which participants access training. Programs can offer training through online, in-person, or hybrid modalities. To choose the most appropriate training mode for their context, programs should consider how virtual or in-person delivery affects training accessibility, engagement quality, relationship-building and mentorship opportunities, and cost.

Online training delivery can involve multiple modes, including synchronous and asynchronous learning. In synchronous trainings, participants engage in the training at the same time. This could look like training delivered by a live instructor with opportunities for audience questions or small group discussions. For asynchronous training, also known as self-paced or on-demand training, participants can complete the training on their own schedule.

In-person training brings participants and instructors together in the same physical setting at a scheduled time. Trainings may be held onsite at employer locations or require workers to travel off-site. In addition to lecture-based training or discussion groups, in-person training can enable participants to observe or practice hands-on skills.

Hybrid programs offer both online and in-person options or require a combination of the two. For example, many college courses offer classes both online and in-person. In addition, they often include an on-the-job learning component, such as field placements, special projects at employment sites, or internships. Apprenticeships and internships inherently require in-person interaction outside of their classroom-based training component, which is frequently accessed online.

**Training accessibility.** Asynchronous, online training is the most flexible option for DSP schedules, especially when DSPs are expected to complete training outside of work hours. Interviewees emphasized that flexibility is critical for DSPs, who may be working odd hours or multiple jobs. In-person training offers less scheduling flexibility for DSPs as trainings must be offered to a group at set times.

However, online training requires internet access and compatible devices. In-person training may therefore be more accessible for DSPs without home internet, sufficient technology skills, or a device that can access the required training or assessment. In addition, staff for one program noted that DSPs with English as a second language may prefer in-person trainings for better comprehension. That said, online trainings are the most logistically feasible option for programs implemented in rural areas or across large geographic areas.

DSP employers involved in training delivery can help accommodate DSP schedules, particularly for in-person trainings. For example, some adult day training sites offered evening trainings after day programs ended, which prevented DSPs from missing shifts or requiring additional travel. Other DSP employers arranged staffing such that DSP shifts were covered while they participated in trainings during regular work hours, or they allowed DSPs to complete certifications during downtime.

**Engagement quality.** In-person and online learning can produce similar learning outcomes, but in-person or synchronous online training tends to support greater engagement (Richmond et al. 2017; Mulaimović et al. 2025; Gegenfurtner 2026). Engagement is an important contributor to educational effectiveness; as a concept, it includes the following participant attributes:

- Behaviors: Are DSPs completing knowledge checks and asking questions? Are they persisting and completing training?
- Mental focus: Are DSPs thinking critically about the lessons and applying them to their work?
- Feelings: Are DSPs feeling positive about the program and their instructor(s)? Are they able to manage any associated stress? (Mulaimović et al. 2025)

The evidence is mixed on the effectiveness of different formats. However, during interviews, program leaders that use in-person training emphasized that, compared to online platforms, in-person training results in higher levels of DSP engagement.

**Relationship-building and mentorship.** Compared to online-only programs, in-person training offers greater opportunities for relationship building and mentorship. Mentorship programs can play a critical role in improving DSP skills and retention, especially for independent DSPs who may not have the same support and advancement opportunities that agency-employed DSPs receive.

In previous RPS research, DSPs have expressed a desire for more connections with and support from other DSPs. In interviews, program staff noted that DSPs identified relationship building as a valuable part of their training programs (Bajaj et al. 2025). In-person training offers participants more opportunities for discussion and relationship building as well as the chance to interact with trainers and benefit from their mentorship.

Online trainings offer fewer occasions for DSP interaction and mentorship. However, these programs can create intentional engagement opportunities, such as participant interaction during synchronous trainings, online platforms with discussion forums, and one-on-one mentorship outside of the regular training.

**Cost.** Overall, in-person trainings are more expensive to implement and more challenging to scale because they require a physical location and on-site staff. They also face class size limits, which is not an inherent limitation of online programs.

## 5. Certifications



Certifications formally recognize that an individual has certain characteristics or has met certain requirements. Most DSP training programs include a certification component for DSPs to provide an attestation of their skills or experience and address the profession's lack of standardized credentials. Most programs identified through the environmental scan offer DSPs a chance to earn a certification by completing trainings and demonstrating competencies. Some programs focus primarily on DSP credentialing while others offer credentials as an additional benefit of participation. New training programs must determine whether to offer certifications and then whether to use existing certification processes or develop new certification methods.

Training program certifications benefit participants and hold promise for professionalizing the DSP workforce. Unlike related direct care positions, such as certified nursing assistants, DSPs have no national certification requirements. Credentialed workers in other direct care positions have better earnings, access to benefits, and more full-time positions relative to their non-credentialed peers (Kim 2020). Credentials can serve several purposes for DSPs and their clients and employers, including the following:

- Increase DSP professionalization and recognition of the skilled work DSPs provide
- Enable DSPs to demonstrate their competencies to families and employers
- Assure clients and their families that DSPs have sufficient experience and a standard level of training and instruction
- Create pathways for wage differentiation and progression through tiered credentials

Training programs can offer program-specific credentials, but many choose to use the NADSP Certification Program. NADSP credentials are the most widely recognized standard for DSPs and are used in most states implementing optional DSP credentialing programs. Alternative certifications are program-specific and include the credential exams used in Georgia's DSP training and credentialing pilot program; the DSPaths Basic Certificate, Certificate of Initial Proficiency, and Certificate of Advanced Proficiency; certificates available through college courses; and certificates of completion from registered apprenticeships. Some programs offer a single certification; others use tiered credentials to represent different experience levels or offer progressive incentives. Some training programs offer certificates of completion without requiring a meaningful demonstration of competencies.

**NADSP Certification Program.** Through the NADSP Certification Program, DSPs complete accredited training and demonstrate real-world competencies to earn E-Badges. Each E-Badge is based on a DSP skill statement. These E-Badges can be used on their own to demonstrate competencies or stacked to achieve three levels of DSP certification (DSP-I, DSP-II, and DSP-III). E-badges can also be earned for a frontline supervisor certification.

The NADSP E-Badge Academy uses microcredentials, designed to certify mastery in a specific skill or area of expertise with a small investment of time. Microcredentials are a helpful strategy for adult learners and a useful tool for demonstrating competencies. Rather than requiring DSPs to complete a single assessment, NADSP's microcredentialing format allows them to gradually make progress toward certification levels. Microcredentials are useful in contexts like the DSP workforce, where formal credentials do not exist, and workers want a way to demonstrate their skills and expertise (Varadarajan 2023). They are also considered a more flexible, time-effective alternative to traditional classroom-based learning (Womack-Adams et al. 2025).

DSPs earn microcredentials by submitting evidence of related training and testimonials. DSPs use testimonials to describe a personal experience demonstrating a specific skill in their work. These testimonials can be a half-page written statement or a few minutes of narration in an audio recording. For example, a DSP seeking the "Building On Strengths" E-Badge might submit a testimonial of how he helped a client use her good communication skills to build her confidence in advocating for needed accommodations.

Other benefits of NADSP's certification program include interoperability with other training providers and NADSP's extensive experience helping states implement credentialing programs. NADSP works with more than 15 training programs, meaning employers and programs can use a variety of training curricula and still use NADSP for certification. DSPs can also receive credit for prior training if it was completed with an accredited training organization. NADSP can engage with training and credentialing programs at different levels, supporting program implementation. Its expertise can be useful for states building out a program.

However, the NADSP Certification Program also has its downsides, including DSP challenges submitting testimonials and the ongoing cost of program enrollment. In interviews and evaluations, program leaders indicated that some DSPs have difficulty learning how to submit testimonials and could need coaching to complete them. Testimonials can also lead to rejections which require DSPs to resubmit for a microcredential, which can be discouraging for DSPs, especially if they do not understand the reason for

the rejection. Additionally, each DSP spot has a cost, which often limits the number of DSPs a credentialing program can enroll.

**Program-specific certifications.** Using exams to assess DSP competencies can reduce subjectivity and program costs but may present some motivational or logistical challenges for DSPs. Exam-based certifications require program participants to pass a standardized exam to demonstrate their knowledge and their ability to apply what they've learned. For example, Georgia developed its own DSP-I and DSP-II Credential Exams and validated them as psychometrically sound for assessing the CMS Direct Service Workforce Core Competencies (Pettingell et al. 2025). Exams are less subjective than reviewer-based methods—like those the NADSP uses—but program leaders noted that exams can be stressful for DSPs. Georgia also reported some challenges with remote proctoring of exams, including ensuring that DSPs have the technology needed to complete such exams (Pettingell et al. 2025).

College programs typically offer certificates for passing the required graded courses and any practicum requirements, although some programs integrate with the NADSP credentials. In addition to passing required courses, some programs may require a final project, demonstration, or practicum. For example, the two-year Texas A&M PATHS Certificate Program requires participants to pass all required assignments and modules with a score of at least 80 percent and complete at least 480 practicum hours (Texas A&M n.d.). NADSP-accredited college programs, such as the State University of New York (SUNY) program, may also offer DSPs the option to earn credentials through the NADSP E-Badge Academy.

## 6. Incentives



Incentives are benefits, typically financial, that encourage DSPs and employers to participate and persist in a program. DSP training and certification programs must also decide whether to offer financial incentives to motivate program engagement. Optional training and credentialing means DSPs and their employers must invest time and resources that are not consistently rewarded or reimbursed. Programs must determine whether to compensate DSPs or offset their participation costs and whether to incentivize employers to take on facilitation roles. These choices can affect participant enrollment and completion, employer engagement, and equitable access to these training opportunities.

Most training and credentialing programs we reviewed provided some form of incentive for participating DSPs. The profession otherwise offers DSPs limited financial incentives to pursue credentials or other professional development. Prior RPS research and the broader evidence base show that DSP credentialing must be tied to financial incentives or increased compensation to improve workforce stabilization (Kim, 2020; Lane et al., 2024; Bajaj et al., 2025). Some programs also offered incentives to DSP employers, as employers are not typically reimbursed for staff time spent on trainings. Program incentives help offset the lost wages, time, and other resources employers spend developing DSP competencies and credentials.

**DSP incentives.** Program models use different approaches to financially incentivize DSP participation. Most state credentialing programs provide DSPs with stipends when they complete certification levels. These stipends range from several hundred dollars to several thousand dollars for completing all available certification levels. College programs generally partner with other organizations to provide grants or

stipends that help cover participants' course costs. This approach is less uniform than credentialing program incentives and focuses on offering free tuition versus additional bonuses. Apprenticeship programs do not typically provide stipends or bonuses, but they require employers to increase wages at certain points and to compensate DSPs for on-the-job learning. Internships and pre-apprenticeships for may offer bonuses in lieu of wage increases for program completion. States can also implement Medicaid rate add-ons to DSP earning certifications, which are passed on to DSPs in the form of increased wages.

Many program leaders reported that incentives were critical for DSP participation, especially when employers did not allow DSPs to complete trainings during work hours. Because the trainings and certifications in our scan were optional professional development opportunities, employers were not required to compensate DSPs for time spent participating in them. Incentives help bridge this compensation gap. However, two program leaders noted the administrative challenges surrounding incentives, such as preventing duplicate payments to DSPs.

Notably, people with IDD who hire their own DSPs through consumer-directed programs may be budgetarily unable to provide wage increases or compensation for training. Thus, even if independent DSPs have a pathway to earn a credential, they may not have the resources to do so. In this situation, incentives offered directly through a program would be critical for DSP participation.

**Employer incentives.** Programs can offer payments to participating DSP employers to help offset staff and administrative costs. These incentives recognize that DSP employer engagement can be a barrier or facilitator to program implementation. Employer incentives also recognize employer contributions, such as administrative costs (e.g., staff and coordination time) and access to training costs, if relevant. Employer payments may be tied to staff enrollment or, more often, certification completion. DSP employers may also consider any free staff training or mentorship a program provides to be an incentive.

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## IV. Recommendations

### A. Recommended program design components for Florida

In this chapter, we recommend program design decisions that are most likely to advance Florida’s goals for DSP training and professional development. We organize the recommendations around the six design components introduced in Chapter III (Findings): (1) intended audience, (2) training responsibility, (3) training curriculum, (4) training mode, (5) certifications offered, and (6) incentives. These design components represent the core choices that must be addressed regardless of the program model selected. They also provide a consistent framework for translating the study findings into actionable guidance for Florida.

