



## Collaboration between State Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Agencies and State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies: Results of a National Survey

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### Introduction

Do state intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) agencies collaborate with their vocational rehabilitation (VR) counterparts? If so, in what ways and how formalized are these collaborative efforts? This Research to Practice Brief provides answers to those and other questions. Data for this brief come from the National Survey of State Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Agencies' Day and Employment Services. The FY 2009 survey included a topical module to assess collaboration between state IDD agencies and state VR agencies to support integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD. Forty-one IDD agencies (80 percent) responded to the survey, and 40 of those agencies completed the topical module. Overall, survey results showed that most state IDD agencies are collaborating with their state's VR agency in one or more ways to support employment outcomes for individuals with IDD.

### Background

Over the last two decades, the federal government has implemented a series of legislative measures to provide a policy framework and funding for promoting integrated employment for people with disabilities. This includes the 1986 Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act and the 1986 Vocational Rehabilitation Act amendments. More recent legislation and initiatives include the 1998 Workforce Investment Act, the 1999 Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, and President George W. Bush's 2001 New Freedom Initiative.

Despite these promising efforts, integrated employment has still not become a reality for many people with disabilities and individuals with IDD in particular (Butterworth et al., 2010). Data on state IDD agencies show that the number of individuals supported in integrated employment declined from 118,093 (24.7 percent) to 114,004 (20.3 percent)

between FY 2001 and FY 2009 (Butterworth et al., 2011). Over this same period, the number of individuals served in facility-based and non-work settings increased from 281,917 (67 percent) to 318,282 (77 percent) (Butterworth et al., 2011). These service trends reflect state IDD agency investment in services other than community employment. Data on state VR agencies tell a similar story. The number of individuals with IDD closed by state VR agencies with an employment outcome decreased from 33,485 (a rehabilitation rate<sup>1</sup> of 62.7 percent) in FY 2001 to 23,307 (a rehabilitation rate of 54.6 percent) in FY 2009 (Butterworth et al., 2010, 2011).

At the state level, there is considerable variation in integrated employment rates. The percentage of individuals served in integrated employment by state IDD agencies varied from 4 percent to 88 percent in FY 2009, and on average state IDD agencies served 20.3 percent of individuals in employment (Butterworth et al., 2011). Likewise, in FY 2009 the rehabilitation rate for individuals with IDD served by state VR agencies ranged from 26 percent to 83 percent, with the national average rehabilitation rate at 56 percent (Butterworth et al., 2011).

Both state IDD and VR agencies serve individuals with IDD. However, the two systems differ in many aspects (e.g., expectations for integrated employment, definitions of integrated employment, and funding structure). These differences have been a barrier to expanding opportunities for integrated employment across both disability-service systems (Halliday & Cully, forthcoming; Winsor, 2010). VR has been subject to targeted federal legislative efforts to increase access to integrated employment for individuals with IDD. For example, the 1986 Rehabilitation Act amendments formally defined supported employment and authorized funds for related research, demonstrations, and staff training. This was followed by the formal elimination of sheltered employment as a rehabilitation outcome in 2001.

State IDD agencies, however, are not directly subjected to the requirements of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) or the Rehabilitation Act. While the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act established supported employment as a valued service option, it does not provide oversight of state IDD agencies. In 1995, McGaughey et al. noted that, unlike individuals who are served by state VR agencies, there is not a specific federal policy that creates supported employment as the preferred service model for all people served by state IDD agencies, and more than 15 years later this is still the case. State IDD agencies have significant latitude to develop and implement policy for individuals with IDD that reflects their state's preferences, and these differences account for the wide range of participation in integrated employment nationally. For example, Oklahoma's outcome-based rate-setting system (Freeze & Timmons, 2009), Vermont's decision to no longer fund sheltered employment (Sulewski, 2007), and Washington's Working-Age Adult Policy (Hall, 2007) are each ways that individual states' IDD agencies have supported integrated employment outcomes.

