

# BRINGING EMPLOYMENT FIRST TO SCALE

## Multi-System Collaboration: Supporting Individuals from Pre-employment Through Employment and Community Engagement Across the Life Course

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Key Findings  
from the RRTC  
on Advancing  
Employment

Read this brief to learn about effective strategies for interagency collaboration to foster integrated employment and community engagement.

### Introduction

In concert with the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston, the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS) identified potential topical areas for policy white papers that influence employment outcomes and services for individuals served by state intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) agencies. This is the third white paper in a series of five.

To determine priority topics for the white papers, discussions were held with ICI and NASDDDS leadership, advisory team members, and self-advocates identifying potential topics aligned with the high-performing states model for increasing employment. The high-performing states model draws from extensive research in states that achieve strong employment outcomes with systems change initiatives. The seven key elements essential to improving and achieving employment success that guide the structure of the model are:

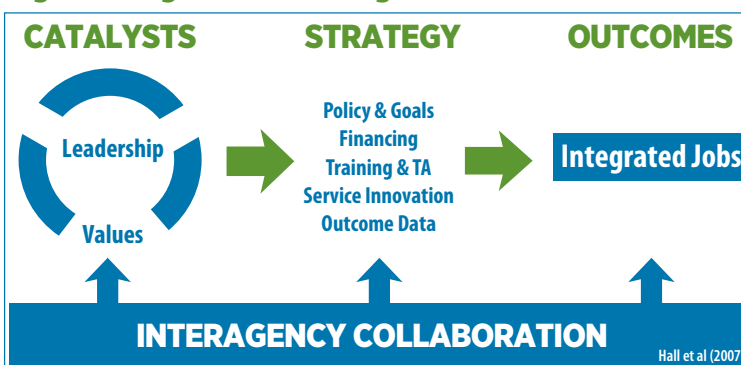
1. Leadership
2. Strategic Goals and Operating Policies
3. Financing and Contracting Methods
4. Training and Technical Assistance
5. Interagency Collaboration
6. Services and Service Innovation
7. Employment Performance Measurement and Outcome Data

To meet current federal regulations and provide the opportunity for individuals to receive services in the least restrictive environments, states are focusing on providing day habilitation services in inclusive community environments, rather than

**SERIES OVERVIEW:** This series provides an in-depth analysis of priority and emerging practices and policies implemented by state-system collaborations. Other papers have addressed: what states have learned from the implementation of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) 2011 guidance on prevocational services and employment; and support coordination strategies that impact employment outcomes and services for individuals served by state intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) agencies. This paper reviews multi-system collaboration to support employment and community engagement outcomes during different transformative life stages of individuals with I/DD.

traditional congregate facility-based programs. The two main services of day habilitation focus on helping people work and participate in community activities and civic life while engaging with non-disabled people in their communities. To ensure that a person can live an “everyday life” regardless of the supports they need, it is important to consider employment and non-work services in tandem.

Figure 1: Higher Performing States Framework



**Community Employment (CE)** involves a person working at an individual job in a local business, earning the prevailing wage for that position or industry, alongside peers who do not have disabilities. The business is located within the community, and is not owned or managed by the support organization (or provider).

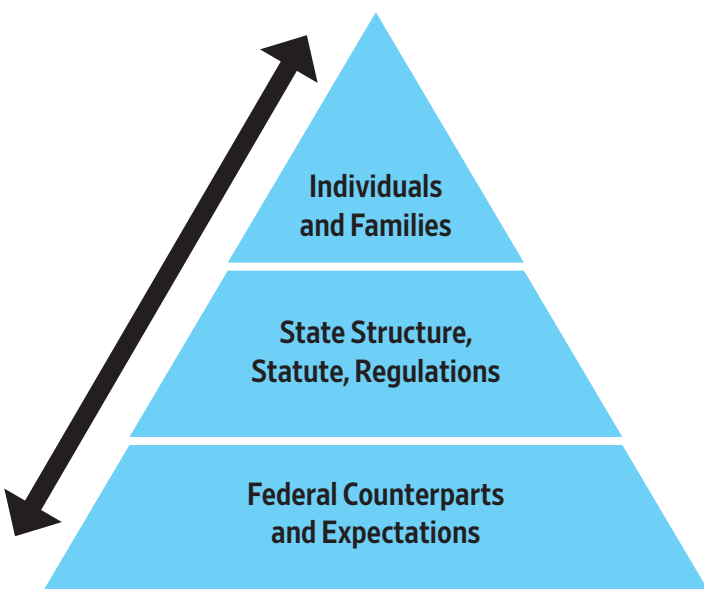
**Community Life Engagement (CLE)** supports and supplements employment by providing opportunities for individuals to explore careers through experiential activities and learning around career exploration. CLE provides an opportunity to expand an individual's personal network, build social capital, and participate in social and civic community activities.

### Interagency Collaboration and the Intersection between Community Employment and Community Life Engagement

Understanding effective interagency collaboration to support individuals with I/DD requires a multilevel view of the agencies themselves, including their roles and relationships within a federal framework, their statutory and regulatory obligations at the state level, and the key touchpoints they have in the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families. Collaborative efforts can affect all these levels.