We developed these recommendations based on (a) the most common design options in existing programs, (b) evidence from program evaluations, peer-reviewed literature, and conversations with program staff about the benefits and tradeoffs of different approaches, and (c) the application of the evidence to Florida’s context and FDDC’s priorities. For each design component, we identify the approach we believe is best suited to Florida’s current circumstances and also describe important tradeoffs, implementation constraints, and conditions that might support alternative approaches.

#### 1. Intended audience



**Prioritize training and certifying current DSPs, rather than prospective DSPs.** Recruitment is an important component of a holistic DSP workforce strategy; however, in a resource-limited situation, retaining existing staff is a higher priority. A few factors contribute to this recommendation. First, families of people with IDD and self-advocates in Florida identified DSP turnover as a significant problem; it impacts quality of care as frequent handoffs cause significant disruptions and quality concerns (Carney et al. 2024; Bajaj et al. 2025). The RPS work group also identified retention as the most important outcome when assessing the quality of a training program. Second, DSPs and their supervisors say it is highly challenging to recruit individuals with the right values, motivations, and overall fit for the job (Bajaj et al. 2025). Finally, hiring new staff requires DSP employers to complete onboarding and mandatory trainings, which are not reimbursable costs under Medicaid. One study estimated that each DSP who leaves their role costs an organization \$5,728 (Hall et al. 2024). Thus, retaining existing DSPs with experience, motivation, and basic training is more likely to improve overall workforce quality than increased recruitment.

**Focus on engaging early- and mid-career DSPs.** This group would benefit most from additional training and are at greater risk of leaving the field. Program evaluations indicate that DSP employers generally have the freedom to recruit DSPs into a program based on their own criteria. In some cases, DSP participation is conditioned on employment at the organization for a certain length of time (Bershadsky et al. 2025; Pettingell et al. 2025). One evaluation noted that recruiting more experienced DSPs to the program limited its overall benefits as staff entered the program with an already high level of competency, satisfaction, and career commitment (Dickinson 2025). Training programs should consider

recruiting guidelines based on experience levels and offer guidance to help employers select the DSPs who participate.

**Do not pursue training for young adults in secondary schools further.** Although programs focused on young adults show promise in other states, structural factors in Florida limit the feasibility of exploring these programs further. States with the most robust and successful approaches to youth engagement integrate DSP training and career exposure through secondary schools. In Florida, secondary school training programs are regulated by CareerSource Florida. Thus, for training programs to be considered a Career and Professional Education program in Florida's secondary schools, CareerSource Florida must list the certification on its Master Credentials List. However, other groups have been unsuccessful getting CareerSource Florida to add DSP credentials to the Master Credentials List because the occupation does not meet certain wage thresholds. Specifically, to be listed, a program must be linked to at least one occupational code that has an average wage greater than or equal to the median wage of high school graduates with no other credential. Applicants must also demonstrate how the credential is part of a career pathway to an occupation that meets a higher wage standard (CareerSource Florida 2026). Without wage changes in the DSP industry, getting an in-school DSP training program approved for secondary school students is currently unfeasible. Stakeholder groups may still consider offering internships oriented toward high school or college students, but the overall impact of this approach would be limited.

**Prioritize program designs that support independent DSP participation.** Independent DSPs are less likely to receive robust training and supervision than DSPs working with provider agencies or residential facilities (Bajaj et al. 2025). Experts and advocates on the RPS work group emphasized the importance of including independent DSPs in any training program design. As a result, we advise that training programs should provide equal access to independent DSPs or pathways that provide an option for them to participate.

**Offer pathways for non-Medicaid DSPs to participate.** In Florida, more than 23,000 people with IDD are on a waitlist to receive direct care support through Medicaid-funded HCBS (Agency for Persons with Disabilities 2026). People who are waiting for services or do not qualify for Medicaid HCBS may pay out of pocket for direct care supports or rely on unpaid family caregivers. Offering pathways for non-Medicaid DSPs—including caregivers with the fewest formal supports—to participate in training or certification programs would increase quality of care more universally. However, if Medicaid is a training program's primary funding source, offering incentives or limited training slots to non-Medicaid DSPs may not be feasible. In this situation, other options could include making training materials publicly available or offering supplemental funding to support non-Medicaid DSP participants.

**Include training opportunities for frontline supervisors.** Frontline supervisors play an important role in DSP job experience, and effective supervision can improve DSP retention (Hall et al. 2024; Relias 2025). In the 2025 RPS survey of DSPs, 30 percent of survey respondents who were not completely satisfied with their position indicated that improvements to supervision and support within their agency would increase their satisfaction. Such improvements could include supervisor training and certification either combined with DSP training or as a standalone initiative (Bajaj et al. 2025).

## 2. Training responsibility



**Enable DSPs to access training directly through a central coordinating entity.** Under current circumstances, we do not recommend relying fully on DSP employers or independent DSPs to provide or secure access to accredited training. Smaller or less well-resourced DSP employers face the greatest barriers to providing training opportunities, and they may be unable to dedicate the resources needed to provide in-house training. If employers with existing access to training platforms—or the funding to support such access—are the only organizations able to participate in a training or certification program, current disparities in training and quality across provider agencies and facilities might increase. Likewise, programs that require independent DSPs to access accredited trainings separate from the program could place a disproportionate burden on these participants.

**Allow DSP employers with existing training infrastructure to use that infrastructure for DSP certification requirements.** DSP employers should be able to use an accredited training platform or curriculum of their choosing for their staff to earn certifications. If, in the future, DSP Medicaid reimbursement rates for DSPs increase or the state provides financial support to help employers increase training opportunities, having employers implement training directly could be the preferred approach because it does not require a central coordinating entity to sustain a training program. Many DSP employers currently offer limited training and onboarding because Medicaid does not have a direct reimbursement mechanism for these activities.

**Engage DSP employers in program implementation regardless of their training role.** Programs can provide participating organizations with tools to monitor staff progress, such as a training dashboard, and recommend strategies to help staff complete and apply training content.

## 3. Training curriculum



**Choose a training curriculum aligned with the NADSP Competency Areas and the CMS Direct Service Workforce Core Competencies.** This alignment is a standard practice across nearly all training programs and ensures that program participants achieve nationally recognized competencies. For newly developed curricula, such alignment allows a program to pursue NADSP accreditation.

**Use or adapt an existing accredited curriculum.** This approach reduces start-up time and integrates effective adult learning practices. In a resource-limited environment, the benefits of developing a new set of trainings and materials—which should align with the same competencies as existing curricula—do not justify the additional labor costs and start-up time. A new state or local training program may not have the same capacity as existing training providers to hire and consult disability experts to develop and deliver training, evaluate and refine trainings, obtain accreditation, and integrate activities and practices aligned with adult learning principles.

**Consider using DirectCourse College of Direct Support, Relias, Open Future Learning, or DSPaths as training curricula.** These programs are all rigorously developed. They have been tested in multiple states and across employers, and they offer both DSP and supervisor training options.

- Lighthouse Cove’s DSPaths program has been used in Florida, is well-regarded by those who have participated in the program, and includes a mentorship component. Lighthouse Cove plans to release new online versions of this program within the year, which may address concerns around scalability and statewide use. It also offers an in-person option for DSP employers willing or able to make that investment in staff training.
- DirectCourse College of Direct Support is the clearest choice for an online training provider. It offers a rigorously developed and tested curriculum, is in use across many states and programs, and offers a wide range of courses that allow DSPs to choose the most relevant trainings for their careers.
- Relias and Open Future Learning are good options as well, with some caveats. Relias and Open Future both offer a sufficient but less robust training catalog than DirectCourse. This may reduce their applicability for experienced DSPs in particular. Relias’ catalog has more of a healthcare orientation than other curricula. Open Future has fewer examples of use in state-level programs.
- NADSP does not offer a full set of trainings for all DSP competencies but its supervisor train-the-trainer curriculum should be considered for a standalone supervisor training program.

#### 4. Training mode



**Combine online training and in-person experiences for the strongest training outcomes.** An ideal DSP training program would combine online training and in-person experiences, but both online-only and in-person training can also be successful on their own. The evidence does not strongly favor either online or in-person approaches over the other, and evaluations of state programs have shown both methods to be successful. Many experts recommend a combination of online and on-site training for direct care workers more broadly, as this hybrid approach both supports flexibility and allows programs to teach skills that require in-person interactions (Kareddy et al. 2020). The right choice depends on other program design factors. As discussed under Design Component 2 (Training Responsibility), an ideal program would give DSP employers the flexibility to choose the delivery mode that would best support their staff and organization. The way training is administered in a given organization varies greatly based on organization type, capacity, and commitment.

**Incorporate elements that address potential weaknesses of a program’s delivery mode.** Although both online and in-person trainings are reasonable options, there are several overarching recommendations related to delivery mode that could support DSP participation and quality engagement in a program. They include the following:

- **Schedule in-person and synchronous online trainings around DSP availability.** This includes scheduling classes for evenings and weekends. Programs should also provide guidance that helps employers schedule trainings and provide other supports that allow DSPs to complete training on their own schedule.

- **Include checkpoints and requirements for assessing DSP learning in asynchronous online-only programs.** Asynchronous online training can result in lower quality engagement, making assessments of DSP engagement even more critical for this approach. Learning demonstrations can be periodic or integrated with credentialing requirements.
- **Pair online training with opportunities for DSP connection and mentorship.** These opportunities can include online discussion forums, in-person gatherings, discussion groups for participants at a given employer, on-site mentors at employment locations, or discussions during synchronous trainings. These options are less critical for program models that inherently include in-person interactions, such as apprenticeships or internships.
- **Balance travel and scheduling requirements with the incentives tied to participation.** For example, programs linked to wage increases or significant one-time bonuses may require a stronger commitment (e.g., attending synchronous online trainings instead of a self-paced training). This is particularly important for independent DSPs who may lack employer support to complete a program.

## 5. Certifications



**Include certification as a component of any comprehensive DSP training program.** The literature suggests that certification is one strategy for improving job quality, retention, and professional recognition (Lane et al. 2025; Kim 2020). Certification can make training programs more appealing to DSPs, thereby increasing participation. In the 2025 RPS survey of Florida DSPs, more than two-thirds of respondents reported an interest in pursuing a DSP certification if it were available. Certifications can also address concerns families and DSPs have raised about the hiring process. For example, in prior research, Florida families expressed frustration with the process of finding and vetting qualified, trustworthy DSPs (Mann et al. 2023). At the same time, independent DSPs highlighted the potential of DSP certifications to strengthen their credibility and help alleviate service users' apprehension about hiring unfamiliar DSPs (Bajaj et al. 2025). DSP certifications could help families move away from a reliance on personal referrals and increase the potential hiring pool they consider. Certifications also provide the necessary framework for implementing incentives and wage differentiation.

**Tie certification to DSPs' demonstration of nationally recognized competencies.** To earn a credential, DSPs should be required to apply their learning to real life scenarios (versus information recall or course participation). For example, to earn an NADSP E-Badge, DSPs are required to submit a testimonial describing how they applied their training on the job. A program can choose to develop assessments of competencies independently—as Georgia did with its credentialing exams—but they should test for DSP core competencies rather than a program's specific curriculum. Many programs choose to use NADSP to assess credentials, and NADSP offers a level of implementation support that can help the program succeed. However, using the NADSP E-Badge Academy depends on available funding.

## 6. Incentives



**Provide financial incentives for DSPs to participate in optional training or certification.** Incentives can take multiple forms, including (1) one-time bonuses for earning credentials, (2) wage increases for completing training or earning credentials, or (3) benefits that offset future career investments, like college credits. Offering bonuses or wage increases for DSPs who complete training and certification programs enables equitable participation in the program. Employers are not obligated to pay for DSPs to participate in optional professional development opportunities during working hours. Absent incentives, many DSPs may not have the capacity or motivation to complete trainings in their personal time. In a 2025 survey of Florida DSPs, over half (58 percent) of respondents faced challenges related to time, cost, or shift coverage when accessing additional training (Bajaj et al, 2025). Other programs have cited incentives as a critical component of their recruitment and retention strategy. One study of home-based caregivers found only 13 percent completed training without an incentive, and financial incentives increased training completion by 66 percent (Cronin & Lieber, 2024).