The source of dollars to fund services is a major difference between state VR and IDD agencies. The primary source of funds for state VR agencies is the RSA, which provides 78.7 percent of total program funding, with states required to provide 21.3 percent in matching funds. There are two main sources of funds for state IDD agencies (Winsor, 2010): federal dollars from Medicaid Waivers with states required to provide matching funds, and locally generated state or county dollars that serve individuals who are not eligible for federally generated funding.

The types of employment services each agency funds is another area of difference between state IDD and VR agencies. While both agencies are primarily funded through federal pass-through and state monies (Butterworth et al., 2006), VR services are designed to be short-term, while IDD services are expected to be long-term.

By design, VR services are time-limited and require that recipients will either obtain jobs where they do not require paid supports or transition to another state agency (such as state IDD agencies) to receive long-term employment supports (Hill et al., 1987). Alternatively, state IDD agencies can fund short-term employment services for individuals with IDD who are denied services by the state VR agency or who

exit VR services without obtaining a successful case closure, as well as long-term employment services. Underlying either funding scenario is the assumption that state VR and IDD agencies coordinate services to support each individual's employment outcomes. Although this funding arrangement makes sense, it can be difficult to implement because it does not take into account differences in each system's employment priorities (Winsor, 2010).

However, there is some research evidence that bridging system differences through interagency collaboration can positively impact integrated employment outcomes (Foley, Butterworth, & Heller, 2000; Hall et al., 2006; Hall 2009; Winsor, Hall, & Butterworth, n.d.). In Colorado, for example, a two-year pilot project embedded state VR counselors in local Community Centered Board offices to improve employment outcomes for individuals with IDD (Hall, 2009). The result of the pilot project was that 240 individuals with IDD received VR services in the first 12 months of the project, and individuals who participated in the project moved through the VR process at a faster rate than individuals with IDD who did not participate.

In Tennessee, the state IDD agency, state VR agency, and the Council on Developmental Disabilities came together to fund<sup>1</sup> the Tennessee Employment Consortium (TEC) (Winsor, Hall, & Butterworth, n.d.). TEC functions as a conduit through which money for training and development for integrated employment flows. It has advocated successfully for changes in policy (e.g., development and implementation of an Employment First policy) and practice (e.g., requiring that job coaches participate in integrated employment training) in integrated employment services for individuals with IDD.

Foley, Butterworth, and Heller (2000) surveyed 41 state VR agency program managers about VR's interagency activity with 14 other state agencies and programs including IDD. A total of 28 states reported some type of interagency activity between VR and IDD, including 23 state-level and seven local-level interagency agreements, and 13 reports of informal interagency activity. Asked how effective the state-level interagency agreement was in promoting integrated employment for people with disabilities, 22 states reported that state IDD agency interagency agreements with VR had the strongest impact. Building on Foley et al.'s study, the topical module, whose findings are presented in this brief, sought to

explore a wider range of interagency activity between state IDD and VR agencies and their potential impact on integrated employment for people with IDD.

## Findings

This section is divided into two parts. Part One provides a summary of data on state IDD employment services. Part Two describes results of the topical module on collaboration between state IDD agencies and state VR agencies to support integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD. Please see page six for survey definitions and for information on the data collection process.

### Part One: Data on State IDD Employment Services

Nationally, an estimated 560,979 individuals received day and employment services from state IDD agencies in FY 2009. The median number of individuals served by state IDD agencies was 6,527.

An estimated 114,004 (20.3 percent) individuals received integrated employment services from state IDD agencies in FY 2009. This number demonstrates a decrease in the percent in integrated employment since 2001 when 24.7 percent of individuals received integrated employment services. In FY 2009, the median number of individuals served by state IDD agencies in integrated employment was 1,428.

States that reported on the total number of individuals in facility-based work services supported 27.1 percent of individuals in this service in FY 2009. While facility-based work services continue to serve more individuals than integrated employment services, this service option has slowly decreased in popularity since FY 2004 (29 percent).

States that reported funding for integrated employment ( $n = 36$ ) allocated 12 percent of total funding for day and employment services to integrated employment in FY 2009. There has been little fluctuation over time in the percentage of funding allocated toward integrated employment, which peaked in 2001 at 16.6 percent but otherwise ranged from 9.6 percent to 12.7 percent in all other years since 1999.

