

## Background

This is the sixth in a series of briefs on the findings from a Delphi process conducted by the Employment Learning Community in 2013–2014. More information on the Employment Learning Community and the Delphi process can be found in Brief #1 (Introduction, Values, and Overall Themes).

This brief focuses on how data and evidence can support integrated employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). This was the fifth overarching theme among the Delphi panel's recommendations.

## Generation and use of data and evidence to support integrated employment outcomes

Within this category, recommendations fell under two sub-headings:

1. Developing an evidence base for supported integrated employment practices (62\*)
2. Enhancing collection and use of data (38)

### Developing an evidence base for supported integrated employment practices

The higher sub-priority in the area of data and evidence was the development of an evidence base for supported employment—that is, research on which employment support strategies are most effective. Recommendations were:

- Piloting demonstrations of new strategies in supporting people to succeed in employment. Determining how to effectively move individuals into community employment, as well as the length of time required for change. (79)
- Developing more requests for proposals to develop community-based employment services that can be measured, and that reinforce emerging best practices. Conducting demonstration projects that explore best practices and data-based decision making. (67)

The Employment Learning Community has been developed to assist states in improving employment systems and services that will increase inclusive, competitive employment for individuals with IDD. To gain insights on the most cogent policies and priorities to promote such systems change, the project convened a panel of national subject matter experts to participate in a Delphi process. Nineteen Delphi panel members, including employment researchers, service providers, state vocational rehabilitation directors, developmental disability agency directors, educators, self-advocates, family members and representatives from related programs and initiatives, participated in four rounds of data collection. The values, policies, and practices that emerged from this effort are being presented in this series of seven briefs:

1. Introduction, Values, and Major Themes
2. Transition From School to Work
3. Collaboration Across Agencies
4. Education and Training for Job Seekers
5. Processes Within State Agencies
6. Generation and Use of Data and Evidence
7. Paths Toward Fair Wages

Other recommendations that were lower-ranked included requiring states to conduct rigorous evaluations of policies and programs, especially for waiver activities (29), and creating a system to measure and evaluate federal programs across agencies (26).

### Enhancing collection and use of data

The panel also identified a number of specific strategies for enhancing the collection and use of data on employment services, supports, and outcomes. Specific recommendations were:

- Expanding and improving the reporting of outcome data to include measures such as number of individuals who have transitioned from school to integrated employment, number who have transitioned from sheltered to integrated employment, type of employment secured, whether employment was part time or full time, and whether or not community-based day services or day habilitation were a part of this transition. (84)
- Disseminating public information highlighting efforts and outcomes in the successful employment of people

\* Numbers in parentheses are the standardized scores of the item's ranking across panel members. The standardized scores were calculated as follows: Standardized Score = (sum of scores - minimum score) / (maximum score - minimum score)



with IDD at the provider, regional, and state levels. Defining a baseline and highlighting annual progress in placing individuals in integrated employment. (66)

- Having agreements between state agencies and providers regarding what data will be measured and what software system will be used to gather this data. State agencies requiring providers to report regularly on the metrics for funding to continue. (64)
- Developing cross-agency databases and shared data points within states. (58)
- Developing a portfolio of education, life experience, and employment opportunities of every individual who transitions from school to adult life. Upon reviewing the portfolio, one could glean descriptors/milestones that are related to employment outcomes, based on one person's story at a time. (51)
- Providing more transparency and open access to data within and among state agencies. (50)
- One of the lower-priority recommendations was to tie in state IDD agencies to federal programs through the Department of Labor and Department of Education. This would support states in developing longitudinal data systems to follow individuals from public school enrollment through to adulthood (39). Other recommendations included making data collection and analysis more participatory and accessible by using Participatory Action Research (41); improving data collection with technology, using the health care system or other private industries as models (34); and developing universal databases for cross-state comparisons (28).

## Conclusions

The Delphi panel identified both research on effective strategies for supported employment and improved data systems as priorities. Recommendations included funding more research and demonstration projects to explore new strategies and identify best practices. The panel also had a number of specific recommendations for better use of data, including improving approaches for coordinating data collection across state agencies and expanding the dissemination of data to the public.

# ThinkWork!

Advancing employment and opportunity for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities



The Employment Learning Community (ELC) 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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### For more information about the Employment Learning Community please contact:

Cindy Thomas, MS, CRC, CESP  
Project Director  
Institute for Community Inclusion  
cindy.thomas@umb.edu  
(617) 287-4312

### For more information about the Delphi Panel please contact:

Jennifer Sullivan Sulewski, PhD  
Senior Research Associate  
Institute for Community Inclusion  
jennifer.sulewski@umb.edu  
(617) 287-4356

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