**Consider financial incentives to DSP employers if the program depends highly on their contributions.** For programs that deliver training and mentorship directly to DSPs, employer involvement may be limited. For programs requiring more employer involvement, employer incentives are important; they help ensure adequate resources are allocated to mentorship and program oversight. During interviews, program staff noted that DSP employers are interested in using training to improve service quality, but many lack the financial resources to invest in training due to more pressing financial priorities.

**Avoid shifting additional training costs to DSPs and their employers without broader reforms in DSP wages or reimbursement.** While improving workforce quality is critical, unfunded training mandates can impose additional barriers to recruitment and retention. As we see in related direct care professions, training costs and time constraints can be substantial barriers to entering direct-care occupations (Khatutsky et al., 2011). Because many DSP provider organizations rely heavily on Medicaid rates, new training requirements can increase operating costs without creating a corresponding source of revenue. Federal Medicaid guidance recognizes this issue by identifying training as a provider cost and describing mechanisms for incorporating training expenses into payment rates or otherwise subsidizing training (NDSWRC, 2013).

## B. Recommended program models for implementation in Florida

Based on our research findings, we recommend two program models that best align with FDDC's priorities and can be feasibly implemented in Florida: (1) a DSP credentialing program and (2) a college certificate program. For each of these models, we discuss the following:

- Advantages and disadvantages relative to FDDC's priorities (i.e., DSP retention, workforce professionalization, and efficient implementation)
- Considerations when selecting specific program design components
- Conditions for feasible implementation in Florida

- A case study of a similar program in another state, including its evaluation outcomes

### 1. Program model selection criteria

Using the program design components framework, Exhibit IV.1 outlines the selection criteria we considered to identify the recommended DSP training models. We included a seventh additional criteria to emphasize the importance of aligning implementation decisions with learnings from other programs.

**Exhibit IV.1.** Selection criteria for recommended DSP training program models, by component

|                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | <b>1. Intended audience</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritizes retention of existing early- to mid-career DSPs</li> <li>• Includes independent and non-Medicaid DSPs</li> </ul>                                                                   |
|    | <b>2. Training responsibility</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides options for DSPs to access training</li> <li>• Allows employers to use existing training infrastructure</li> </ul>                                                              |
|    | <b>3. Training curriculum</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses existing curriculum aligned with nationally recognized DSP competencies</li> </ul>                                                                                                      |
|   | <b>4. Training mode</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritizes accessibility for DSPs and aligns expectations with incentives</li> <li>• Enhances DSP engagement with opportunities for connection and mentorship</li> </ul>                          |
|  | <b>5. Certifications offered</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes certifications earned through demonstration of nationally recognized DSP competencies</li> </ul>                                                                                 |
|  | <b>6. Incentives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoids shifting additional training costs to DSPs and employers without broader wage or reimbursement reforms</li> <li>• Offers incentives commensurate with DSP and employer expectations</li> </ul> |
|  | <b>7. Overall</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligns with implementation learnings from other successful programs</li> </ul>                                                                                                                           |

Despite largely meeting these criteria, we excluded registered apprenticeships from our selected program models as it is not feasible to implement in Florida at this time. Florida previously had a registered DSP apprenticeship program, coordinated by Florida ARF for its member organizations. In 2026, Florida ARF voluntarily withdrew its apprenticeship from registration from the Florida Department of Education's Career and Adult Education. This decision was based on recent changes in Florida's administration of and expectations for registered apprenticeship programs. With these changes, state's registered apprenticeship structure was no longer well aligned with this DSP workforce development program.

Compared to other registered apprenticeships that focus on individuals entering an occupation, the DSP apprenticeship often engaged experienced DSPs in advancing their competencies and careers.

While Florida may consider implementing a new registered apprenticeship focused on entry-level DSPs in the future, low wages and limited wage growth in the DSP occupation will be a persistent barrier. State and local career boards focus their investment on careers with both strong earning potential and employer demand. As noted in the discussion on DSP training embedded in secondary schools, DSP careers often do not meet desired wage thresholds. Registered apprenticeships require a progressive wage schedule, with most entry-level wages ranging from 40-50 percent of the exit wage (Eldridge & Boren, 2021). Many DSPs receive hourly wages at or slightly above minimum wage; in the 2025 Florida DSPs survey, 71 percent of DSPs made between \$15 and \$17.99 per hour, including 68 percent of DSPs with four or more years of experience (Bajaj et al., 2025). As a result, employers are largely unable to offer wage schedule increases comparable to other registered apprenticeships.

2. DSP credentialing programs

DSP credentialing programs are the most common approach for states seeking to address DSP workforce challenges while improving service quality. Evaluations of DSP credentialing programs in Georgia, New York, and Tennessee indicate these programs are effective at improving DSP-reported job satisfaction, confidence, and skills (Pettingell et al. 2025; Dickinson 2025; Bershadsky et al. 2025). In addition, voluntary credentialing programs provide an opportunity to test a framework for formalizing a state’s DSP workforce standards without imposing additional barriers to entering the DSP workforce.

Credentialing programs directly address several concerns raised by people with IDD and their families in Florida, and they hold potential interest for Florida’s DSPs. Exhibit IV.2 shows how a DSP credentialing program aligns with Florida’s priorities; it offers a flexible pathway that can support DSP retention, recognize DSPs’ existing skills and experience, and strengthen professionalization through standardized, nationally recognized credentials. Existing credentialing models and curricula could also support efficient implementation.

Key challenges include securing sustainable funding for incentives, training, and participation and ensuring that credentials are connected to meaningful benefits, such as wage increases, which might be constrained by provider reimbursement rates. In Exhibit IV.2, we highlight the advantages and disadvantages of a DSP credentialing program.

Exhibit IV.2. Advantages and disadvantages of a DSP credentialing program

| Advantages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Disadvantages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Priority 1: Address DSP retention                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| A DSP credentialing program requires a lower initial investment from DSPs compared to an apprenticeship program or a community college program. Onerous, mandatory training requirements can dissuade potential DSPs from entering the DSP workforce. Optional credentialing programs, especially those available online, may be a more appealing option for DSPs and DSP candidates with limited time and no previous postsecondary experience. | Credentialing is less successful as a retention mechanism when credentials are not paired with wage increases. Some credentialing programs showed some evidence that certification completion led to wage differentiation, but the extent to which such wage differentiation can be implemented is limited by reimbursement rates for many DSP employers. |

| Advantages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Disadvantages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Credentialing can apply to DSPs across the workforce (e.g., independent or agency, rural or urban, and early or late career).</b> For DSPs who have already worked in the field for years, credentialing allow them to receive credit for their experience and existing knowledge.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Priority 2: Professionalize the workforce</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>In Florida, DSPs and families of people with IDD are interested in credentials as evidence of DSP skills</b> (Carney et al. 2024; Bajaj et al. 2025). DSPs who have received certifications in other states view a national certification as a major accomplishment that earns employer recognition.<br><b>Credentials can increase DSP professionalization in an underrecognized field.</b> Disability advocates have repeatedly raised concerns that DSPs are not classified as a distinct occupation at the national level, which limits assessment of and action on the DSP workforce crisis (Macbeth 2026). In Florida, DSPs report limited public recognition of DSP as a career option (Bajaj et al. 2025). Professionalization is supported by competency standards, standardized training, and credentials (Roman et al. 2022).<br><b>Credentials serve as a validated and nationally recognized assessment of DSP quality.</b> This recognition supports the growth of a more competent workforce.<br><b>Credentials serve as a foundation for differentiated responsibilities and wages.</b> Tiered credentials offer an objective distinction among entry-level, early career, and advanced workers. | <b>No disadvantages identified.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Priority 3: Foster efficient implementation</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>A credentialing program can be based on the NADSP E-Badge Academy model, which has been widely tested.</b> Other credentialing programs have used NADSP-certified curricula with success, and NADSP could be a helpful partner for building a program. Evaluations of credentialing programs and preexisting data on their success demonstrate the effectiveness of these programs in other states, where they have expanded as a result. The notable success of credentialing programs in other states could provide the data needed to gain the support of key stakeholders for funding pathways.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>The incentives needed to guarantee DSP and employer participation in credentialing programs can be costly to implement statewide.</b> In interviews, program leaders indicated that incentives are important for both DSP and employer participation, whether its financial incentives for completing certain levels of DSP certification, access to free training resources, free enrollment in the E-Badge Academy, or other compensation for training time. At a minimum, Florida’s program would likely need to provide access to the E-Badge Academy and free trainings from a NADSP-qualified training provider. |

3. Considerations when selecting specific program design components

In terms of training responsibility, Florida could consider two different approaches:

- 1. A state-level, single-entity program that delivers training directly to DSPs
- 2. An employer-level program in which employers deliver training to DSPs

Based on Florida's current (Fall 2026) landscape, **we recommend a state-level, single-entity program that delivers training directly to DSPs** due to the cost burden an employer-level program places on employers. However, an employer-level program could be preferred if broader reforms address financial barriers to training.

#### 4. State-level, single-entity program

This centralized model would give FDDC greater control over curriculum and training delivery, participant tracking, and participant supports. Compared to an employer-level program, this approach would facilitate more consistent implementation of a statewide training program and be more inclusive of independent DSPs who lack access to employer-sponsored training. To be feasible statewide, this model would likely rely heavily on virtual or asynchronous training. This modality offers flexibility for DSPs with irregular schedules and those in rural areas, but it also increases the importance of coaching, mentoring, and technical assistance.

In this model, the state would likely need to fund incentives, particularly if DSPs are completing training outside paid work hours. Independent DSPs, who do not have an employer partner to provide paid training time, are likely to need outside compensation to participate.

#### 5. Employer-level program

For this employer-led model, FDDC would need to spend time early on identifying DSP employers willing to implement the program. In this model, employers would be responsible for ensuring DSPs complete the curriculum and demonstrate the competencies. This is often easier for employers that already have training infrastructure; their staff can integrate the credential training requirements into the organization's existing onboarding, supervision, or professional development processes. In this approach, employers can also tailor scheduling and delivery to their workforce needs. Additionally, implementation of training at the employer-level can make it easier to embed mentoring, coaching, and skills application into the workplace. However, this model would limit the recruitment and participation of independent DSPs who are not affiliated with an employer.

Employer-level implementation shifts more costs from the state-level program to the employers delivering the training. Employers may need to pay for a variety of training-related costs, including access to learning management systems; curriculum licenses; trainer or supervisor time; backfill or overtime so DSPs can complete training; mentoring; participant tracking; and administrative coordination.

#### 6. Conditions for feasible implementation in Florida

✓ **Florida has available seed funding that allows DSPs and their employers to participate at no or low cost.** At a minimum, a statewide DSP credentialing program would require funding for the following: access to an approved training curriculum; credentialing fees or E-Badge Academy seats; program administration, coaching and navigation supports; and incentives or compensation for DSP training time. Florida work group participants emphasized that new credentialing expectations should be accompanied by meaningful funding and not require DSP employers to absorb additional expenses. One former program leader noted that a lack of funds to continue reimbursing participating employers led employers to exit the program. As a result, this program is no longer active.

- ✓ **Florida has identified an entity with the capacity to administer the DSP credentialing program.** Regardless of who delivers the training, administering a DSP credentialing program in Florida and securing long-term funding for it requires participant enrollment and tracking, administration of incentives, and evaluation activities to assess program outcomes. These functions require meaningful, dedicated staff capacity at an organizational level. Ideally, the program staff roster would also include a program coordinator and/or coaches who understand the credentialing process and can provide individualized support to participants through program completion.
- ✓ **Florida has a strategy for addressing technological and accessibility barriers to virtual training.** Virtual and hybrid DSP credentialing programs have the potential to reach more DSPs, such as those living in rural areas. However, the technology required to complete these programs may exclude DSPs with limited technological skills, unreliable internet access, or limited access to compatible devices. DSPs participating in such a program may need technical assistance or opportunities for in-person assistance.
- ✓ **Florida can assign meaningful value to earned credentials.** Credentialing is a stronger retention strategy when DSPs see a tangible benefit from obtaining certifications at increasingly advanced levels. In the near term, that benefit could include credential completion bonuses, paid training time, professional recognition (e.g., graduation ceremonies), or eligibility for advanced titles or responsibilities. For credentialing to become a more impactful strategy for increasing workforce retention, Florida needs mechanisms that connect higher credential levels to increased wages or other career advancement. However, such mechanisms are not likely without significant support at the state level, including policy changes mandating wage differentiation.



