Overview. You just heard a reliable rumor that Opportunities Unlimited, Inc., the agency that runs a 30-year-old sheltered workshop in your town of Breezeway (population 30,000), is going to tear down the workshop and rebuild it. The Board of the agency is about to announce a Capital Fund drive aimed at raising $500,000 by next summer for the project. They also plan to borrow money to cover the total costs of construction.

The workshop serves a total of 42 people with disabilities. Right now, the sheltered workshop is the only real option for young adults when they graduate from Breezeway High School. The children of your team members range in age from 5 to 16. You were hoping that by the time they graduated, there would be support available for some young adults to work in community jobs. Right now, Opportunities Unlimited does not have a supported employment program, and they don’t appear to be interested in developing one as part of their rebuilding project.

Stage 1. Start the dialogue

a. How would you try to engage the agency Director and the Board of Opportunities Unlimited in a constructive dialogue aimed at modifying their long range plan, e.g. to convince them to build a smaller workshop and support some people in community jobs?

1.b. What would be the main talking points in your message?

1.c. What preparation would you need to make, and what information would you want to have, before approaching the agency?

Stage 2. Developing a Plan B

The meeting with the Board and the Director did not go well. They have worked on this plan for a year, and the board vote was unanimous. They believe the new sheltered workshop will have better lighting and air conditioning, and will “definitely meet the clients’ needs”. They also believe that the people in the workshop now are “too severe” to make it in community jobs.

Here are some other relevant facts:
- Officials of the WI Dept. of Health Services have said publicly that they would like to see more Medicaid dollars spent on community employment and less on sheltered work (Opportunities Unlimited relies heavily on Medicaid $).
- The Family Care MCO (managed care organization) which contracts with and directly funds Opportunities Unlimited has been encouraging provider agencies in its 7 county region to provide more supported employment (most of the other 7 counties have it now).
- There is one transition teacher at Breezeway High School who is starting to find paid part-time jobs for students with intellectual disabilities in town.

What are some ideas for your next move?

Stage 3. Helping to develop the plan

Your strategy worked (at least to some degree). Congratulations. Opportunities Unlimited has modified their plan and now they say they will rebuild a smaller sheltered workshop, using $350,000 of the money they plan to raise. The other $150,000 will be allocated to starting a new supported employment program.

The agency has asked your team to make suggestions for them to consider including in their plan. You made a strategic decision not to overwhelm them with too many ideas. So you have decided to limit your list to 5 recommendations. What will they be?

Stage 4. An unforeseen development

The new supported employment program has been up and running for 3 months. But you have discovered that the first 6 people selected for the program are:
- 2 long-time clients of the workshop who appear to have minimal disabilities (they were doing the most challenging work on the contracts the workshop currently has)
- 4 new high school grads who do not have intellectual disabilities (one person has epilepsy which is controlled by seizure medications, and another person lost his lower left leg in a motorcycle accident)

a. What’s your reaction to this?

b. What (if anything) will you do about it?