Although each state agency has its own mission, it is important to acknowledge the shared goals among agencies. In his article "A Whole Government

### Figure 2: Multi-Level Systems of Support



Approach to Solving Social Issues,"<sup>1</sup> William Eggers describes how a holistic collaboration approach has been effective in addressing the crisis in veteran homelessness. This article highlights federal-level collaboration efforts that yielded positive results for a pressing and pervasive problem. The practices used in this approach provide a strong example of collaboration at every level of government.

In this approach, two of the main components are shared, unambiguous goals and defined roles. These components allow each state agency to see the impact of its own actions toward the shared goal. In addition to clear goals and roles, autonomy, buy-in, specified timelines, and data all play an important part in the overall success of the mission.

These same building blocks are necessary for success in any type of partnership, including those essential to supporting individuals with disabilities to engage in their communities. Collaborating to support employment and CLE for individuals with I/DD is a priority agenda within education, developmental disability, and vocational rehabilitation (VR) systems at both the federal and state level. Each agency intersects with individuals on their pathway to employment, often multiple times during different points of the individual's life stages. Understanding agency partnerships and strategies that link to the shared goal of employment and connect to long-term supports and services is critical to the development of an employment pathway. There is a strong link between CLE and CE, even more than being the two parts of a meaningful day.

- » CLE activities can lead to employment through career exploration and networking.
- » CLE activities wrap around employment to fill gaps in time, provide new experience, and offer increased opportunity for social connection with coworkers.
- » CLE activities support people in retirement while they access their communities.
- » CE provides an opportunity to increase social relationships outside family and disability-specific connections.
- » CE provides economic means to participate in

<sup>1</sup> [www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/col-whole-of-government-approach-social-problems-veterans-homelessness.html](http://www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/col-whole-of-government-approach-social-problems-veterans-homelessness.html).

community activities of interest.

- » CE often increases the value of the person with a disability in the eyes of other community members.

Unfortunately, the work to support an individual to find employment is often isolated through separate and distinct agency functions, and important aspects of supporting someone to be fully engaged in their community with ongoing opportunities to build and maintain relationships is lost. Similarly, services to support a person to be engaged in their community are often separate and distinct from employment services.

This paper looks at the roles of federal and state agencies with responsibility for education, VR, and I/DD services over the life stages of students, transition-age youth, and adults. In addition, the paper examines the pivotal role of meaningful and effective person-centered planning (PCP) in ensuring that, at the individual level, the various agencies are successful in partnering to achieve positive individual-level outcomes.

## SECTION ONE: Key Partners and Practice at Each System Level

### Federal Level System Partners: Collaborating Agencies and their Roles and Responsibilities

Federal agencies and their counterparts at the state level play a key role in providing public resources that support people with disabilities to become successful in employment, and in community living. The Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, and the Social Security Administration are the four primarily federal agencies that provide specific public resources to people with I/DD. Although the Department of Labor and the Social Security Administration have a role, they do not collaborate as significantly with respect to resources and implementation of services that people with I/DD depend on to achieve their career aspirations. This may change as state agencies further implement the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Three areas of federal legislation give authority and

responsibility to the federal agencies that direct services used by people with I/DD. They are the Social Security Act of 1935 and its subsequent amendments, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and WIOA.

Currently, the collaboration between the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has the most direct influence for people with I/DD in accessing and maintaining employment in the general labor market. Each of these agencies provides public resources, and has authority and responsibility to develop regulations and give guidance to states for implementation of federal laws aimed at enabling people with disabilities to live and thrive in their local communities. Collaboration at the federal level on regulation, and guidance to states on setting expectations, both have a direct impact on whether or not people with I/DD access community employment. It is equally important that this expectation of collaboration occur at the state and local level.

Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) is the primary funding resource for services that support people with I/DD to live and work in their communities. CMS is the federal agency that has the authority and oversight over HCBS. In September 2011, CMS issued guidance to states on employment. This guidance highlighted the priority of delivery of employment services that lead to employment in integrated community jobs earning wages at or above minimum wage. This set the stage for states to revise and enhance employment services to emphasize the expected outcome of community-based, integrated employment.

The guidance and the subsequent 2015 revisions to the HCBS full application and guidance reinforces that states must not authorize their employment services without ensuring that the services do not duplicate or supplant other services available to the person. This regulation and the RSA regulation requiring VR agencies to ensure that other comparable services are not available before they authorize employment services cause challenges for collaboration at the state level between I/DD and VR agencies.

**Table 1. Federal Level: Key System Partners**

Federal Agency	Service	Policy	Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)
<b>United States Department of Education: Office of Special Programs</b>	To ensure that all children with disabilities have access to “a free and appropriate” education. Tracking students post-education for employment and/or post-secondary education outcomes	Transition services for students with disabilities to ensure students are prepared for employment and/or post-secondary education and community life.	WIOA calls for MOA between state education and state VR systems to ensure that students with 504 plans or IEPs are prepared to participate in labor market post-education system.
<b>United States Department of Education: Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)</b>	Short-term employment and community living services for people with disabilities	Competitive integrated employment is the priority outcome regardless of disability challenges.	WIOA requires state VR systems to have an MOA with state education, state Medicaid, and state I/DD operating agency.
<b>United States Department of Health and Human Services: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)</b>	Medicare and Medicaid health benefits  Home and community-based services including individual and group supported employment, career planning, prevocational and day habilitation	Requires state I/DD agencies with HCBS program to ensure other eligible financial resources are used first.  Service setting is integrated and supports full access to the greater community; is chosen by service participant; ensures rights of privacy, dignity, respect, and freedom from coercion; optimizes autonomy and independence; and facilitates choice regarding services and who provides them.	WIOA requires state VR agencies to engage in MOA with I/DD operating agencies as well as with state Medicaid agencies.