### Case study of a DSP credentialing program: Georgia DSP Training and Assessment Program

The **Georgia DSP Training and Assessment Program (DSP TAP)** began as one of three DSP certification pilots funded by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD). It is administered by the University of Georgia Institute on Human Development and Disability (UGA). DSP TAP prepares potential DSPs for direct support work and recognizes the competencies of existing DSPs through structured training and standardized assessment processes. Participants receive a financial incentive after earning certification, and they could complete the program at no cost during the pilot.

#### Key outcomes

- As of September 2025, 426 participants had received a DSP-I credential, and 260 participants had received a DSP-II credential.
- After receiving their credentials, 60 percent of participants reported that they intended to stay in the direct support field for the next 10 years, and another 34 percent reported that they intended to stay for the next 3–10 years. Nearly all staff reported feeling better equipped to work as a DSP after receiving their credential.
- Provider organizations thought the DSP TAP program was beneficial. Overall, 75 percent of organizations reported the program having a positive impact, and 25 percent reported some positive impacts.

#### Key considerations for Florida

The DSP TAP pilot's flexibility depended in part on wraparound supports available to individual DSPs. DSPs without additional supports (e.g., flexible work schedules) sometimes struggled to fit training in given work and family responsibilities. Remote proctoring of the credentialing exam also created challenges for some DSPs. The

program’s one-time completion bonus provided a strong incentive for participation; however, the bonus was supported by temporary pilot funding, raising questions about its sustainability. Continued implementation will require dedicated funding and infrastructure for program administration, technical assistance, and certification oversight. Finally, although participants reported increased competency and strong intentions to remain in direct support work, the evaluation did not establish whether certification resulted in improved long-term retention or reduced turnover.

Sources: Evaluation of Georgia DBHDD-Funded Direct Support Professional Certification Pilots: Final Report (2025). ▲

7, College certificate programs

College certificate programs are a strong option for DSP training. They can be delivered independently for a more localized impact or as one pathway in a comprehensive, statewide DSP training and credentialing program. Community and technical colleges develop most of the training curricula for the entry-level healthcare workforce (Fischer et al. 2020). College programs are likely to appeal to some DSP groups more than others. For example, these programs may appeal more to young professionals and those interested in career ladders available through postsecondary programs. Not all college certification programs have been successful, but some models, such as the SUNY DSP training program in New York, demonstrate how supplementing academic training with the right participant supports can be effective (Bershadsky et al. 2025).

Below, we discuss the advantages and disadvantages of college certificate programs and potential considerations for implementing such programs. Exhibit IV.3 shows how a college certificate program aligns with Florida’s priorities; it creates a pathway for DSPs to build workforce skills, earn academic credit, access mentorship, and pursue further education and career advancement opportunities. The existing college infrastructure and emerging DSP programs in Florida may also provide a foundation for implementing these programs.

Key challenges include potential barriers to enrollment and participation, the time and complexity involved in obtaining academic credit approval, coordination across state and college systems, and ensuring long-term program sustainability. In Exhibit IV.3, we highlight the advantages and disadvantages of college certificate programs.

Exhibit IV.3. Advantages and disadvantages of college certificate programs

| Advantages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Disadvantages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Priority 1: Address DSP retention                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Completing college certificate programs can enhance DSP perceptions of their professional pathways. In credit-based programs, DSPs can develop workforce skills while earning academic credits toward a degree. In the SUNY community college program, 85 percent of participating DSPs planned to continue their education in a degree-granting program (Bershadsky et al. 2025). | Obtaining academic credit approval can present implementation challenges. The accreditation process for college credit courses can be time-consuming and administratively complex. Some programs have addressed this barrier by offering noncredit courses instead of formal academic credit. However, noncredit courses may not carry the same career development benefits for DSPs interested in eventually pursuing a degree-conferring program. |

| Advantages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Disadvantages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>For college programs, there are no inherent limitations on the types of DSPs who can participate.</b> These programs are available to prospective DSPs, current DSPs, and both independent and agency-based DSPs. However, related grants or incentive programs may be tied to specific funding sources, such as prioritizing grants for Medicaid providers.</p> <p><b>College programs can support mentorship through teacher and student connections.</b> For online programs, learning management systems can facilitate peer supports among students and instructors.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p><b>Enrollment in a college program may present some barriers.</b> Some DSPs may be intimidated by college enrollment. In addition, time constraints due to work and personal responsibilities can prevent some individuals from participating.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Priority 2: Professionalize the workforce                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p><b>Shifting DSP training to a college certificate program can reduce employer training costs.</b> DSPs that complete some training prior to onboarding can decrease an employer's need to provide DSP training after they are hired.</p> <p><b>Most college programs include a certification component with assessment strategies.</b> This meets the recommendation to include certification as a component of the DSP training program without requiring the program to contract with or develop new credentialing processes.</p> <p><b>College programs can strengthen early-career DSP recruitment and retention by introducing the profession through a college pathway.</b> These programs can also help participants build professional networks that support job satisfaction.</p>         | <p><b>College programs are not a universal strategy to train and credential DSPs statewide.</b> These programs can be an effective component of a statewide training and credentialing program but are not a universal pathway for all DSPs. These programs may exclude DSPs unable to presently commit to a college program or fail to attract participation from DSPs uninterested in continuing education. Additionally, these programs are unlikely to achieve the scale necessary to train all DSPs. This strategy could be one of several options used in a mandatory training and credentialing program.</p> |
| Priority 3: Foster efficient implementation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p><b>One state college in Florida is developing a DSP microcredential program that incorporates community partnerships.</b> This work that is already underway offers a potential foundation for collaboration, pilot testing the effectiveness of reaching DSPs through college programs and future expansion of the model.</p> <p><b>Colleges offer existing infrastructure that can reduce start-up costs and enhance learning experiences.</b> Colleges already have teaching staff, learning management systems, and connections to employers and community stakeholders, elements that would take time and resources to secure through other training programs. In addition, colleges can use their student support systems to facilitate connections to financial or wraparound services.</p> | <p><b>Implementation requires coordination between state entities and college systems.</b> This can potentially create challenges related to differing terminology, organizational processes, and communication. Program sustainability depends on a college's willingness to continue offering a program. The data available for program evaluations may be limited by a college's ability to collect and share implementation information.</p>                                                                                                                                                                    |

*a. Considerations when selecting specific program design components*

Based on the environmental scan, college certificate programs were less likely to align their curricula explicitly with national competency areas, compared to other program models. College certifications do not necessarily require alignment with competencies developed by an organization like NADSP because college staff independently assess each participant to determine whether they have earned their credential. Integrating a college certification program into a statewide credentialing system would require aligning the college curriculum with national standards. However, DSPs earning credentials through a

college certificate program should gain similar skills and knowledge as DSPs earning credentials through other means.

We recommend that college certificate programs offer flexible options for completing the program, including online, in-person, and hybrid options. It is critical to support interactions among students who choose online-only learning. Discussion forums on online platforms and live online events can help support relationship building and collaborative learning. College certificate programs can also include optional in-person gatherings, celebrations, or learning experiences to support participant connections.

College certificate programs tend to focus on existing DSPs, though many are also open to prospective DSPs. If accepting prospective DSPs, the program should consider including opportunities for students to get hands-on experience through field placements, special projects at employment sites, or internships. For prospective DSPs, such experiences offer the opportunity to apply new skills in real-world settings. Field placements can also build student relationships with potential employers, strengthening recruitment pipelines. Existing DSPs can get hands-on experience through their current employers.

*b. Conditions for feasible implementation in Florida*

✓ **Florida has sufficient start-up funding available and has identified a pathway to sustainable funding.** Initial resources are needed to adapt or develop the curriculum, compensate subject matter experts and instructional staff, establish administrative and data systems, and recruit participants and employer partners. Funding is also necessary to make the program financially accessible to DSPs who may be unable to pay tuition or fees out of pocket. A scholarship or tuition-assistance program could support reduced- or no-cost enrollment and could also cover related expenses, such as textbooks, technology, or other costs. Grant funding or investments from trade organizations or other funders could support this initiative. Community partners and employers could also help address indirect participation costs by providing DSPs with paid time to complete training.

✓ **Florida has one or more college partners with the capacity and willingness to implement the program.** An appropriate partner would have staff with expertise in workforce education, disability services, instructional design, and program administration along with systems for enrollment, student support, and online or hybrid instruction. The partner college would also need to collaborate with DSPs, employers, people with disabilities, families, and advocacy organizations to ensure its curriculum reflects workforce needs and national competencies. If the program includes a practicum component, the college will need to establish partnerships with employers. Depending on the program's goals, the college should also determine whether the certificate would be offered as a microcredential, for academic credit, or integrated into the NADSP E-Badge Academy.

✓ **Program partners have clearly defined roles and a shared implementation and evaluation plan.** Written agreements should outline responsibilities for curriculum ownership, program recruitment, scholarships, student supports, employer engagement, and collecting and sharing participation and outcome data. Advocacy groups could play an important convening role and help identify college and funding partners, promote enrollment, incorporate the perspectives of DSPs and people receiving services, and use evaluation findings to build support for long-term funding and program expansion.



### Case study of a college certificate program: SUNY Microcredentials Program

In 2023, the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) partnered with SUNY to implement the **SUNY DSP Microcredentials Program**. This program provides DSPs with a pathway to earn national certifications through the NADSP E-Badge Academy while earning college credits. As of August 2025, the program had expanded to 21 SUNY campuses. Each campus uses existing coursework to develop credit-bearing microcredentials that count toward a degree.

#### Key outcomes

- As of August 2025, 869 students had earned a DSP-I certification, 455 had earned a DSP-II certification, and 210 had earned a DSP-III certification.
- Nearly all certified students (99 percent) agreed that the certification had made them better equipped to provide high-quality supports to people receiving services. Most students (78 percent) planned to remain in the direct support field for more than five years.
- Most provider organizations (81 percent) planned to give new or additional promotions, raises, or bonuses to staff who earned a certification.

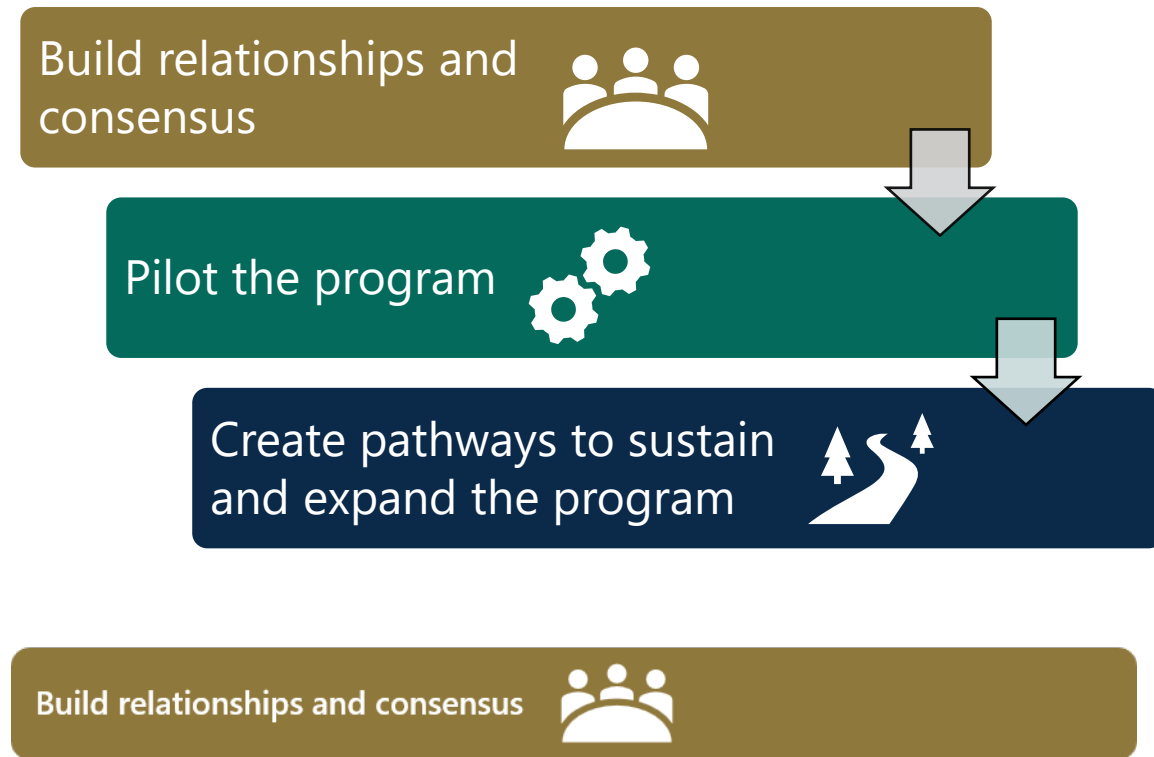
#### Key considerations for Florida

The published evaluation of the SUNY Microcredentials program identifies several considerations for adapting a similar approach in Florida. A college certificate program could require substantial administrative resources as well as intensive supports for DSPs with limited postsecondary experience. Flexible scheduling and pacing is important, but should be balanced with opportunities for students to interact with instructors, coaches, and peers. Programs also need clear processes for student mentorship and clear guidance for completing certification requirements and ensuring that coursework remains directly relevant to DSP responsibilities. The SUNY experience suggests that funding is important not only for tuition but also for the wraparound services that allow working DSPs to participate in the program. Finally, meaningful wage and career incentives may require additional employer commitments.