### Part Two: Results from the Topical Module

**The majority of state IDD agencies reported collaborating with VR.** IDD agencies were asked if they collaborate, either formally or informally, with the VR agency (or agencies) in their state to

support individuals with IDD. Thirty-seven of the 40 responding IDD agencies reported that they collaborate with VR. This included 21 agencies that collaborated with VR in both formal and informal ways, 10 IDD agencies that described their collaborative relationship with VR as only formal, and six IDD agencies that reported engaging with VR only in informal ways. If a state responded that they did not collaborate with VR, they were not asked any additional questions in the topical module.

### State IDD agencies most frequently reported collaborating with VR to conduct cross-agency planning, coordinate integrated employment services for individuals across agencies, and conduct cross-agency training (see Table 1).

The topical module listed nine collaborative activities and asked IDD agencies to identify which they engaged in with their state's VR agency (or agencies). On average, IDD agencies that reported collaborating with VR in both formal and informal ways ( $m = 5$  activities) engaged in a greater number of collaborative activities with VR than IDD agencies that only had formal ( $m = 4$  activities) or informal ( $m = 2$  activities) collaborative relationships. The number of collaborative activities is only reflective of the breadth of efforts between IDD and VR and not reflective of the depth of efforts.

**Table 1: Collaborative Activities of State IDD Agencies and State VR Agencies**

Collaborative Activities	Yes	No
Cross-agency planning (n = 33)	28	5
Cross-agency coordination of integrated employment services for individuals (n = 33)	26	7
Cross-agency training (n = 34)	22	12
Sharing of intake and eligibility information for individuals (n = 30)	21	9
Sharing of data on individuals employment outcomes (n = 30)	19	11
Blending and braiding of funds to support individual employment outcomes (n = 33)	14	19
Combining funds to support shared initiatives to improve integrated employment outcomes (n = 32)	11	21
Shared monitoring of employer provider services (n = 30)	8	22
Shared employer provider certification (n = 31)	5	26

The number of activities IDD agencies engaged in was compared to the type of collaborative relationship states identified they had with their state's VR agency (or agencies) (see Table 2). Results suggest that IDD agencies with both formal and informal VR relationships engaged in a greater number of collaborative activities than IDD agencies with only formal or informal VR relationships.

**Table 2: Number of Collaborative Activities States Engaged in by Type of Collaborative Relationship (n = 34)**

Number of Collaborative Activities	Type of Collaborative Relationship		
	Formal and Informal	Formal	Informal
Between 1 and 3	3	4	4
Between 4 and 6	13	3	1
Between 7 and 9	4	2	0

*Note.* Three IDD agencies (Idaho, Maine, and Virginia) reported collaborating with VR but did not select any of the nine collaborative activities listed in the survey. These three agencies were excluded from this analysis.

**State IDD agencies that described having both formal and informal VR relationships were more likely than other agencies to report that they develop cross-agency plans, coordinate integrated employment services, and conduct staff training across agencies.** Of the 28 IDD agencies that reported conducting cross-agency planning, 19 described their relationship with VR as both formal and informal, six described their relationship with VR as only formal, and three described their VR relationship as only informal. Likewise, of the 26 IDD agencies that responded that they coordinated integrated employment services for individuals across agencies, 19 collaborated with VR in both formal and informal ways, six reported only formal collaboration, and one agency reported only informal collaboration. The 22 IDD agencies that reported conducting cross-agency training included 14 agencies with both formal and informal VR relationships, seven with only formal collaborative relationships, and one agency that collaborated with VR only informally.

**Twelve state IDD agencies reported automatically referring customers who receive integrated employment services to VR for additional services and supports.** The 12 agencies were: Alabama, Arizona, California, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, and Vermont. As a follow-up question, states were

asked to report the number of customers they had referred to VR and for whom a case had been opened in FY 2009; however, only three agencies were able to report this information (California, Indiana, and Vermont).