WIOA implementation calls for states to revisit development of a Memorandum of Agreement. States are tackling how to better collaborate on business processes to ensure that individuals with I/DD seeking services to acquire employment may receive service from both systems in a seamless manner. WIOA also calls for education and VR systems to be better connected in ensuring that youth and young adults exiting high school are prepared to enter the general labor market or seek continued education leading to competitive employment.

In 2015, federal agencies formed a workgroup to understand system gaps and to develop a federal interagency strategy to promote inclusive service delivery for youth with disabilities. Their report, *The 2020 Federal Youth Transition Plan: A Federal Interagency Strategy (2020) to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities* ([www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/20150302-fpt.pdf](http://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/20150302-fpt.pdf)), holds promise and provides a blueprint for continued collaboration.

In a comprehensive review of federally funded state programs that support transition, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2012) found that students with disabilities face systemic barriers as

they transition from the entitlement system of special education to the multiple eligibility-driven adult systems. Students and their families may not have sufficient information about the services or options available to them. Consequently, there may be a delay in applying for, and receiving, needed services like job supports, tutoring, or assistive technology. From the agency perspective, the differences in statutory eligibility criteria, and lack of common outcomes or common policies for operating hinders interagency coordination and can challenge student success in achieving post-school outcomes.

Expansion of typical transition planning teams is needed to include all disciplines and agencies that will influence the life of the person with a disability. Antosh and colleagues (2013) identify key concepts for effective multiple agency collaboration. Barriers such as lack of professional knowledge on collaborative approaches, inability of agencies to share information about students across agency boundaries, and lack of outside agency participation in students’ IEP transition planning meetings have limited effective levels of interagency collaboration. Several policy-related



implications should be considered:

- (a) using written interagency agreements that clarify agency responsibilities for providing and paying for specific types of transition services;
- (b) establishing key positions funded jointly by schools and adult agencies to deliver and direct services to students;
- (c) developing and delivering interagency and cross-agency training of professionals;
- (d) using interagency planning teams to foster and monitor capacity-building efforts in transition;
- (e) developing more effective strategies for formally engaging students and families in interagency planning discussions; and
- (f) undertaking evaluations of the effectiveness of local interagency processes in achieving positive adult life outcomes for transition-aged youth with disabilities.

States that have experienced the most success in transition planning have incorporated these six key components of effective collaboration into their system change efforts.

Undoubtedly, these federal efforts at collaboration will have influence on and implications for state and local entities involved in supporting individuals with I/DD in gaining and maintaining employment and meaningful community connections.

### State and Local Level System Partners: Collaborating Agencies and their Roles and Responsibilities

Each of the entities at the federal level described above either has a counterpart at the state and local level or has its own local presence through field offices (Social Security Administration). These entities at the state and local level play a crucial role in supporting individuals throughout the lifespan: education (both state and jurisdictional), VR, state departments of labor, and state Medicaid and I/DD agencies (and any related sub-state partners, such as counties or area agencies). Collaboration, resources, and expectations set by both education and the adult VR agencies determine the likelihood that youth and young adults with I/DD will become successfully

employed. However, the long-term care system (state I/DD agencies and the state Medicaid agency) also plays a significant role, and must have a strong collaborative relationship with the state VR agency.

In the sections below, this paper will detail how these collaborative efforts, particularly at crucial periods of transition, are imperative for long-term successes in employment and community integration. Importantly, this all begins with the individual.

### Individual Level: Person Centered Planning

All collaboration efforts should derive from the information made available through person-centered planning (PCP). The goal of PCP is for a person to become empowered to build the life they choose or aspire to at any age across their lifespan. PCP supports people to have lives that provide independence, choice, informed decision-making, and include goal setting--just as people without disabilities do. PCP sets the foundation for getting to know the core of a person. It is a process that values what is truly important to a person, along with their strengths and skills as drivers of the development of personal outcomes.

Information derived from PCP efforts has a direct impact on how each separate and distinct agency supports a person they are working with and how those agencies collaborate to ensure those needs are met. The PCP is a person's roadmap for success, and should be the principal document that drives all systems as they are working together. The contents of the PCP should initiate steps down an employment path that are congruent with a person's strengths and needs.

**Person - centered thinking leads to...**  
**Person - centered practices that lead to...**  
**Person - centered organizations that create...**  
**Person - centered systems that support...**

**Person - directed lives.**

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**Importance of person-centered planning.**

When developing a plan through a PCP, the process lays out a foundation, but that plan remains a fluid document. As we grow and change, and move through our lives, many of the areas within that plan grow and change with us. Re-visiting the plan throughout the year as we make decisions that affect the life we choose, becomes essential.

This life planning process is rooted in what is most important to the person. It involves the person interacting directly with their network of connections and close personal relationships in order to look at innovative ways to attain life goals and dreams (Council on Quality and Leadership, 2019). Many factors come into play, including our interests, our age, and our goals and aspirations along the path of life.

