

Meeting the Holistic Vision of Employment and Community Life Engagement: State Administrator Perspectives on Achievements and Gaps

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INTRODUCTION

As states focus on expanding integrated employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and phase out sheltered work, they are finding a need to concurrently examine day services and supports that promote Community Life Engagement (CLE, see yellow box to the right for a detailed definition). These supports can be a wrap-around to ensure individuals' engagement in the community is maintained and they continue to receive sufficient levels of support, despite fluctuations in job status and hours.

From January through June 2017, the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) hosted a working group of member states to share strategies for encouraging quality day services and supports that promote CLE. The SELN is a membership-based network of state IDD agencies committed to making changes in their service systems to ensure access to competitive integrated employment for the people they serve (www.selnhub.org/home).

This CLE Working Group (CLEWG) was comprised of 17 SELN state administrators and met five times. The first four meetings focused on the four guideposts for providing high-quality day services and supports to promote CLE. Themes from those discussions can be found in Engage Brief No. 8 (www.thinkwork.org/state-roles-promoting-community-life-engagement-themes-state-employment-leadership-networks-working).

PURPOSE OF THIS BRIEF

The fifth CLEWG meeting explored how CLE and employment can be combined to create a holistic vision of community engagement. The CLEWG considered how the seven elements of the Higher-Performing States framework for integrated employment (Hall, Butterworth, Winsor, Gilmore, & Metzel, 2007) can be applied to that holistic vision. See page 2 for a definition of the Higher-Performing States framework.

The purpose of this brief is to:

1. Share a more holistic definition of each higher-performing element
2. Offer the results of a poll of CLEWG participants that examined their state's progress according to each element
3. Identify perceived gaps in states' capacity to meet their vision
4. Provide recommendations for next steps

WHAT IS COMMUNITY LIFE ENGAGEMENT?

Community Life Engagement refers to how people access and participate in their communities outside of employment. CLE activities may include volunteer work; postsecondary, adult, or continuing education; accessing community facilities such as a local library, gym, or recreation center; participation in retirement or senior activities; and anything else people with and without disabilities do in their off-work time. For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), day services and supports should include those for CLE as part of a meaningful day.

The Institute for Community Inclusion has been conducting research to identify the elements of day services and supports that lead to high-quality CLE. Through expert interviews and case studies with providers, four guideposts in delivering high-quality CLE supports were identified. For more on the guideposts, see: www.thinkwork.org/high-quality-community-life-engagement-supports-four-guideposts-success.



WHAT IS THE HIGHER-PERFORMING STATES FRAMEWORK?

The work of the State Employment Leadership Network is guided by the Higher-Performing States (HPS) framework for systems change. The HPS framework was developed through case studies of three states with strong integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD enrolled in adult day and employment services (Hall et al., 2007).

The framework identifies seven elements that transmit and maintain commitment to the goals of community inclusion and integrated employment. The seven elements are leadership/values, interagency collaboration, policy & goals, financing, training and technical assistance, service innovation, and outcome data. As Figure 1 suggests, successful states are defined not by implementation of any one element, but by a consistent focus on employment within each of the model factors.

FIGURE 1: THE HIGHER PERFORMING STATES MODEL



Hall et al (2007)

As a basis for discussion, the project team expanded each HPS element definition to reflect a holistic vision encompassing both CLE and employment. Then, using these statements, the team polled CLEWG participants to assess their perceived progress in each area. The poll responses then framed a follow-up discussion on specific state strategies for each element.