**Fifteen state IDD agencies responded that they had a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or other written agreement with VR that specified how an individual would transition from VR placement services to long-term employment supports funded by the state IDD agency after obtaining a VR case closure.** The 15 agencies were: Arkansas, Arizona, California, the District of Columbia, Kentucky, Montana, North Carolina, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin. Respondents were asked to report the number of individuals who had completed VR services and obtained long-term employment supports from the IDD agency in FY 2009. Eight agencies provided this information. Numbers ranged from 35 to 725, the average being 314 individuals.

**Fourteen state IDD agencies reported blending and braiding funds to support individual employment outcomes.** The 14 agencies included: the District of Columbia, Indiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. As a follow-up question, states were asked to describe the process through which funds are blended and braided. Typically, states described using VR funds to support up-front or short-term employment services. Then, once a VR case closure is obtained, the IDD agency uses Medicaid Waiver or state funding resources to support long-term employment services. One state noted that this process can vary depending on the individual's specific support needs, and another state noted that the process is not formalized at the state level and so it can vary across localities.

**Six state IDD agencies that reported blending and braiding funds to support individual employment outcomes had a formal agreement with VR for this purpose.** The six agencies were: the District of Columbia, Montana, Oklahoma, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin. Respondents were asked to report the number of individuals for whom they had blended or braided funds to support individual employment outcomes in FY 2009; however, only three agencies provided this information (the District of Columbia, Washington, and Vermont).

**Eleven state IDD agencies reported that they collaborated with their state VR agency (or agencies) to combine funds to support shared IDD and VR initiatives to improve integrated employment services.** States developed initiatives to target transition-age youth (District of Columbia and New Hampshire), self-employment (New Hampshire), and individuals on the waiting list for IDD agency services (Utah). One state developed initiatives to support education on integrated employment (Oklahoma), and several states reported coming together to support the goals of their state's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (Connecticut, Minnesota, and Vermont).

**Most state IDD agencies ( $n = 29$ ) reported that their mission and the mission of their state's VR agency are similar with respect to providing opportunities for integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD.** IDD agencies were asked to describe the ways in which their mission was similar to the mission of their state's VR agency. Similarities that were commonly noted included: the desire to promote independence, the desire to support an individual's right to work, and the belief that integrated employment services should be a priority. Some state IDD agencies also included information about the differences between their mission and the mission of their state's VR agency. Differences that were described by states included: the VR agency's inclusion of enclaves and job crews as integrated employment outcomes, the IDD agency's commitment to serve individuals determined to be ineligible for VR in integrated employment services, and variation within and between IDD and VR agencies on how to assess an individual's employment skills.

## Discussion and Implications

This analysis of the FY 2009 National Survey of State Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Agencies' Day and Employment Services topical module confirms that the majority of state IDD agencies collaborate with their VR counterparts ( $n = 37$ ) and that collaboration is mostly formal in nature ( $n = 31$ ). This finding is consistent with previous research (Foley, Butterworth, & Heller, 2000). Collaboration between state IDD and VR agencies mostly focused on planning, service coordination, and staff training and, to some extent, on data sharing. There was less of an emphasis on sharing and combining funds at the individual customer and program level and on sharing provider certification and monitoring.

As mentioned earlier, VR and IDD differ in their funding sources and funding responsibilities for integrated employment. This leads to challenges with collaborative funding for employment services. Not only are there differences in VR's and IDD's funding responsibilities, but VR agency staff often have limited understanding of the state IDD agencies' funding sources, specifically Medicaid Waivers (Halliday & Cully, forthcoming). Halliday and Cully (forthcoming) reported the following limitations: knowledge of the number of Medicaid Waivers in the state, and differences between waivers in terms of services, fees, and structure.

Despite these issues, survey results showed that some state IDD agencies are making progress in overcoming these differences. Fourteen state IDD agencies reported blending and braiding funds to support individuals with IDD closed into integrated employment by VR, and six of those agencies had a formal agreement with VR for this purpose. Likewise, 11 state IDD agencies reported combining funds to support shared IDD and VR initiatives to improve integrated employment services for individuals with IDD.

Survey results showed little collaboration between state IDD and VR agencies with respect to provider certification and monitoring. This is not surprising given agency differences in funding arrangements for integrated employment. These differences impact how the agencies purchase services from providers, coordinate service delivery with them, and then reimburse providers for these services. This may be compounded by limited provider availability and capacity within a state or sections of a state (Halliday & Cully, forthcoming).