The significance of PCP is that the person leads the direction of their life, and determines what supports they need at each juncture, rather than the system and collaborating agencies designating that direction.

**Engaging families in planning for employment outcomes.**

PCP often involves family contributions to identify what is “important to and for a person.” Accordingly, it is important to engage with families about the importance of work, community, and interests of their family member and how these elements fit within the overall family culture.

The Supporting Families Community of Practice between the University of Kansas City, Missouri (UMKC) and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS) has been building capacity within and across states to create policies, practices, and systems to assist and support families that include a member with I/DD across the lifespan.

The LifeCourse framework, used as a companion to the PCP process, helps to look at the full array of supports and services a person may need as s/he moves through life. As its website (<http://www.lifecoursetools.com/>) explains, the framework “helps individuals with disabilities and families at any age or stage of life think about what they need to know, identify how to find or develop supports,

and discover what it takes to live the lives they want to live. Individuals and families may focus on their current situation and stage of life but may also find it helpful to look ahead to start thinking about what they can do or learn now that will help build an inclusive productive life in the future.”

**Federal guidance to support person-centered planning.**

PCP is not just a best practice from the field. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) have supported and invested in PCP for many years. In 23014, CMS issued a regulatory expectation for PCP.<sup>2</sup> The rule specifies that when developing plans for those receiving supports through a Medicaid HCBS program under section 1915(c) and 1915(i), these plans are developed through a PCP process. As indicated in the CMS Application for a 1915(c) Home and Community Based Waiver, “CMS encourages and supports the use of person/family-centered planning methods in service plan development. Such methods actively engage and empower the participant and individuals selected by the participant in leading and directing the design of the service plan and, thereby, ensure that the plan reflects the needs and preferences of the participant (and/or family, if applicable).”<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2: CMS Plan Development Process**

PCP process is driven by the individual
Includes people chosen by the individual
Provides necessary information and support to the individual to ensure that the individual directs the process to the maximum extent possible
Is timely and occurs at times/locations of convenience to the individual
Reflects cultural considerations/uses plain language
Includes strategies for solving disagreement
Offers choices to the individual regarding services and supports the individual receives and from whom
Conducted to reflect what is important to the individual to ensure delivery of services in a manner reflecting personal preferences and ensuring health and welfare
Identifies the strengths, preferences, needs, and desired outcomes of the individual

<sup>2</sup> CMS-2249-F; CMS-2296-F

<sup>3</sup> Version 3.5, HCBS Technical Guide, 2015

CMS also requires that through the PCP process, opportunities to “seek employment and work in competitive integrated settings” should be present. These opportunities stem from a process of Discovery through conversations that identify what is Important To and Important For a person to ensure a support system is in place that aligns with a person’s preferences and leads to progress and attainment of identified outcomes. The Discovery process for each person is strength-based; it identifies skills and preferences, which can lead to community and job experiences. The process also takes into account the family as a unit, to identify family perspectives concerning employment and to address concerns and barriers that connect to the PCP process.

***Washington, DC: Best practice using person-centered planning and agency collaboration.***

One state that has made a huge investment in not only PCP, but also into becoming a person-centered organization is the District of Columbia (DC) Department on Disability Services (DDS). In 2012, DC DDS launched an initiative to support transformational change to a person-centered system. Agency leadership voiced the need to “infuse and immerse the Long-Term Services and Supports System (LTSS) with value based principles and practices that would take their system change efforts to the next level” across their multiple service systems.

DDS has since been building a system that focuses on what people want and how DDS can then take action and make this happen for every person an organization supports. This person-centered system is built upon DDS’s mission, which is to provide innovative high-quality services that enable people with disabilities to lead meaningful and productive lives as vital members of their families, schools, workplaces, and communities in every neighborhood in the District of Columbia and by truly listening to the people they support.

DC DDS is threading person-centered thinking and practices into all levels of the system. Their No Wrong Door (NWD) initiative is visible and accessible for all people with disabilities, older adults, and their families. It offers the chance to learn about and have easy access to a full range of integrated long-term services and supports that assist people to live with

dignity and as independently and as long as possible in their homes, and to be fully included in their communities.

The District Office on Aging, Department of Health Care Finance, Department on Disability Services, Department of Human Services, and the Department of Behavioral Health are collaborating to improve and align intake and referral processes so that a person seeking services can access holistic and seamless services regardless of the entry point. DDS wants individuals to experience a system that is person-centered, linguistically and culturally responsive, and streamlined, and that links them to government and community-based supports, no matter where they come for help.

NWD prepared a state assessment report that included process maps and a crosswalk of each agency’s intake and referral process. The assessment helped to guide discussions as agency leaders determined the strategy to redesign the “front door” to LTSS programs.

Some of the steps within the NWD strategy include focusing on the person’s strengths, what is “working and not working” to help identify LTSS needs, looking across the lifespan to determine goals, and then matching that information to community supports or system supports if needed. PCP development must be completed using PCP tools, focusing the entire conversation about what people like and admire about a person, exploring interests in employment and community integration at the forefront, and ensuring that a person’s goals match the PCP and discovery tools.