HOLISTIC DEFINITIONS

Project staff first created the following holistic definitions and shared them with the CLEWG:

- » **LEADERSHIP/VALUES:** The state's leadership sends consistent messaging that both work and CLE should be supported in each person's life.
- » **INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION:** The state's collaborative and partnership activities promote seamless sequencing or braiding of services in support of CLE and employment outcomes.
- » **POLICY & GOALS:** The state's goals and policies around Employment First* include a role for CLE as part of a full life.
- » **FINANCING:** The state's funding methodology and rates promote and prioritize a combination of CLE and work outcomes over other options.
- » **TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:** The state is making an investment in training and technical assistance to support people in pursuing a combination of CLE and employment outcomes.
- » **SERVICES AND SERVICE INNOVATION:** The state's service definitions and strategies facilitate a whole life including work and CLE.
- » **OUTCOME DATA:** The state's data indicates whether individuals are achieving the vision of a full life including both work and CLE.

*WHAT IS EMPLOYMENT FIRST?

Many states have been developing policies that prioritize integrated employment as the first choice and preferred outcome for individuals with IDD. Collectively, these actions have been united under the framework of Employment First.

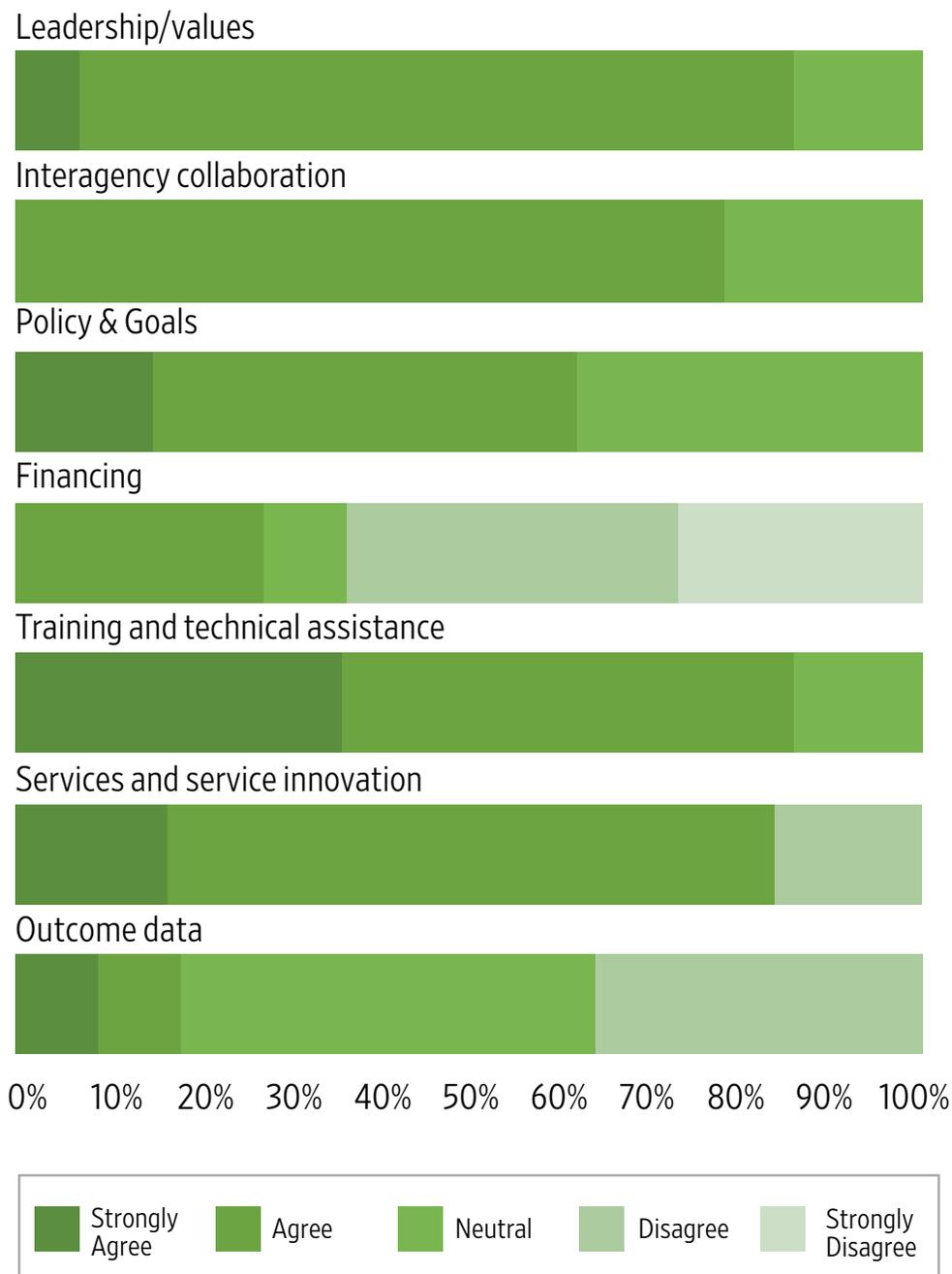
POLL RESPONSES

CLEWG members were then asked to report on the extent to which they agreed that their state was making progress toward the newly expanded holistic definition. Five response options ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

The poll responses indicated areas of commonality across CLEWG states (see Figure 2). Investing in training and technical assistance and having goals and policies that reflect a vision for both employment and CLE were perceived as strengths. Areas for improvement included financing, which might include funding methodology, rates, and sequencing or braiding of services, as well as having performance management systems and data to track progress and quality.

These findings suggest that, while the values related to a holistic vision of CLE and employment are strong, some of the specific strategies to accomplish that vision are still in development. Specific recommendations were also identified for moving these holistically defined elements forward.

FIGURE 2: CLEWG POLL RESPONSES TO HOLISTIC HIGHER-PERFORMING STATES ELEMENT DEFINITIONS



RECOMMENDATIONS

The CLEWG identified a growing interest in, and commitment to, including CLE alongside competitive integrated employment as part of a vision for a fully included life for people with IDD. However, the working group found several gaps in states' capacity to make that vision a reality.

Based on these gaps, the CLEWG identified several next steps:

LEADERSHIP/VALUES

