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# Organizational Transformation: Guiding Principles for Community Providers (Bringing Employment First to Scale, Issue No. 6)

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# BRINGING EMPLOYMENT FIRST TO SCALE

## Organizational Transformation: Guiding Principles for Community Providers

By Jaimie Timmons, Amie Lulinski, & Cindy Thomas

### Key Findings from the RRTC on Advancing Employment

## Introduction

A key area of focus for our Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) is organizational transformation, leading to improved employment outcomes for those served by community provider organizations.

Community provider organizations and their staff are the primary source of day and employment supports for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD). Among this large provider community, variation of services and employment philosophies exists. Many believe that facility-based programs are essential for individuals with disabilities who are having difficulty getting or maintaining competitive work in the labor force, and have limited plans to expand competitive integrated employment. Others believe that all individuals with IDD can work if provided the appropriate supports.

State and federal systems, however, increasingly expect individuals with IDD to have access to quality employment supports. Community providers are challenged to consider how they will transform their facility-based employment services in order to provide opportunities for competitive integrated employment, including supported and customized employment options.

### Bringing Employment First to Scale Key Findings series

The Bringing Employment First to Scale Key Findings series shares research from ICI's ThinkWork projects, which focus on increasing employment for individuals with IDD. The goal of this series is to identify and share findings that support state agencies, providers, advocates, individuals and families to make the philosophy of Employment First a reality.

### National Council of Executives of The Arc

Each year, the National Conference of Executives (NCE) of The Arc hosts the NCE Summer Leadership Institute. This three-day conference provides attendees with focused training in organizational and program development necessary for serving a diverse IDD community.

### The purpose of this brief is to:

1. Share the experiences of leaders of local chapters of The Arc in the area of organizational transformation, including areas of progress, common barriers, and plans for the future.
2. Highlight emerging findings from a Delphi process regarding essential elements seen as critical to successful organizational transformation.
3. Present these emerging findings as a set of key considerations for providers as they move their organizational transformation efforts forward.

### Where did this information come from?

The information in this brief came from two sources:

1. The National Council of Executives of The Arc's Summer Leadership Institute (SLI) Forum on Employment, and
2. A Delphi process conducted by the RRTC to identify essential components of community provider organizational transformation.

### Issues from the SLI forum

Following a series of SLI workshops on employment, The Arc and ICI facilitated a forum on the future of employment services. Attended by about 30 executives of The Arc, this forum allowed for a facilitated dialogue focused on competitive integrated employment opportunities for people

RRTC on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

A project of

**ThinkWork!**  
at the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston



with IDD throughout The Arc's network. This session was open to all leaders of The Arc attending the SLI who wished to engage in a productive discussion on the future of employment for individuals they support.

Participants were encouraged to share their experiences with organizational change, how they have overcome systemic barriers, and challenges they face. The session also included an opportunity to brainstorm creative solutions.

Attendees acknowledged a shift to higher expectations for employment (especially for transition-age individuals), increased use of person-centered approaches, and a need for organizational evolution to meet demand and address the continually high unemployment rates nation-wide.

In order to address concerns and perceived barriers, participants indicated the following would be helpful:

- » **Messaging and guidance:** Providers need consistent messages from all levels of government about employment goals and expectations, as well as support to understand Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act implementation and enforcement at a systemic level.
- » **Information on best practices:** Providers want to understand best practices (both programmatic and systemic) in promoting competitive integrated employment.
- » **Communications planning:** Providers would appreciate information on methods for communicating with stakeholders, especially employers, on hiring and supporting employees with IDD.
- » **Engagement strategies:** Providers want strategies to more effectively engage families earlier in the transition process, as well as to engage staff in employment-seeking activities.
- » **Funding resources:** Transformation requires a change in the business model for many agencies. Noted support needs include guidance in the reallocation of existing resources, and working with state funders to address changes in purchase of service.

These issues and needs are not uncommon. Yet many of the providers at the town hall session, as well as others across the country, are struggling to develop and implement a

successful transformation plan. In order to support providers as they bring Employment First to scale, the RRTC will create a framework for provider transformation, develop a toolkit, and pilot the use of a peer-to-peer learning community to support organizational transformation.

## Inside the Delphi process

The RRTC is using a Delphi process to identify and understand the most important elements of organizational change, which can guide the transformation process for community providers, including chapters of The Arc. The goal of the Delphi process is to validate previous research with a group of experts in order to create a framework for future resources, technical assistance, and training.