According to the DDS DC website, “DC is working to implement person-centered thinking through training sessions and other agency wide initiatives. Teaching and supporting the use of person-centered thinking skills means that it is likelier that service plans will be used and acted on, that updating service plans will occur ‘naturally,’ needing less effort and time, and that the person’s ability to lead a fulfilling, independent life is maximized.” As seen in its person-centered system’s video, “the work regarding becoming a person centered system has been one of its greatest accomplishments” ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJhbPcmRDuY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJhbPcmRDuY)).

## SECTION TWO: System Interactions with Individuals Throughout the Lifecourse

Collaboration among the state departments of education, VR, and the I/DD agency is critical in ensuring that people with I/DD can use public services and supports to achieve success in employment and careers as well as in becoming full participating citizens in their communities. How and when they collaborate will be different based on where the person with I/DD is across the lifespan.

This paper examines collaboration needs at three key stages of life relative to employment as identified by the work at the University of Kansas City Missouri (UMKC): School-Age (everyday life during school years), Transition (transitions from school to adult life), and Adulthood (living life as an adult).

**Each system influences the success of others...**

### Agency Collaboration for School-Age Students Preparing for Transition, Ages 14-18

School-age youth and young adults' ages 14-26 cross two developmental stages, middle adolescence and young adulthood. Although children differ in the rate they develop, the order in which they move through the developmental stages does not vary. Developmentally, this is a period when adolescents and young adults desire independence, yet depend on parental guidance and direction from other adults in their lives.

During this life stage, adolescents and young adults begin to really know themselves and need opportunities to explore, express themselves, and build their social networks beyond the boundaries of school and family life. Youth and young adults, whether they have a disability or not, need opportunities that encourage self-direction, participation in civic projects, and experience in real-life problem-solving situations. Research has shown that youth who have had an integrated community work experience while still in high school have a

greater chance of being successful in adulthood (Carter, Austin & Trainor, 2016). In fact, work-based experiences have shown to be one of the strongest predictors of adult employment success among youth with disabilities (Wehman et al, 2015). "Employment can be beneficial for youth by teaching responsibility, organization, and time management and helping establish good work habits, experience, and financial stability" (Ahituv, 1996).

For youth and young adults with I/DD, this is a time when they see their non-disabled peers exit high school. Recognizing the characteristics of this developmental stage is important as systems collaborate on the supports and services each provides. Each system influences the success of others in meeting their own responsibilities and authority.

### *Partnering agencies/roles and responsibilities.*

State education, VR, and I/DD services play a major role in supporting this age cohort. However, it is at the local level that these systems must collaborate to ensure that youth have the supports to develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence to engage as fully participating and contributing citizens in their communities. It is not enough for state-level leadership to agree on cross-system coordination. Each state agency must support and ensure that leadership at their regional and local levels collaborate and share local resources.

Collaboration begins with agencies coming together, taking time to understand each other's systems and responsibilities to recognize their collective goal. In this age group, local education has the primary role of developing community interests, building social skills, teaching to community needs, and developing job skills and interests. Vocational rehabilitation is introduced to the student and their family during this time, starting with information but laying the groundwork for a path to employment. Practical examples of VR participation include school administrators inviting local VR representatives to parent nights to share information and stories of youth with I/DD successfully employed or in college. In some states, the state I/DD system may already be supporting the child and family with supports outside the school, such as respite or in-home supports.



**Table 3: For School Age Students: Potential Roles for a Collective Impact**

	Education	Vocational Rehabilitation	I/DD
<b>Career Counseling</b>	Provide exposure to life. Work-based learning links knowledge gained through work with classroom or related instruction.	Provide information on potential employment and career options and information on accessing VR service. While still in school, provide services that support job shadowing, paid and unpaid internships, and apprenticeships.	Provide family support, case management, taking lead on life course planning including, and employment service options.
<b>Job Development</b>	Provide information (research) on employment options.	Provide information (research) on employment options. Support internships, summer employment.	
<b>Job Support</b>	Provide support during work-study or internships.	Offer employment services to this age group after school, weekend or summer jobs.	Offer employment services to this age group after school, weekend or summer jobs.
<b>Community Life Engagement</b>	Support participation in extracurricular school activities.	Provide information on assistive technology, home modifications, etc. to support community living.	Use life course trajectory tools in planning for future.

The I/DD service coordinator can play an important role in setting adult life expectations. I/DD service coordinators have a role in providing information about future long-term services and supports, as well as supporting students to participate in summer youth employment before graduation and introducing the student to adult peers with disabilities who have become successful in employment and or gone on to college.

Table 3 above gives examples of potential roles to enhance collaboration for collective impact.

### **Partnerships that work.**

#### **Delaware**

Delaware recognized the value and importance of collaboration to ensure that youth in this age cohort succeed in adult life when the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, the Delaware Department of Education, and participating Local School Districts implemented their “Early Start to Supported Employment” initiative in 2005. Building on this collaboration, Delaware has continued to engage youth between the ages of 14 and 25 to plan and achieve their individual employment goals via the Pathways to Employment (1915(i) Medicaid State Plan Amendment) created in 2015.

The Pathways to Employment program is designed

for youth aged 14 to 17 who are focusing on career exploration and enhancing pre-employment skills, and youth aged 18 to 25 who are continuing to work on pre-employment skills while they are in the job hunt. Delaware continues its long-time collaboration with partnering agencies (Department of Education, Local Education Agencies, and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation) to coordinate services and supports for youth engaged in Pathways to Employment.