- » Create clearer policies around CLE to align with existing well-defined messaging around Employment First.

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

- » Collaborate with vocational rehabilitation to determine how to braid resources to support a mix of employment and CLE for each individual.

POLICY & GOALS

- » Define the relationship between work and CLE in the context of Employment First.

FINANCING

- » Balance incentivizing employment via rates with the need for sufficient funding to provide quality non-work supports as a wrap-around, pre-employment, or retirement option.
- » Ensure that funds for CLE and employment do not compete with, but rather complement each other.

TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- » Provide training on person-centered planning/thinking, values that should guide service provision, and building individual skills (human capital) through CLE.

SERVICES AND SERVICE INNOVATION

- » Change perceptions at the service delivery level to ensure that employment and CLE are no longer considered mutually exclusive.
- » Analyze and modify existing service definitions as needed to support CLE.
- » Engage local communities, including people and organizations outside the IDD system, to be more inclusive and supportive.

OUTCOME DATA

- » Make use of existing data sources such as the National Core Indicators (www.nationalcoreindicators.org).
- » Develop and implement new measures of service quality and outcomes.
- » Redesign quality assurance systems to balance accountability with the dignity of risk.

Reference

Hall, A. C., Butterworth, J., Winsor, J., Gilmore, D., & Metzel, D. (2007). Pushing the employment agenda: Case study research of high performing states in integrated employment. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 45(3), 182-198.

ThinkWork!



Community Life Engagement is an initiative 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.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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FUNDING SOURCES

Funding for Community Life Engagement is provided in part by the Access to Integrated Employment Project, supported by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under cooperative agreement #90DN0216, and by the State Employment Leadership Network, a membership-based network of state intellectual and developmental disability agencies committed to employment-related systems change.

www.CommunityLifeEngagement.org

www.ThinkWork.org

www.CommunityInclusion.org



State Employment Leadership Network

The SELN is a place for states to connect, collaborate, and create cross-community support regarding pressing employment-related issues at state and federal levels for individuals with developmental disabilities.

The SELN was launched in 2006 as a joint program of the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services and the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.



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