Studies have shown that funding sources and arrangements can also impact employment services. West et al. (1998) surveyed a random sample of 385 supported employment providers in 40 states, 345 of whom provided long-term employment supports. They found that providers who primarily used Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver dollars to fund long-term employment supports (reported by 9.5 percent of respondents) felt less discouraged about moving individuals and resources from segregated to community-based employment, compared to providers who primarily funded long-term employment supports through state VR funds (reported by 11.2 percent of respondents). Note that some state VR agencies have their own, separate programs for purchasing long-term supported employment services from providers.

Furthermore, survey results also showed that state IDD agencies that had both formal and informal collaborative relationships with VR engaged in a greater number of activities, compared to those with only formal or informal ties to their VR agency. Research is needed that not only addresses the range of interagency activity but also what types of activities lead to better employment outcomes. Given that there are differences between state IDD and VR agencies in their focus on integrated employment, a surprisingly large number of state IDD agencies ( $n = 29$ ) reported their mission to be similar to their state VR agency's mission with respect to providing opportunities for integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD. Research is needed on how these missions can be translated into shared definitions of integrated employment in terms of service approaches and hours worked to guide service delivery.

Lastly, only a low number of state IDD agencies were able to report the number of individuals referred to VR and for whom a case had been opened. A similarly low number of state IDD agencies were able to report the number of individuals who had completed VR services and obtained long-term employment supports from the state IDD agency. This suggests that there is a greater need for state IDD agencies to track individuals' participation in integrated employment, including participation in VR services.

Hall et al. (2007) found that state IDD agencies with high rates of integrated employment not only collected data on individual employment outcomes, but also used these data to further the goal of participation in integrated employment. Connolly (1999) also found that local IDD agencies that collect and disseminate employment-outcome data have higher rates of integrated employment than those that do not collect and disseminate these data. Further research is needed on ways to streamline data collection between state IDD and VR agencies to track individual employment outcomes.

## Data Collection

The National Survey of State Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Agencies' Day and Employment Services is a longitudinal study commissioned by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities to analyze community-based day and employment service trends between FY 1988 and FY 2009 for individuals with IDD and

closely related conditions. The survey is designed to provide the following information:

- Trends in the number of people served in integrated employment, facility-based employment, and facility-based and community-based non-work programs;
- Trends in the number of individuals waiting for services;
- Funding sources that are being used to support day and employment services; and
- The allocation of funds across day and employment services.

The most recent version of the survey focused on state IDD agency data for FY 2009 and included a topical module to examine the ways in which state IDD agencies collaborate with their state's VR agency to support integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD.

The survey was most recently administered in March 2010 to IDD agencies in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Of the 51 IDD agencies contacted, 41 finalized their responses to the survey, yielding an 80 percent response rate. Forty of the 41 responding agencies completed the topical module.

## Survey Definitions

The survey collects information on all people with *intellectual (mental retardation) and other developmental disabilities* who receive services funded or monitored by the state IDD agency. Other developmental disabilities may include sensory (e.g., visual and hearing impairments), neurological (e.g., epilepsy, spina bifida, traumatic brain injury, autism), physical (e.g., cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis), or psychiatric disabilities that were acquired prior to the age of 22.

*Integrated employment* services are provided in a community setting and involve paid employment of the participants. Integrated employment includes: competitive employment, individual supported employment, group supported employment, and self-employment supports.

*Facility-based work* includes all employment services that occur in a setting where the majority of employees have a disability. Facility-based work includes: sheltered workshops, work-activity centers, and extended-employment programs.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Rehabilitation rate is the ratio of successful closures (Status 26) relative to the sum of successful closures and unsuccessful closures (Status 26 + Status 28).
- <sup>2</sup> State IDD and VR agency funding for the Tennessee Employment Consortium (TEC) does not come from federal funds.



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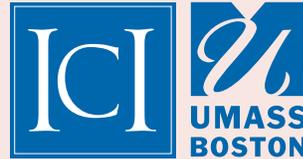
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