Background
This is the seventh and final brief in our series 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 the final priority area for policy and practice change: creating paths toward fairer wages for individuals with IDD.

Paths toward fairer wages
Recommendations in this area focused on decreasing reliance on sub-minimum wage work, and fell into two main strategies: investing in integrated employment, and reducing or eliminating sub-minimum wage options. Among our panelists, the first option was clearly preferred in the rankings:

1. Investing in integrated, community-based employment alternatives (85*)
2. Reducing or eliminating the use of sub-minimum wage options (17)

Investing in integrated, community-based employment alternatives
As noted above, the higher-priority approach according to most panelists was investing more in integrated, community-based employment. Specific recommendations included:

• Allocating public funds toward integrated employment supports and away from grouped and/or sub-minimum wage employment options. (77)
• Providing technical assistance to providers with converting their services from sheltered workshops into community-based employment. (59)
• Investing in awareness-building and education throughout communities, in addition to investments in integrated employment supports. (48)
• Investing in skills training, postsecondary education, and internships, in addition to job placement and supports. (48)

Reducing or eliminating the use of sub-minimum wage options
A vocal minority on the panel endorsed phasing out or eliminating sub-minimum wage options such as sheltered workshops. Specific recommendations under this category included:

• Phasing out sheltered employment for students in high school, turning 22, or leaving high school. (77)
• Phasing out sheltered employment for new referrals to IDD agencies (57)
• Phasing out sheltered employment for those who lose their community placement and require additional services to regain integrated, competitive employment (52)

The two lower-ranked strategies for reducing or eliminating sub-minimum wage options were getting rid of the Department of Labor’s 14(c) sub-minimum wage provision (42), and limiting the amount of time an individual can earn sub-minimum wage (25).

* 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)
Conclusions

There was general consensus that people with disabilities should earn prevailing wages, and that sub-minimum wage employment should be reduced, although the panel members did not universally agree that sub-minimum wage options should be eliminated altogether.

The panel’s recommendations in this area mostly focused on improving the availability of above-minimum-wage options by increasing funding, technical assistance, and education in support of individual supported employment. Some panelists did recommend phasing out sub-minimum wage options altogether, particularly for specific groups such as transition-age youth or new referrals to adult IDD services.