Source: Evaluation of OPWDD-Funded American Rescue Plan Act Workforce Projects, Final Report (Dec. 2025). ▲

## C. Implementation road map

For FDDC's implementation of a DSP training model, we recommend three key steps (see Exhibit IV.4). In this section, we describe each step in detail and provide an example of another state's approach to each of these implementation steps.

**Exhibit IV.4.** Recommended road map to implement a DSP training model

Developing multistakeholder work groups fosters a shared understanding of workforce challenges and builds consensus around DSP training program goals. For example, organized work groups or advisory councils bring stakeholders together to brainstorm training solutions to DSP workforce challenges. An increased sense of ownership and commitment among stakeholders creates program champions, which leads to funding opportunities and advocacy, including support for legislative changes that would encourage program implementation. This collaboration also helps identify potential roadblocks and any similar efforts already underway.



#### **Building relationships and consensus: Multistakeholder workforce work groups**

To identify and advance potential solutions to DSP workforce challenges, one interviewed state agency convened a multistakeholder work group composed of organizations and individuals with different roles in the IDD service system. Discussions stemming from a 2022 State Senate Committee study highlighted both the limited pathways for DSP wage increases and the need for a more sustainable mechanism for incorporating wage increases into Medicaid rate models.

Using available funds from the American Rescue Plan Act, stakeholders in this multistakeholder work group explored ways to direct resources to DSPs and which approaches could be most effective. The multistakeholder work group also engaged independent researchers to assess the sustainability of the pilot programs and inform ongoing research about payment options that could be incorporated into the state's Medicaid rate-setting process. Stakeholders described the multistakeholder work group as an important mechanism for bridging gaps across organizations, coordinating efforts, and building momentum toward long-term DSP workforce solutions. ▀

## Pilot the program



Once a program has built strong partnerships and secured stakeholder support, we recommend FDDC obtain seed funding for start-up costs and a pilot program. A pilot program allows the state to test a program design model on a smaller scale (e.g., with a limited number of employers or enrolled DSP participants). To determine which program designs work best in Florida, FDDC may want to run multiple, concurrent pilots. Several programs involved in the interviews used American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to launch and implement pilot programs. Potential sources of seed funding include grants through the Rural Health Transformation Program or the Department of Labor, one-time federal funding opportunities, and state funds.

We recommend evaluating all pilot programs to inform the design of any future program iterations. An evaluation would reveal which components worked well and which components were less effective and should be changed. FDDC should also consider conducting outcome evaluations of pilot programs, including success stories from participating DSPs, to demonstrate proof of concept.



### Program pilots: From testing to sustained implementation

One state launched a two-year DSP training and certification pilot in 2022 using ARPA funds. This pilot program arose from long-standing advocacy from employers, DSPs, and state partners to professionalize the DSP workforce. The pilot program's staff spent approximately three and a half months designing the pilot, which included determining how to structure training around DSP schedules and how to align the program with NADSP accreditation requirements. Initially, ARPA funds supported staff time, curriculum development, and other start-up activities, while funding from a state trust supported financial incentives for DSPs and employer partners for training and certification milestones.

This pilot provided program leaders an opportunity to identify implementation challenges and refine the program before launching a two-year extension of the program. For example, after analyzing feedback from DSPs, program staff shortened the trainings and offered them at times that better accommodated DSP schedules. The state also used the pilot period to build infrastructure that would support continued program implementation.

When ARPA funds were no longer available, the state used Section 1115 Medicaid waiver funding for training delivery and continued its partnership with the state trust to continue providing financial incentives for DSPs and their employers. ▲

## Create pathways to sustain and expand the program



FDDC can use data from pilot program evaluations to quantify its success and secure sustainable funding sources for long-term program implementation and statewide expansion. Potential options for long-term, sustainable funding include changes to Medicaid policy, such as integration into Section 1115 and Section 1915(c) waivers. For example, certification incentives can be included in Medicaid rate add-ons through waivers, such as setting higher rates for a unit of service for staff who have earned an advanced credential through a DSP training program. Florida can also coordinate with managed care organizations to

integrate strategies that support training and wage increases into managed care contracts (Roman et al. 2022). However, a key limitation of this approach is that Medicaid-funded pathways will only be open to Medicaid-certified DSPs.



### **Creating pathways to program sustainability: DSP training level payment differentiation for Medicaid providers**

Missouri has implemented DSP training levels to sustain employer incentives under Medicaid. In Missouri, any non-licensed professional staff who deliver contracted Medicaid HCBS waiver services can earn payments based on the percentage of the employer's DSPs meeting a given training level. As described below, three levels of incentive payments are activated when an employer can demonstrate the following:

- At least 90 percent of its DSP workforce with at least a six-month tenure with the same agency has completed Level 1 DSP training
- The Level 1 DSP benchmark has been met and maintained and 50 percent of its DSP workforce with at least a six-month tenure with the same agency has completed Level 2 DSP training
- The Level 1 and Level 2 DSP benchmarks have been met and maintained and 50 percent of its DSP workforce with at least a one-year tenure with the same agency has completed Level 3 DSP training

Source: Missouri Department of Mental Health (<https://dmh.mo.gov/dev-disabilities/vbp/dsp-training-levels>) ▲

## **D. Recommended implementation strategies**

Interviews with DSP training program leaders and implementation partners highlighted several effective implementation practices that apply regardless of the DSP training program model. Namely, engaging employer partners, supporting participants throughout training, and collecting data to measure program outcomes are all integral to successful implementation.

### **1. Engaging employers**

The program leaders we interviewed named DSP employer participation as the largest barrier to program implementation. One way to address this challenge is proactively engaging an organization's leadership to help them understand the benefits of investing in DSP professional development. One program leader found that when CEOs and other leaders understood their program's value, this generated more support in the provider organization and expanded their network of potential employer partners. As a program nears the implementation stage, FDDC should identify or embed a staff member in the employer organization to be the program's primary contact. For example, one program relied on administrators in employer organizations to coordinate participation, help DSPs overcome barriers to training, and communicate any implementation challenges or progress to program leadership.

We also recommend establishing clear expectations for employers considering a program partnership. Interviewed program leaders reported that employers did not always initially understand what participation would require, including employer responsibilities and the resources required for training access, scheduling, coaching, or participant oversight. Education early in a partnership can help set realistic expectations and identify any potential employers that may not be a good fit for the program. After its initial pilot, one program refined its provider recruitment and vetting process and developed implementation resources for local administrators.

## **2. Supporting program participants**

To successfully complete a DSP training program, participants may need support beyond curriculum access. Programs that paired training with ongoing coaching, flexible participation options, and other participant supports said this facilitated DSP engagement.

Assigning a dedicated program staff member responsible for monitoring participant progress and helping address barriers can help FDDC track engagement and help participants get back on track when challenges arise. In employer-based DSP credentialing models, this role can be filled by a local administrator or other designated staff member in the employer organization. Regardless of where the position is housed, program participants benefit from knowing who to contact when they encounter scheduling, training, technological, or administrative problems.

We recommend pairing training with mentorship or coaching, particularly for competency-based credentialing. Our research showed that coaching was especially important in programs using NADSP credentials; these programs require DSPs to submit testimonials demonstrating how they applied their competencies in practice. Interviewed program leaders found participants could become discouraged if their submissions were rejected, and they benefited from individualized guidance on how to improve them. This mentorship is particularly important during the first year of participation because DSPs became more confident and required less assistance once they understood the testimonial process.

FDDC should also consider the importance of flexible training schedules and certification completion timelines. DSPs often must balance training with demanding work schedules, multiple jobs, caregiving responsibilities, and other constraints that cannot accommodate a rigid training schedule. One program adjusted the timing and frequency of its in-person trainings and offered self-paced coursework that DSPs could complete at different speeds. Online and hybrid formats can increase flexibility, and synchronous sessions can be scheduled for evenings or weekends to accommodate work schedules. However, it is important to balance flexibility with active follow-up so participants in self-paced models do not disengage or fall behind.

FDDC should also plan for barriers involving technology, language, and other accessibility issues. One program had difficulties with remote proctoring technology. It responded by developing a technology guide, connecting participants to technical assistance, and allowing individuals experiencing technical problems to reschedule assessments. Another program provided individualized assistance to DSPs whose first language was not English, including help preparing credentialing testimonials.

We also recommend considering ways to provide DSPs with wraparound services that can help them complete a training program. DSPs may experience financial, transportation, scheduling, or other barriers that make it challenging to complete their training. Partnerships with community coalitions and workforce organizations could connect program participants with additional supports. A statewide program would not necessarily need to provide these services directly; rather, the program could identify existing community and workforce resources and establish referral pathways as needs arise.

FDDC should establish clear expectations during DSP recruitment to and enrollment in the training program. This involves clear communication about the expected time commitment, training and credentialing requirements, program timeline, available incentives, and how completing the training

program will affect their career opportunities in the caregiving and healthcare fields. Clear expectations are particularly important when a program focuses on entry-level or early-career DSPs because they should have a clear understanding of the nature of DSP work and realistic career pathways.

Finally, recognizing program participants through graduation ceremonies, awards, and visible recognition from organizational leaders help establish a credential or certificate as a professional career achievement. These small yet meaningful acts recognizing participant accomplishments also promote FDDC's broader goal of professionalizing the DSP workforce.

### **3. Collecting data to measure success**

Collecting qualitative and quantitative data can help FDDC understand program impacts and improve program design. Qualitative data collection can include discussions with program participants to help program administrators identify the most valuable program characteristics, curriculum gaps, and barriers to participation. FDDC may consider assigning a dedicated program or provider organization staff member to collect ongoing feedback from participants. Interviewed program leaders reported that onboarding a dedicated program staff for collecting feedback allowed them to address participant concerns proactively.

Surveys can help FDDC assess participants' knowledge and their likelihood of entering the DSP workforce. Many program leaders we interviewed required that participants complete surveys or written testimonials at different program intervals to capture snapshots of participant learning and their application of the material. FDDC could consider administering surveys and written modules at the end of each course to understand content-specific knowledge gains or a cumulative survey at the end of the program. Survey feedback would help FDDC adapt training content to better prepare future participants.

Certain grants or funding streams could require quantitative metrics on participants and employers. Some program leaders we interviewed were required to track participant completion rates, test scores, recruitment and retention rates, and wage increases as part of a grant award or their registration as an apprenticeship program. We therefore recommend proactively establishing systems for data collection and reporting (e.g., a data dashboard). A program's ability to track certain outcomes and quality metrics—particularly DSP retention rates after program completion—often depends on its data sharing partnerships with government agencies or employers. Some programs are required to collect and track specific workforce metrics, including participant progression through certification levels, to demonstrate program outcomes and administer wage increases or financial incentives. To better understand long-term program outcomes, some programs also work with employers to track the number of DSPs recruited and retained for one year after program completion. Beyond complying with funder requirements, having data available to quantify a program's success is crucial for sustaining long-term funding and expanding state-level support.

