



STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF MENTAL RETARDATION AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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November 30, 2007

Dear Stakeholder:

RE: Options for People Through Services
(OPTS) Retirement

We are pleased to announce that in response to all of the feedback we received on moving forward to a new methodology for service development, we are retiring OPTS and replacing it with a new and improved approach! Please read ahead to learn how the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) will proceed with decentralized services development that is values-based, inclusive and responsive to local priorities. This revamped process will guide us toward the future of new services and reconfiguration of existing services.

At the request of the Commissioner, a letter went out last April to the NYS-CARES/NYS-OPTS Steering Committee requesting feedback on the state of OPTS. The most consistent and recurring recommendations we received were:

- to return development to the local districts;
- to re-establish local priorities as a factor in service design along with the Commissioner's statewide priorities;
- to ensure a fair, equitable and inclusive process for identifying those local priorities; and,
- to determine an appropriate distribution of resources for local priorities.

These recommendations were subsequently reviewed and endorsed by the NYS-CARES/ NYS-OPTS Executive Advisory Group and the full committee. The transition from OPTS to our new methodology will require your patience as we work through the details but we have outlined some initial steps to move us forward.

During January we will be finalizing a new district-based process with a new, common application for the development of OMRDD funded supports and services. We are working closely with Deputy Commissioner Jim Moran and his staff to define a fairly standardized process and application form that will be used across the districts for this purpose. In addition, Executive Deputy Max Chmura and Deputy Commissioner Moran are reviewing the additional level of funding that will be allocated to the districts for implementing new supports and services that address both local and statewide priorities.



These allocations will enhance funding previously made available to the districts for at-home residential habilitation and waiver respite services. The new allocations will support residential opportunities through NYSCARES III, innovations in services in other domains such as day services and employment and the reconfiguration of the existing service system. We are very excited about this new direction and will work hard to simplify our approaches.

In light of rolling out this new process, we ask that you **not** forward additional OPTS proposals to OMRDD Central Office. **OPTS is now officially retired!**

As discussed in a number of venues, to respond to input that we continue to receive from families, parents and self-advocates, we must all become more aggressive in developing individualized supports and services that realize the least restrictive and most integrated community settings in cost effective ways. The new allocations anticipate your excitement and enthusiasm in designing innovative supports that stretch beyond traditional models to bring new kinds of opportunities to light.

We are planning several working sessions around the state after the first of the year to explore how we can better work together in developing innovative, effective and efficient supports and services.

Since we will no longer accept new OPTS proposals, we recognize that we must be sensitive about OPTS proposals that are currently in some phase of review. Recognizing this, we are providing you guidance (see attached) to help you understand how we will treat these proposals until the new process goes into effect.

As Commissioner Ritter and Executive Deputy Chmura have stated on numerous occasions, we are all very energized and excited about working in partnership with you to move our system ahead in providing quality individualized supports and services. We will communicate frequently during this period of change and transition to keep you up-to-date as you continue to do the great work you do.

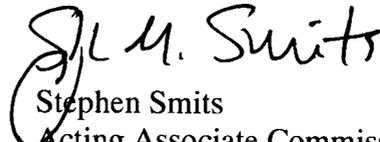
On behalf of the Commissioner, we would like to take this time to thank the many partners that have participated in the development and restructuring of OPTS and now its retirement. OMRDD has learned some valuable approaches we are incorporating into all service development at the local DDSO/NYCRO level. The result will be a stronger more inclusive service delivery system which values the individual needs of all people with developmental disabilities and their families.

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For further information you may contact the OPTS unit at (518) 408-2744, Steve Smits, Associate Commissioner for Upstate Regional Operations at (518) 474-9897, Kathy Broderick, Associate Commissioner for New York City Regional Office at (212) 229-3231.

Sincerely,


Kathleen Broderick
Associate Commissioner


Stephen Smits
Acting Associate Commissioner

Attachment

cc: Commissioner Ritter
Mr. Chmura
Mr. Lind
Mr. Moran
DDSO Directors
Ms. Haneman

**GUIDANCE FOR HANDLING DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS
(Formerly OPTS)**

- Question: What will happen to current OPTS contracts?
Answer: All OPTS proposals that were approved and in contract will continue to be funded through the contract mechanism.
- Question: What will happen to an approved proposal, but not yet currently in contract?
Answer: For those proposals that are approved but not yet in contract, we will be contacting agencies in the near future to finalize the funding mechanism (e.g. contract or price).
- Question: What will happen to my recently submitted OPTS proposal?
Answer: All proposals that are currently in the OPTS Unit will continue to be processed until development is returned to the DDSO/NYCRO. During this time, we will also work with the agencies to finalize the funding mechanism for their proposal.
- Question: What will happen if my proposal is not finalized before things are sent back to the DDSO/NYCRO?
Answer: Once OPTS retires, all proposals that have not been finalized by the OPTS Unit, will be sent back to the districts with a targeted level of resources.
- Question: Will an evaluation still be required under a new streamlined system?
Answer: Yes, though still under refinement, an evaluation will be required for all new service development.
- Question: What do I do with a new service proposal prior to the start of a common application?
Answer: It is advised that you discuss your idea with your local DDSO/NYCRO to garner feedback.
- Questions: Can I use the existing OPTS application format to propose an idea to the DDSO until the new common application is released?
Answer: It is advised that you wait to submit an application until a common application is released, however in the meantime, discuss your proposal with the DDSO.