One of the key elements to this program is the addition of “employment navigators.” The role of the employment navigator is to assist the youth in developing a person-centered employment plan for achieving integrated community employment, and to facilitate the interagency service authorizations to ensure the state is using the resources from the individual service agencies in the most cost-effective way.

<http://dhss.delaware.gov/dsaapd/pathways.html>

#### **Florida**

Florida’s Employment First Initiative (<http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/leadership-florida>) is another example of the collective impact that can be achieved when multiple state agencies move beyond coordinating to truly collaborating. In 2013, Governor Scott signed Executive Order 13-284. The Executive Order asked that state agencies work together to make it easier for people with disabilities to find and keep a job in the community. As the state agencies

collaborated at the top levels of government, it quickly became apparent that to be successful in increasing employment outcomes for Floridians with disabilities, they would need to share the responsibility of providing guidance, resources, and ongoing support at the local community level.

To understand the challenges of local communities to implement the changes made at the state level, pilot projects were initiated across the state. One such pilot site, Nassau County (<http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/search/node/nassau%20county>), proved to be successful in both assisting youth to prepare and experience employment prior to exiting high school and in informing state agencies how they might adapt their policies to ensure the collective impact of their Employment First goals. Nassau County is a rural county where there are a limited number of employment providers. Through collaboration and shared responsibility, the local school district acquired approval to become a VR vendor and to allow job coaches employed by the school to be reimbursed for services not occurring under IDEA. This greatly assisted the state VR agency to expand its capacity to provide employment services to youth in this region of the state.

The success of these initiatives led to the passing of Florida's Employment First Act in January 2016. The Florida Employment First Act calls for state agencies to work together to make sure Floridians with disabilities get the support they need to work for employers in their communities earning minimum wage or greater. State agencies named in the Florida Employment First Act are:

- » Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- » Department of Education, Division of Blind Services of Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
- » Agency for Persons with Disabilities
- » Department of Children and Families, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Program
- » Department of Economic Opportunity
- » CareerSource Florida
- » Florida Developmental Disabilities Council
- » Association of Rehabilitation Facilities

## Agency Collaboration for Transitioning Youth, Ages 18-26

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As noted in the transition of youth ages 14-18, leaving school is one of the most important times in a person's life relative to employment. For many people, this period includes an effort to establish foundations so that expectations of childhood can become the reality of adult lives. The decisions made and learned experiences that occur during the transition age have longstanding implications throughout adult lives.

During this phase, not only is the person moving from childhood to adulthood, but the public service structure, eligibility criteria, and service providers are also changing. Antosh (2013) identified four core concepts for transition planning and processes: (1) self-determination, (2) cultural proficiency, (3) interagency collaboration, and (4) inclusion of all perspectives, disciplines, and organizations that will influence the transitioning student. The work of Noonan et al. (2008) emphasized the complexity of the transition planning process, and found that successful collaborations emphasized a multi-faceted and inter-related system of staffing, support, knowledge building (e.g., training, technical assistance), relationships, and funding.

### *Partnering agencies/roles and responsibilities.*

Traditionally, the public education system's main task was to teach "work skills" and help students get paid and unpaid work experience. In a collaborative approach, one of the key responsibilities of schools is to provide an environment where a person with a disability can develop, through experiential learning, a belief in their own self-efficacy to achieve their goals. Schools can show families and individuals the potential opportunities and advantages of employment and community engagement.

State VR agencies begin working collaboratively with the person's transition team. The VR counselor can build upon the individual's person-centered plan, with its information gained about the desires and aptitudes of the person looking for work, to develop a truly individualized employment plan.

In providing community-based long-term services such as residential and day services, state

**Table 4: For Transition Age Students: Potential Roles for a Collective Impact**

	Education	Vocational Rehabilitation	I/DD
<b>Career Exploration</b>	Provide a wide variety of experiential learning opportunities about life choices.	Provide opportunities for employment experience on a trial basis.	Provide family support, case management. Provide information and connection to general community services and support in participating on community activities.
<b>Job Development</b>	Provide information (research) on employment options. Look at how typical work study and internships can translate to employment.	Provide real life opportunities to experience working and elements of different jobs by doing them. Secure jobs based on desired interests.	
<b>Job Support</b>	Encourage an attitude of belief and achievement in the student to help in later life.	Ensure that SE providers plan for ever decreasing paid supports by substituting natural support (and tech).	Provide assistance to support working on transportation options, flexible scheduling for residential and day services. Provide for the ongoing job supports as needed.
<b>Community Life Engagement</b>	Set up expectations of the individual and family that their loved one will be integrated into the community.	Provide opportunities for employment in the community independently, gaining exposure to the most common community activities.	Provide opportunities to continually discover and develop knowledge of potential ways to be part of the community independently.

developmental disability systems need to ensure that services are flexible enough to be adapted to an individual's unique life choices. Community-based services should be developed to ensure that a person can move between services in a way that supports independence and integration.

Table 4 represents sample service activities that can assist an individual with receiving employment services and community engagement support. The activities are distinct to the particular agency's specific area of responsibility and their main missions.