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## V. Other Interventions

To support DSP retention in Florida, FDDC might consider other promising interventions beyond a DSP training program. These DSP interventions could include improving work schedules, increasing access to health insurance, facilitating peer supports, and supporting job previews.

### A. DSP work schedule improvement model

GoodLife Innovations, a disability services and support organization, in partnership with the University of Kansas Department of Applied Behavioral Analysis, introduced and tested a program model designed to increase the quality of the direct support workforce and strengthen service stability (Goodlife 2026). This model focuses on improving DSP schedules. It combines a three-day work week, flexible shift trading, premium pay, and centralized workforce management to increase worker flexibility while limiting overtime and staff costs for the employer. In this model, most DSPs work 13 days per month, leaving them 17–18 days off, and they can trade shifts within or across programs. This structure gives DSPs both more control over their schedules and more opportunities to pick up additional shifts. In an approach designed to avoid additional overtime costs, the model includes 1.5 times pay for weekend shifts. This allows DSPs to earn more for weekend work and helps employers reduce weekend vacancies.

GoodLife implemented this model with ten employer partners and then conducted follow-up surveys with each provider's implementation team. The survey results show promising outcomes. After implementing the scheduling model, 87.5 percent of respondents indicated increased applications for DSP positions. Respondents also reported a 55 percent increase in staff working extra hours (Goodlife 2026).

### B. DSP health insurance coverage

The Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services, in partnership with researchers from Kansas University, conducted a workforce study that identified lack of health insurance as one of the primary reasons individuals leave the DSP workforce. Like Florida, Kansas has not expanded Medicaid. A recently introduced House bill ([HB 2310](#)) in the Kansas legislature, copied from a 2024 Rhode Island bill, would have allowed the state health plan to cover DSPs. That bill died in committee in April 2026. However, given Kansas's long IDD waiver waitlist and limited DSP capacity to support this population, there is optimism that another iteration of this bill will be introduced within the next year.

### C. Peer supports and mentorship programs

Based on our interviews, DSPs value having a space to share experiences, ask questions, and receive emotional support. To address this need, FDDC could facilitate support groups and other opportunities for independent DSPs to strengthen their community connections. FDDC could also provide a moderated online forum where DSPs could ask questions, share resources and learnings, and provide each other with emotional support. In addition, FDDC could support mentorship programs that match new DSPs with more experienced staff. FDDC could collaborate with professional associations to facilitate these mentorships matches between new and senior DSPs to support retention and service quality improvements.

## **D. Job previews**

During expert interviews, DSPs in Florida noted that new hires are often unprepared for the nature of the DSP role, and this mismatch between expectations and the reality of the job contributes to high turnover among early-career staff. To help those in the recruitment pipeline assess their fit with a DSP career, FDDC could develop realistic job previews for different DSP roles that align with recommendations from the Administration for Community Living. In partnership with employers, individuals with IDD, and their advocates, FDDC could create job previews that represent different roles and service user types. Job previews could include personas or short video vignettes that represent DSP clients and candidates (e.g., a parent with caregiving experience or a college student seeking part-time work). As part of this effort, FDDC could develop standardized job descriptions for various types of DSP clients to facilitate recruitment efforts. To circulate these preview resources widely, FDDC can provide them to employers and clients who use self-directed services.

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## VI. Conclusion

Our Year 4 research identified two promising DSP training program models with the potential to improve the quality of direct support services and DSP retention in Florida: (1) a DSP credentialing program and (2) a college certificate program. These recommended programs use established, nationally recognized credentialing approaches and give employers flexibility in the way training is delivered. An ideal DSP training program model will incentivize employers to invest in workforce quality while creating opportunities for DSPs to advance on a professional career pathway.

FDDC's ability to support implementation of the identified program models will depend largely on the availability of seed funding and a sustainable, long-term funding approach. The next phase of FDDC's work should focus on translating the RPS research findings into advocacy for actionable policy and financing strategies. These financing strategies could include grant funding for pilot programs, Medicaid rate add-ons, value-based payment strategies, and other mechanisms the APD and, ultimately, the Florida Legislature could implement to support a sustainable DSP training program.

A DSP training program alone will not address all the challenges to expanding and sustaining a strong, competent DSP workforce. Although training and certification programs show promise for improved DSP retention and quality of direct support services, they may be less effective at attracting new talent to the DSP field. If recruiting prospective DSPs is also a priority for Florida, FDDC should continue exploring supplemental strategies specifically designed to expand the pool of new DSPs.

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## Appendix A

### Environmental Scan Search Strategy

## Search strategy

Mathematica conducted a search to identify existing DSP training programs and initiatives available from state agencies, high schools, postsecondary institutions, professional organizations, and provider agencies within and outside of Florida. We performed a targeted search of organizational websites and a broader AI-enabled search to capture additional state-specific programs and offerings by high schools and postsecondary institutions. For efficiency, we began the search with a targeted review of educational programs accredited by NADSP,<sup>1</sup> programs identified through prior RPS research, and programs identified by FDDC or members of the RPS Work Group.

**Organizational websites:** The following organizations and agencies fell into three categories: (1) national organizations and agencies that represent or provide direct care services to people with IDD and their families, (2) national organizations and agencies that represent or support direct care workers, and (3) Florida-based organizations and agencies that represent or provide direct care to people with IDD and their families. We searched the following organizations and agencies' websites using a custom Google search and the search terms from **Exhibit A.1**:

- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (cms.gov; medicaid.gov)
- U.S. Department of Labor (dol.gov)
- U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (dol.gov/agencies/odep)
- U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (doleta.gov)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Community Living (acl.gov)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (cdc.gov/ncbddd)
- Rehabilitation Services Administration (rsa.ed.gov)
- Home Care Association of America (hcaa.org)
- Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities (apd.myflorida.com)
- Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (fddc.org)
- Florida Agency for Health Care Administration (ahca.myflorida.com)
- Florida Medicaid Managed Care (flmedicaidmanagedcare.com)
- Florida Department of Children and Families (myflfamilies.com)
- Florida Inclusion Network (floridainclusionnetwork.com)
- Florida Center for Inclusive Communities (flfcic.cbcs.usf.edu)
- Florida Department of Education (fldoe.org)
- Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities (florida-card.org)
- Centers for Independent Living (floridasilc.org/centers-for-independent-living)

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<sup>1</sup> NADSP. "NADSP Accredited Education." 2025. <https://nadsp.org/services/accredited-education/>.

- Florida Association of Centers for Independent Living (floridacils.org)
- Florida Independent Living Council (floridasilc.org)
- National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (nadsp.org)
- National Disability Institute (nationaldisabilityinstitute.org)
- National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (nacdd.org)
- American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (aaidd.org)
- Association of Professional Developmental Disabilities Administrators (apdda.org)
- National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (nasddds.org)
- Association of University Centers on Disabilities (aucd.org)
- American Association of People with Disabilities (aapd.com)
- LEAD Center (leadcenter.org)
- PHI (phinational.org)
- Social Policy Research Associates (spra.com)
- The Arc (thearc.org)
- National Organization on Disability (nod.org)
- National Disability Rights Network (ndrn.org)
- Center for Healthcare Strategies (chcs.org)
- National Academy for State Health Policy (nashp.org)
- National Governors Association (nga.org)
- Center on Disability and Development (cdd.tamu.edu)
- Disability Scoop (disabilityscoop.com)
- ANCOR (ancor.org)
- Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (floridaarf.org)
- National Association of Rehabilitation Providers and Agencies (naranet.org)
- American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association (amrpa.org)
- National Rehabilitation Association (nationalrehab.org)

**AI-enabled search:** To conduct a thorough search of programs offered by specific states, postsecondary institutions, and provider agencies, Mathematica used an AI tool, ChatGPT, to efficiently scan a broader swath of public resources. Before conducting this AI-supported search, we drafted prompts with guidance from our AI Solutions Team. We used an iterative process with these tools to ensure our search captured information on as many publicly available training programs or initiatives as possible. Our search terms can be found in Exhibit A.1.

**Exhibit A.1.** Environmental scan search terms

**Search terms**

**Terms related to DSPs**

Direct support professional  
Direct support specialist  
Direct care worker  
Direct care staff  
Direct care professional  
Direct service professional  
Personal caregiver  
Personal care assistant  
Personal care worker  
Personal care staff  
Home health aide  
Life skills coach  
Job coach  
Independent living skills trainer  
Behavior technician  
Registered behavior technician  
Residential counselor

**Terms related to training programs or initiatives**

Training  
Training program  
Education  
CE (continuing education)  
Apprenticeship  
Credentialing  
Micro credential  
Certification  
Professional progression  
Career advancement  
Workforce development  
Work-based learning  
Earn and learn  
Career pathway  
Career path  
Accreditation  
Professionalizing  
Workplace support  
Professional development  
Professional growth  
Online training  
Blended training  
Mentoring  
Internet-based training

**Search terms**

Web-based training

Interactive training

Flexible training

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## Appendix B

### Programs Identified in the Environmental Scan

## Appendix B Programs Identified in the Environmental Scan

| Program name                                                            | Location  | Overview                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Program type              | Link to source and evaluation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alaska Primary Care Association's Registered DSP Apprenticeship Program | Alaska    | Registered apprenticeship for entry-level employees coordinated by the Alaska Primary Care Association. Participating DSPs must complete 35 hours of work per week and 1 or 2 hours of online classes during working hours over 1 or 2 years. Employer partners receive support through mentor training, on-the-job training support, and other resources.                                                                                                                  | Registered apprenticeship | <a href="https://alaskapca.org/dsp-apprenticeship/">https://alaskapca.org/dsp-apprenticeship/</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Georgia Department of Labor Certified DSP Apprenticeship Pilot          | Georgia   | Registered DSP apprenticeship pilot project by the Georgia Department of Labor, administered by River Edge Behavioral Health. Apprentices include new hires and currently employed DSPs. DSPs must complete 159 online training hours through Relias and 2,000 hours of work. Employers provide mentors, who evaluate DSPs against competencies to grant certification.                                                                                                     | Registered apprenticeship | <a href="https://www.nasddds.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/How-a-Rate-Study-Became-a-Game-Changer-in-Georgia.pdf">https://www.nasddds.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/How-a-Rate-Study-Became-a-Game-Changer-in-Georgia.pdf</a><br>Evaluation results: <a href="https://ici.s.umn.edu/files/g4g7qgFaCA/evaluation-of-georgia-dbhdd-funded-direct-support-professional-certification-pilots?preferredLocale=en-US">https://ici.s.umn.edu/files/g4g7qgFaCA/evaluation-of-georgia-dbhdd-funded-direct-support-professional-certification-pilots?preferredLocale=en-US</a> |
| Humanim DSP Adult Apprenticeship Program                                | Maryland  | Registered DSP apprenticeship for adults, coordinated by a nonprofit providing workforce development and disability services. Adult apprentices complete classroom instruction and online instruction through Humanim, have on-the-job training from employers, and earn three levels of NADSP certifications.                                                                                                                                                              | Registered apprenticeship | <a href="https://humanim.org/careers/dsp-apprenticeship-program/">https://humanim.org/careers/dsp-apprenticeship-program/</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Minnesota Direct Support Specialist Apprenticeships                     | Minnesota | Registered DSP apprenticeship offered by Quality of Life Home Care Services, LLC, in Minnesota. Accepted 10 DSPs per year.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Registered apprenticeship | <a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20240225061301/http://www.dli.mn.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/appr-health-care.pdf">https://web.archive.org/web/20240225061301/http://www.dli.mn.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/appr-health-care.pdf</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Missouri Talent Pathways                                                | Missouri  | Registered DSP apprenticeship program coordinated by the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Division, Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, and Association of County Developmental Disability Services. DSPs complete 2,000 hours of on-the-job training and at least 169 hours of technical instruction from approved training sources. Employers provide mentorship, participate in monthly Communities of Practice, and receive technical guidance and assistance. | Registered apprenticeship | <a href="https://dmh.mo.gov/dev-disabilities/service-providers/talent-pathways">https://dmh.mo.gov/dev-disabilities/service-providers/talent-pathways</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