### **Partnerships that work.**

#### **Washington state**

In Washington state, the King County Developmental Disabilities Division (KCDDD) began the School to Work (STW) project began in 2005. Its goal was to assist students with I/DD to leave school with a job or on a pathway to employment. STW was designed as a collaboration between 17 King County school districts, 15 employment support agencies, the King County Work Training Program, Washington State's Department of Social and Health Services' Division

of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), and (very importantly) local businesses (employers).

Central to this program is the goal of ensuring that students with I/DD leave school with a job. Some specific objectives of STW include:

- » Help I/DD-eligible students in King County School Districts leave school with a paid job each year.
- » Increase the capacity of schools to prepare students for employment.
- » Improve systems coordination between school districts, DDD, and DVR.
- » Increase collaboration between schools and employment providers.
- » Increase parents' awareness of employment-related resources available and the value and possibility of employment for their children.

The number of students enrolled in STW was comparable in each of the program's first three years. The number of STW students who were working within six months of exiting school, however, has steadily increased from year to year. In 2006, 53% of students enrolled in STW year were working

within six months of exiting school. In 2007, this number increased to 68%, and in 2008, it increased further to 76%. These figures represent a marked increase when compared with I/DD-enrolled students who did not participate in STW activities.

**Table 5. School to Work Project–King County, Washington**

STW participants			non-STW participants		
Year	Number working	Percentage working	Year	Number working	Percentage working
2006	40	53.3%	2006	6	7.1%
2007	50	67.6%	2007	6	9.0%
2008	55	76.4%	2008	9	12.5%

Choosing an employment vendor is an important piece of the STW program. As discussed previously, vendors work as part of a team with students, teachers, parents and other natural supports. They are ultimately responsible for services related to employment support, job readiness, and search skills. Finding job placements, however, typically lies with the vendor.

### Iowa

In 1998, Iowa convened a now longstanding team called The Iowa Governance Group. This group is composed of leadership and staff from a number of state agencies and departments determined to have an impact on employment for individuals with I/DD. The state agencies included are the Department of the Blind, the Department of Education, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Human Rights, the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities, and the state workforce development agency. This group quickly determined that there were a number of factors that were preventing positive collaboration among these state agencies, such as multiple funding streams, differing performance measures, and diverse missions. The group members developed and signed a Memorandum of Understanding to guide their ongoing collaboration.

Regarding this initiative, Hall (2011) notes that the stability of the membership of this group, their common mission, and their shared dedication

to a single outcome (increasing employment for people with disabilities), coupled with the concrete contribution of financial resources and staff, have made the group effective in gaining positive results.

Three important strategies can be taken from the group’s continued success:

- » Develop a shared mission statement and guiding principles to underlie the work of the group.
- » Ensure that there are decision-makers at the table from each agency, i.e., staff who have the authority to allocate staffing and other resources.
- » The group is relatively free from the regulatory nature of state government, since it is not housed within any one department. While this is a positive attribute, this must be balanced with the group having enough power to put “teeth” behind their recommendations.

Individuals of transition age are experiencing tremendous change in their lives. Studies have shown that in order to assist individuals to become successful in employment during this time, state agencies need to have a clear agreement of the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the agencies involved (Sloper 2004; Oertle, Trach, & Plotner, 2013). Agencies must ensure that their particular services smoothly transition from one to another, are complementary, and focus on helping people attain their individual life goals.

### Agency Collaboration for Working Adults, Ages 27 and Older

Age 27 and older is a time for people to reflect on their employment journey and the opportunities they have had, and currently have, to determine if a change is warranted. It might also be a time to acknowledge the person’s work strengths, interests, and skills to determine if they want to pursue developing additional skills or interests, or a new job or career path.

Some individuals may experience a job loss or career change, and thus need to use supports again or increase previously faded services. Likewise, an individual may wish to advance in a career and use



**Table 6. Working Age Adults: Potential Roles for a Collective Impact**

	Vocational Rehabilitation	I/DD
<b>Career Exploration</b>	<p>Provide information (research) on employment options.</p> <p>Provide information on potential employment and career options and information on accessing VR services.</p> <p>Determine what employment supports the person is already involved in through I/DD services.</p>	<p>Referral to VR with detailed information on the person and what conditions are needed for successful employment.</p> <p>Provide services to support community participation while person is engaged with VR.</p> <p>Provide services to support volunteer experiences, career planning and development.</p> <p>Support coordinators continue to use information from the Person-Centered Plan to facilitate meaningful discussions by asking probing questions about the person's vision of work, and/or if the person is truly satisfied in their current position.</p>
<b>Job Development</b>	<p>Provide real-life opportunities to experience working and elements of different jobs by doing them. Secure jobs based on desired interests.</p>	<p>Support community life engagement.</p>
<b>Job Support</b>	<p>Job coaching/job placement.</p> <p>Supported employment.</p>	<p>LTSS job coaching as needed.</p>
<b>Community Life Engagement</b>		<p>Provide opportunities to continually discover and develop knowledge of potential ways to be part of the community. .</p> <p>Support coordinators continue to identify community life experiences that can lead to increased opportunities for meaningful employment and community inclusion, and coordinate those activities with other agencies.</p>

supports to do so. A person may also still be unsure if competitive, integrated employment is a goal they want to pursue, and may need discovery or other prevocational services to help inform the decision.