## Appendix B Programs Identified in the Environmental Scan

| Program name                                                                                 | Location  | Overview                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Program type              | Link to source and evaluation                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| New York State Registered Apprenticeship for Direct Support Professionals                    | New York  | Registered DSP apprenticeship program coordinated by the New York Department of Labor. DSPs must complete 3,000 to 4,000 hours of work and at least 144 hours of instruction. Currently offered by 15 employers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Registered apprenticeship | <a href="https://dol.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/06/direct-support-specialist-time.pdf">https://dol.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/06/direct-support-specialist-time.pdf</a>                                                   |
| New York State Registered Apprenticeship for Direct Support Professional Supervisors         | New York  | DSP supervisor apprenticeship program, coordinated by the New York Department of Labor. Supervisors must have completed the apprenticeship program or its equivalent. Supervisors must complete 2,000 hours of work (supervisor role, workplace orientation, communication, supervision of DSPs, administrative functions) and at least 144 hours of instruction (safety and the workplace; job, workplace, and employer overview; trade skills). Currently offered by four employers. | Registered apprenticeship | <a href="https://dol.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/06/direct-support-professional-supervisor-time.pdf">https://dol.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/06/direct-support-professional-supervisor-time.pdf</a>                         |
| DSP Apprenticeship Program of the QuILTSS Institute                                          | Tennessee | Registered DSP apprenticeship coordinated by the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development. DSPs must work at least 32 hours per week and complete at least 144 hours of educational instruction. Employers must provide safety training (at least 50 hours), relevant instruction, and mentorship. One-year program.                                                                                                                                                    | Registered apprenticeship | <a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20250904162230/https://www.tbr.edu/academics/direct-support-professional-training">https://web.archive.org/web/20250904162230/https://www.tbr.edu/academics/direct-support-professional-training</a> |
| Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities DSP Apprenticeship                          | Florida   | Registered DSP apprenticeship coordinated by the Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities. Employers are limited to members of the association. Employers must provide training using the DSPaths curriculum and mentorship. DSPs earn certificates of initial and advanced proficiency. One-year program.                                                                                                                                                                     | Registered apprenticeship | <a href="https://apprenticeflorida.com/resources/">https://apprenticeflorida.com/resources/</a>                                                                                                                                           |
| Alaska Training Cooperative (AKTC) /Senior and Disabilities Services DSP Certification Pilot | Alaska    | Training and certification pilot program led by AKTC at the University of Alaska Anchorage and Senior and Disability Services in the Alaska Department of Health. DSPs complete 102 training hours across 41 competency areas, with trainings developed and delivered by AKTC training coordinators. Provides access to the NADSP's E-Badge Academy for DSPs at Medicaid-certified provider organizations. DSPs earn three levels of certification over two years.                     | Credentialing program     | <a href="https://www.jedc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/FY25-AKTC-SDS-DSP-Training-Certification-Program-Overview.pdf">https://www.jedc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/FY25-AKTC-SDS-DSP-Training-Certification-Program-Overview.pdf</a> |

## Appendix B Programs Identified in the Environmental Scan

| Program name                                                         | Location  | Overview                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Program type          | Link to source and evaluation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Georgia Division of Developmental Disabilities NADSP E-Badge Academy | Georgia   | Training and certification pilot program administered by United Cerebral Palsy. DSPs currently employed by provider agencies complete 50 hours of online learning through Relias or the College of Direct Support. Program provides access to NADSP E-Badge Academy for DSPs, who complete certification through the academy.                                                                                                              | Credentialing program | <a href="https://www.nasddds.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/How-a-Rate-Study-Became-a-Game-Changer-in-Georgia.pdf">https://www.nasddds.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/How-a-Rate-Study-Became-a-Game-Changer-in-Georgia.pdf</a><br>Evaluation: <a href="https://ici-s.umn.edu/files/g4g7qgFaCA/evaluation-of-georgia-dbhdd-funded-direct-support-professional-certification-pilots?preferredLocale=en-US">https://ici-s.umn.edu/files/g4g7qgFaCA/evaluation-of-georgia-dbhdd-funded-direct-support-professional-certification-pilots?preferredLocale=en-US</a> |
| The NADSP E-Badge Academy                                            | National  | Through the NADSP E-Badge Academy, DSPs and frontline supervisors submit testimonials demonstrating on-the-job competencies and evidence of relevant accredited training. NADSP reviewers assess these testimonials and grant E-Badges to qualified DSPs. E-Badges stack up to three levels of DSP certification (DSP-I, DSP-II, and DSP-III) and Frontline Supervisor certification. E-Badges are aligned with the CMS Core Competencies. | Credentialing program | <a href="https://nadsp.org/services/the-nadsp-e-badge-academy/">https://nadsp.org/services/the-nadsp-e-badge-academy/</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| New York State NADSP Certification Grant Program                     | New York  | Certification program led by New York State's Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, in partnership with NADSP. The program provides access to NADSP's E-Badge Academy to participating New York provider organizations that employ DSPs. Providers oversee the program and ensure access to NADSP-accredited training platforms for staff.                                                                                    | Credentialing program | <a href="https://opwdd.ny.gov/news/nadsp-dsp-fl-supervisor-certification-program-extended">https://opwdd.ny.gov/news/nadsp-dsp-fl-supervisor-certification-program-extended</a><br>Evaluation: <a href="https://opwdd.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2026/02/opwdd-workforce-project-evaluation-final-report-12-18-25_1.pdf">https://opwdd.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2026/02/opwdd-workforce-project-evaluation-final-report-12-18-25_1.pdf</a>                                                                                                             |
| NADSP E-Badge Academy Program in Tennessee                           | Tennessee | Certification program led by TennCare. The program provides home and community-based services provider organizations in Tennessee with access to NADSP's E-Badge Academy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Credentialing program | <a href="https://www.tn.gov/tenncare/long-term-services-supports/systems-transformation/e-badge-academy.html">https://www.tn.gov/tenncare/long-term-services-supports/systems-transformation/e-badge-academy.html</a><br>Evaluations: <a href="#">NADSP E-Badge Evaluation Report</a> (2025), <a href="#">TennCare 2024 E-Badge Evaluation Report</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

## Appendix B Programs Identified in the Environmental Scan

| Program name                                                                       | Location | Overview                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Program type          | Link to source and evaluation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DSPaths                                                                            | Ohio     | Training and professional development program offered by Lighthouse Cove for people with experience working as a DSP. Students can earn up to three nationally accredited levels of certificates: the Basic Certificate, Certificate of Initial Proficiency, and Certificate of Advanced Proficiency. Students receive access to the NADSP E-Badge Academy to demonstrate proficiency in set competency areas. | Credentialing program | <a href="https://lighthousecove.org/educate/dspaths/">https://lighthousecove.org/educate/dspaths/</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Arc Broward DSPaths Certificate Program                                            | Florida  | Training program offered by Arc Broward. Students earn their DSPath certificate by successfully completing the Certificate of Initial Proficiency and Certificate of Advanced Proficiency sessions through Arc Broward's DSPath program.                                                                                                                                                                       | Credentialing program | <a href="https://arcbroward.com/educates/professional-training/dspaths/">https://arcbroward.com/educates/professional-training/dspaths/</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| DSP-U                                                                              | Ohio     | Training and professional development program offered by Lighthouse Cove for secondary school-age students and adult learners not already working in the DSP field. DSP-U students learn content taught in the DSPath Certificate of Initial Proficiency and gain access to the NADSP E-Badge Academy to demonstrate their proficiency in set competency areas.                                                | Credentialing program | <a href="https://lighthousecove.org/educate/dsp-u/">https://lighthousecove.org/educate/dsp-u/</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Georgia Division of Developmental Disabilities DSP Training and Assessment Program | Georgia  | Training and assessment program led by the Institute on Human Development and Disability at the University of Georgia. Students participate in self-paced, online training in competency-based modules and must prove their proficiency via a remotely proctored exam to complete the course.                                                                                                                  | Credentialing program | <a href="https://www.nasddd.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/How-a-Rate-Study-Became-a-Game-Changer-in-Georgia.pdf">https://www.nasddd.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/How-a-Rate-Study-Became-a-Game-Changer-in-Georgia.pdf</a><br>Evaluation: <a href="https://ici-s.umn.edu/files/g4g7qgFaCA/evaluation-of-georgia-dbhdd-funded-direct-support-professional-certification-pilots?preferredLocale=en-US">https://ici-s.umn.edu/files/g4g7qgFaCA/evaluation-of-georgia-dbhdd-funded-direct-support-professional-certification-pilots?preferredLocale=en-US</a> |

## Appendix B Programs Identified in the Environmental Scan

| Program name                                                                                                                                                                                        | Location      | Overview                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Program type          | Link to source and evaluation                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Providers' Council Human Services Credentialing Program                                                                                                                                             | Massachusetts | Online credential-based training program offered by the Massachusetts Council of Human Service Providers via its Provider eAcademy. Students can earn two levels of credentials: the Human Service Credential for entry-level staff and the Human Service Credential for supervisory staff. Each credential has at least 10 training modules and one final assessment based on nationally recognized competency areas for DSPs.                                                                                                | Credentialing program | <a href="http://providers.org/pages/human-services-credentialing-program">http://providers.org/pages/human-services-credentialing-program</a> |
| National Association for the Dually Diagnosed's (NADD's) Competency-Based Intellectual/Developmental Disability and Mental Illness Dual-Diagnosis Direct Support Professional Certification Program | National      | Online credential-based training program offered by NADD. The program focuses on DSPs who have experience in the field. DSPs demonstrate mastery of five competency areas and complete an online examination to earn the NADD-DSP credential. NADD membership is required to apply for certification. Certification is valid for two years, after which DSPs can recertify through an online application documenting continuing education.                                                                                     | Credentialing program | <a href="https://thenadd.org/dsp-cert-home-2/">https://thenadd.org/dsp-cert-home-2/</a>                                                       |
| New York State Frontline Supervisor Competency Series                                                                                                                                               | New York      | Online credential-based training program, offered by the Regional Centers for Workforce Transformation, for frontline supervisors supporting DSPs. Participants complete 25 accredited training hours. NADSP has provisionally accredited the series, and completing all sessions fulfills the 25 accredited learning hours required for NADSP's Frontline Supervisor credential. Webinars are offered every month and allow participants to progress at their own pace, obtaining certificates after completing each session. | Credentialing program | <a href="https://www.workforcetransformation.org/fls-manual-materials/">https://www.workforcetransformation.org/fls-manual-materials/</a>     |

## Appendix B Programs Identified in the Environmental Scan

| Program name                                                                 | Location      | Overview                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Program type          | Link to source and evaluation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lighthouse Cove Frontline Supervisor Credential                              | Ohio          | Online credential-based training program, offered by Lighthouse Cove, for frontline supervisors supporting DSPs. Students complete 60 hours of training designed to develop supervisor knowledge, skills, and tools. To complete the credential, students demonstrate competency in specific areas through the NADSP E-Badge Academy. Students can also use the program's modules to help earn the NADSP Frontline Supervisor Credential, which requires 25 hours of NADSP-accredited training.                                                                                              | Credentialing program | <a href="https://lighthousecove.org/educate/fls-cred/">https://lighthousecove.org/educate/fls-cred/</a>                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Pennsylvania College of Direct Support                                       | Pennsylvania  | Online credential-based training offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, with content developed by the Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota and delivered through Elsevier Performance Manager. The College of Direct Support offers about 146 hours of training. Training is available online for students to access at their own pace and is free for specified groups, including people with disabilities, family members and caregivers, person-directed service providers, and certain provider and program organizations. | Credentialing program | <a href="https://www.myodp.org/mod/page/view.php?id=7758">https://www.myodp.org/mod/page/view.php?id=7758</a>                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Delaware Technical Community College Direct Support Professional Certificate | Delaware      | Certificate program offered by Delaware Technical Community College. Students earn 12 credit hours from classroom instruction (both in person and online) and field work over two semesters.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | College certificates  | <a href="https://dtcc.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2020-2021/catalog/programs-of-study/certificate-programs/direct-support-professional-certificate/">https://dtcc.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2020-2021/catalog/programs-of-study/certificate-programs/direct-support-professional-certificate/</a> |
| Des Moines Area Community College DSP Developmental Disabilities Certificate | Iowa          | Certificate program offered by Des Moines Area Community College. Students earn a certificate after completing 40.10 hours of online training and receive post-graduation support finding employment or pursuing further education.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | College certificates  | <a href="https://www.dmacc.edu/careertraining/dsp-disabilities.html">https://www.dmacc.edu/careertraining/dsp-disabilities.html</a><br><a href="https://www.dmacc.edu/careertraining/faqs.html">https://www.dmacc.edu/careertraining/faqs.html</a>                                      |
| Direct Support Certificate Program                                           | Massachusetts | Certificate program offered by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services, in partnership with the Massachusetts Community Colleges. Students complete a field placement and earn 22 to 28 transferable community college credits. The program can be completed in one year.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | College certificates  | <a href="https://masscc.org/direct-support-certificate-program-brochure/">https://masscc.org/direct-support-certificate-program-brochure/</a>                                                                                                                                           |