Because of the changes that occur in adults' lives as they move through life stages, as individuals move along the path to different careers and jobs, services and supports may need to be re-considered. Systems need to be responsive to the changing needs and goals of the individual.

#### ***Partnering agencies/roles and responsibilities.***

VR and I/DD services continue to play a major role in supporting this age cohort. When individuals express a desire to work, a VR referral should be made and VR program services or VR supported employment services can begin. Individuals may also be receiving time-limited supports through the I/DD agency to identify work strengths, interests, and skills so they are successful in the general labor market.

Whether these types of supports are occurring in tandem or separately, interagency collaboration to

build consensus that guides both the development of the Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) and the Individual Support Plan (ISP) is critical. Having open communication, a clear distinction of roles, and a mutual understanding of each program's purpose and limitations is critical to achieving collaboration. Learning how to maximize the expertise of each agency by sharing information, conducting interagency planning meetings, and structuring working agreements delineating responsibilities will continue to build a common ground for collaboration, and will help overcome organizational barriers.

Table 6 represents a sample of activities that can assist an individual with receiving employment services and community engagement.

#### ***Partnerships that work.***

In 2013, Alaska cross-system leadership engaged in a renewed commitment to understand each other's systems and collaborate to provide quality, cost-effective employment services across systems in the state. Over a period of three to five years, cross-VR and I/DD agency leaders and their stakeholders

met on a regular basis to learn from each other, understand and confirm language each system used, and identify gaps in their systems, and worked together to create a seamless system of employment services.

The collaborative team identified service gaps, shared resources, and committed to development of system-wide practices and procedures that reinforced each other's work in delivery of employment services, with the priority of making sure people with even the most significant disabilities are supported to achieve competitive integrated employment. Establishing shared values and commitments drove the development of the memorandum of understanding between the state VR and I/DD agencies. These values and beliefs drive all publicly funded services provided to individuals with disabilities to have the first and preferred outcome of services to be competitive and integrated employment.

Alaska has also developed an accompanying guide and matrix between agencies so that all are working towards the common goal. The guide ensures that people have access to job supports and services that lead to competitive, integrated community employment as they navigate dual systems. Collaborating agencies know when to use the supports and what the next steps should be. <http://dhss.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/committees/et/IDDServiceGuide.pdf>.

The guide states, "Work is a fundamental part of adult life for people with and without disabilities. Meaningful work is associated with positive physical and mental benefits and is a critical component of being an active community member. In order to ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities realize their goal of integrated and competitive employment this matrix offers a visual model of how community supports through collaborating agencies might be best utilized. Time spent in each phase of this continuum will differ based on a person's individual work skills, interests, conditions of employment, needed supports and desired outcomes. As individuals progress along the employment continuum, the desired objective is fading support over time with the option to pursue a

career change and/or advancement in their chosen field of work."

## Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) is another state agency that has spent considerable time developing a collaborative relationship with its VR partners. They have developed policy and an accompanying joint referral form ([www.dhs.pa.gov/provider/BulletinSearch/bulletinselected/index.htm?bn=00-16-02&o=N&po=ODP&id=04/01/2016](http://www.dhs.pa.gov/provider/BulletinSearch/bulletinselected/index.htm?bn=00-16-02&o=N&po=ODP&id=04/01/2016)) to ensure that all individuals enrolled or enrolling in ODP's waivers have access to experiences and services that will enable them to obtain and benefit from competitive integrated employment. This policy and dual enrollment form was critical as it provides clarity to ensure that referrals to other agencies are being made in pursuit of the goal of competitive integrated employment.

## Conclusion

Federal and state policy priorities continue to promote services that support individuals with I/DD to be fully engaged with their communities, not only where they live, but also in how they spend their days (integrated employment and community engagement). Practice has shown that to achieve these goals, sequencing and braiding of supports and services to meet the desired outcomes needs to occur. Of critical importance is the recognition that support needs of people change over their life course from childhood through transition to adulthood. States need to ensure that a person can move smoothly through the employment process as they move from one life phase (and associated service delivery agency) to another.

This paper has identified the need for strong interagency collaboration to achieve the priorities of federal and state policy and practice. Federal and state agencies need to collaborate in functions such as service design, shared resources, and provider development with a recognition of life stages to ensure that integrated competitive employment and community participation are a reality for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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## Other resources

### WINTAC

The WINTAC provides training and technical assistance (TA) to State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (SVRAs) and related agencies and rehabilitation professionals and service providers to help them develop the skills and processes needed to meet the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

[www.wintac.org/topic-areas/resources-and-strategies-competitive-integrated-employment/resources](http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/resources-and-strategies-competitive-integrated-employment/resources)

### Pathways to Employment

Pathways to Employment is a program designed to support low-income teens and young adults with disabilities in Delaware who want to work. The program helps participants get prepared for work, find jobs, and succeed in the workplace.

<http://dhss.delaware.gov/dsaapd/pathways.html>

### Employment First Florida

The purpose of this website is to provide information about what the state of Florida is doing to make it easier for people with disabilities to work. Included are strategies from both the state and local levels.

[www.employmentfirstfl.org/](http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/)

# ThinkWork!



The Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities is a project of ThinkWork! at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. ThinkWork! is a resource portal offering data, personal stories, and tools related to improving employment outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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[www.ThinkWork.org/rrtc](http://www.ThinkWork.org/rrtc)