## Appendix B Programs Identified in the Environmental Scan

| Program name                                                                                         | Location       | Overview                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Program type         | Link to source and evaluation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Advanced Training Certificate Program for DSPs                                                       | North Carolina | The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services partnered with the North Carolina Community College System to offer a college certificate program for new or existing DSPs. Students complete two eight-week continuing education programs, virtually or in person.                                                                                                                                                                    | College certificates | <a href="https://www.ncdhhs.gov/news/press-releases/2025/08/05/ncdhhs-partners-north-carolina-community-college-system-offer-free-training-strengthen-direct">https://www.ncdhhs.gov/news/press-releases/2025/08/05/ncdhhs-partners-north-carolina-community-college-system-offer-free-training-strengthen-direct</a> |
| Bergen Community College DSP Career Development Program                                              | New Jersey     | Certificate program offered by Bergen Community College, funded by the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education. Students earn credits by completing the DSP certificate course and state-mandated training. Currently employed DSPs have access to financial assistance to complete the course. After graduating, students have access to the DSP Career Center to receive mentoring, career guidance, and career pathway support. | College certificates | <a href="https://bergen.edu/ce/courses-programs/direct-support-professional/">https://bergen.edu/ce/courses-programs/direct-support-professional/</a>                                                                                                                                                                 |
| State University of New York (SUNY) Microcredentials for New York State Direct Support Professionals | New York       | SUNY partnered with the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities to offer a college certificate program. Students earn microcredentials and up to four NADSP certifications, in addition to college credits. Students are offered grant funding to pay for the course, along with financial incentives for completing each microcredential level and related national certificate.                                        | College certificates | <a href="https://www.suny.edu/microcredentials/dsp/">https://www.suny.edu/microcredentials/dsp/</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Tennessee Board of Regents Direct Support Professional Technical Certificate                         | Tennessee      | Certificate program offered by the College System of Tennessee. In addition to the technical certificate, students are awarded microcredential badges on a portable training and learning record. Students have the option to earn college credits through partnerships with institutions of higher education.                                                                                                                                    | College certificates | <a href="https://catalog.tbr.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=1&amp;poid=695">https://catalog.tbr.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=1&amp;poid=695</a>                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Postsecondary Access and Training in Human Services Certificate Program                              | Texas          | Two-year certificate program offered by Texas A&M University. Students participate in classroom training and a supervised practicum before earning their certificate.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | College certificates | <a href="https://paths.tamu.edu/about-us/">https://paths.tamu.edu/about-us/</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

**Appendix B** Programs Identified in the Environmental Scan

| Program name                               | Location | Overview                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Program type             | Link to source and evaluation                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| College Disability Training Internship     | Hawaii   | Training and internship program for postsecondary-age students offered through the Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities. Students are matched with DSP employers to gain on-site, supervised experience working as a DSP. College students are given access to Open Future Learning to complete online modules before starting work and must participate in at least four hours of on-site work each week. At the end of the internship, students receive a financial stipend for participating. | Internships              | <a href="https://www.hiddcouncil.org/internshipopportunities">https://www.hiddcouncil.org/internshipopportunities</a>         |
| High School Disability Training Internship | Hawaii   | Training and internship program for secondary-age students offered through the Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities. Students are matched with DSP employers to gain on-site, supervised experience working as a DSP. Students can use this internship as part of their senior project or as part of their career pathways through a partnership with the Department of Education.                                                                                                               | Internships              | <a href="https://www.hiddcouncil.org/internshipopportunities">https://www.hiddcouncil.org/internshipopportunities</a>         |
| Humanim DSP Youth Apprenticeship Program   | Maryland | DSP pre-apprenticeship for high school students, coordinated by a nonprofit providing workforce development and disability services. Youth apprentices complete 450 hours of paid, on-the-job training; classroom instruction; and online training in their senior year of high school.                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Internships              | <a href="https://humanim.org/careers/dsp-apprenticeship-program/">https://humanim.org/careers/dsp-apprenticeship-program/</a> |
| Open Future Learning                       | National | Online training offered by Open Future Learning. Students access online, interactive learning modules via computer, tablet, or phone. Modules can be completed individually or in groups, and administrators can track participation and issue certificates and accompanying documentation to attendees.                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Online training provider | <a href="http://www.openfuturelearning.org/">http://www.openfuturelearning.org/</a>                                           |
| DirectCourse                               | National | Online training provider offering six curricula for DSPs and other human services professionals. DirectCourse provides evidence-based training developed through partnerships with university-based research and training centers. Curricula cover intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health, aging and senior living, employment supports, person-centered practices, and supervision and management.                                                                                        | Online training provider | <a href="https://directcourseonline.com/">https://directcourseonline.com/</a>                                                 |

**Appendix B** Programs Identified in the Environmental Scan

| Program name     | Location | Overview                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Program type             | Link to source and evaluation                                                                                                                       |
|------------------|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Relias           | National | Online training for DSPs and organizations that employ DSPs, offered by Relias. Relias provides training intended to support DSP onboarding, professional development, and retention. Training includes topics such as person-centered care, communication, health and safety, and supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Organizations can use Relias to assign and track staff training and support ongoing DSP development.                                             | Online training provider | <a href="https://www.relias.com/resource/topic/direct-support-professionals">https://www.relias.com/resource/topic/direct-support-professionals</a> |
| IntellectAbility | National | Online training provider that offers person-centered health and safety training for DSPs and staff who support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and other at-risk populations. IntellectAbility Academy provides e-learning courses that use knowledge checks and scenarios designed for staff such as DSPs, frontline supervisors, nurses, case managers, and clinicians. Some courses are NADSP-accredited and count toward E-Badges used to obtain NADSP certifications. | Online training provider | <a href="https://replacingrisk.com/idd-staff-training/">https://replacingrisk.com/idd-staff-training/</a>                                           |

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol Template

## **Introduction**

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with us today.

My name is [NAME], and I'm joined by [NOTETAKER NAME], and we are part of the Researching Provider Solutions team at Mathematica. We are partnering with the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council on a project focused on strengthening the direct support professional (DSP) workforce.

## **Project Context**

Like other states, Florida is facing challenges recruiting and retaining high quality DSPs. As part of this project, we've been exploring what the challenges are and identifying potential strategies to mitigate them. This year, we're specifically focused on training solutions. We've done a scan to identify DSP training programs available nationally and are now looking to learn more about how promising programs have been implemented and the feasibility of using similar models in Florida.

## **Purpose of Today's Discussion**

Today, we're hoping to learn more from you about [NAME OF PROGRAM]. We're interested in the program's structure, implementation, outcomes, and lessons learned. We're also interested in your perspective on what makes training programs for DSPs effective.

What you share today will help us develop recommendations for the FDDC to advocate for in Florida.

## **Logistics and Consent**

Before we begin:

This conversation will take about an hour. We'll ask you some questions, but there are no right or wrong answers - we're interested in your experience and perspective.

Your participation is completely voluntary, which means you do not have to take part. There are no risks, costs, or benefits related to today's discussion. You can choose to keep your video on or off during the interview.

Only the Mathematica project team will see or hear our discussion. All files and recordings will be stored in a secure location. At the end of our research we will summarize our findings in a report that we share with the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. While the program we discuss today may be identified in this report, we will not include your name when presenting findings from these interviews. Any publicly posted information from this report (such as a high-level summary of findings) will not include information at the individual program level. We will only identify your organization, when necessary, by descriptive characteristics such as organization size, population density of area served, and region.

Florida state law requires that we tell the authorities if we learn about possible neglect or abuse or that you might hurt yourself or someone else (§ 415.1034(1)(a)5).

With your permission, we'd like to record (both audio and video) this conversation to support accurate notetaking. The recording will only be used for research purposes, will be stored in an access-restricted folder, and will not be shared outside the project team. Is that okay with you?

*[If interviewee agrees to recording the call, start the recording.]*

*[If the interviewee does not agree to the recording, notetaker will take careful notes.]*

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Do you have any questions before we get started?

### **Topics and questions**

*Note: topics for the interviews and interview questions will vary based on the program and what information Mathematica has already identified from the environmental scan. Not all topics or questions will be asked in every interview.*

### **About the program leader**

1. Could you describe your role in this program?
  - a. Probe: How long have you been involved with this program?
  - b. Probe: Were you involved in the initial design and implementation of this program?

Thank you for that context. I'd like to start us off today by talking about the design of your training program itself. We've reviewed the public information on your program, but it would be helpful to hear more about it in your own words.

### **Program design and structure**

2. Can you provide me with an overview of the program design?
3. Who is your program intending to reach?
  - a. How has that aligned with who you have engaged to date?
  - b. How do participants or providers become involved in the program?
  - c. How has the program done outreach to these audiences?
4. Tell me more about what the curriculum is focused on.
  - a. Are there opportunities for continuing development beyond the core curriculum? For example, offering add-on trainings or microcredentials on specific areas of practice, supervision and management, or other professional skills.
5. How are the trainings delivered to participants?
  - a. Who provides the training materials and platform?
  - b. Are these delivered virtually? In-person? Hybrid?
6. Who are the instructors, and what has been your experience recruiting and retaining them?
  - a. What is the total time commitment for participants?

## Implementation

Now that we have that outline of the program, I'd like to get some history about how and why the program started and what you've learned from implementing it so far. This is important to us as we think about how a similar program might be implemented in Florida.

7. Tell me about how this program came to be. What was the impetus behind it?
  - a. Was there a specific event or champion that moved this forward?
8. How was the program funded?
  - a. What additional resources were required for start-up?
  - b. How is the program funded today? Has your funding model evolved since the program initially launched? [If yes] What are your primary funding sources now?
9. What was the timeline from the idea for this program to its roll-out?
10. What challenges did you face during start-up?
11. What factors made the program possible?
12. If you could go start over from the beginning, what would you do differently?
13. [For programs outside of Florida] What advice would you give to someone looking to implement something similar?
14. [For programs in Florida] What steps would it take to support broader adoption of this program in Florida?

## Outcomes/effectiveness

For this last portion of our conversation, I'd like to hear about what the program has achieved, and how it measures success.

15. First, what are the specific objectives of the program?
16. How does the program measure success?
  - a. Does the program collect data from participating professionals? Employer partners? If so, what kind?
  - b. What results has the program had to date?
  - c. How many DSPs has the program reached?
  - d. What do professionals say about the program? Employers?
  - e. What other outcomes have you observed, even if not formally measured?
17. What about the program, do you believe, has contributed to its success?

## Conclusion

We're coming to the end of our time today. I have a few wrap-up questions to close us out.

18. Is there anything we didn't ask about that you think is important for us to understand about your program?

**19.** Based on your experience, what advice would you give to Florida as it considers strengthening or expanding DSP training programs?

**20.** Is there anyone else you think we should speak with as part of this research?

Thank you so much for sharing your time and expertise today. What we learned today will inform our recommendations to the FDDC as they consider strategies to strengthen training for DSPs.

We truly appreciate your participation, and we will reach out if there's anything we need to clarify from our conversation today. If you think of anything afterward that you wanted us to know, please feel free to send us an email.

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