The Delphi panel members represent a range of stakeholder groups, including provider administrators and leadership, trainers and technical assistance providers, state IDD agency staff, direct support professionals, family members, individuals with IDD, and researchers. The respondents had knowledge and experience in either leading or participating

### What is a Delphi process?

A Delphi process is a research technique used to obtain a reliable group opinion using a group of experts. It engages experts who can assist in addressing a complex problem. This process embraces a range of opinions in way that insures that uncertainties related to the problem are accurately represented (Rowe & Wright, 1999).

in an organizational transformation process. Of the 36 Delphi panelists, 26 reported having taken part in an organizational change process, 20 had served in a leadership role in a transformation process, and 28 had participated in organizational transformation planning process.

As part of the Delphi process, these experts were asked to respond to six characteristics essential in organizational transformation identified by earlier research (Butterworth, Gandolfo, Revell, & Inge, 2007). In addition, panelists were asked to identify any essential elements they felt were missing after reviewing the original six.

## What we are learning from the Delphi process

Through the Delphi process, panelists confirmed the original six elements of organizational change and identified four additional areas that are essential to transformation. These initial findings will be used to guide the development of a framework and toolkit for provider transformation.

To transform a facility-based program to one that supports individuals in competitive integrated employment, a community provider must have:

1. **Clear and consistent goals:** Providers must establish an explicit commitment to increasing competitive integrated employment. Goals must be measurable, flexible to the needs of individuals, compelling and easy to grasp, directly reflective of the core mission, modifiable, and specific to an established time frame.
2. **Reallocated and restructured resources:** Providers must have active and ongoing investment in realigning all fiscal, material, and staff resources in order to put into place the supports and services needed for successfully increasing competitive integrated employment.
3. **An active, person-centered job placement process:** Providers must be proactive in finding jobs for one person at a time. This “just do it” approach creates momentum and enthusiasm as successful employment outcomes are achieved and celebrated.
4. **Multiple and diverse community partnerships:** Providers must engage organizations and state systems and create buy-in for the change process. These partnerships can happen with school districts, state agency offices such as vocational rehabilitation, faith-based organizations, and transportation resources.
5. **A holistic approach:** Providers must consider the whole person with wrap-around life supports as necessary, and use a career planning process that involves multiple stakeholders (staff, parents, friends).
6. **A strong internal and external communications plan:** Providers must communicate clear, authentic expectations for competitive

integrated employment. Internally, this includes all levels of staff, individuals, and their families. Externally, successful organizations market themselves and their services throughout the community.

7. **A focus on customer engagement:** Providers must effectively engage with their two customer groups: job seekers with disabilities, and employers. First, they must partner with self-advocates, families, and existing customers. Second, they need the full engagement of the business community to meet both individual and market needs.
8. **An ongoing investment in staff professional development:** Providers must offer frequent and ongoing training, continuing education, conference participation, and mentorship opportunities in order to maintain their staff’s core competencies and to implement best practices.
9. **An agency culture that supports values:** Providers must establish an agency culture that values supporting individuals in the community rather than facilities. The culture also values positive thinking, learning, creativity, innovation, and continuous quality improvement.
10. **Effective employment performance measurement, quality assurance, and program oversight:** Providers must establish a clear framework for implementing and measuring administrative, management, and program strategies over defined periods of time. This helps to determine the impact of their efforts and their success in obtaining desired results.

## What’s next?

The second round of our Delphi process will ask experts to rank these ten characteristics in order of importance during the organizational transformation process. Once this Delphi process is completed, project staff will conduct case study research of community providers that have successfully transformed services to prioritize competitive integrated employment.

Findings from this case study research will be used to validate and refine the existing ten characteristics. These characteristics will inform

a framework and subsequent toolkit to support community providers to rebalance resources. The toolkit will become the basis for technical assistance provided as part of a scalable, facilitated, peer-learning community. Researchers will test the impact of provider involvement in this peer network on organizational change and individual employment outcomes in later years of the project.

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## What is the RRTC on Advancing Employment?

The Institute for Community Inclusion's ThinkWork! portal houses the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Advancing Employment for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The RRTC integrates research, training, and knowledge translation activities, with the ultimate goal of making the philosophy of Employment First a reality. Employment First is the idea that employment in integrated settings within the community should be the priority service option.

The RRTC integrates four focus areas:

- 1) individual and family knowledge and engagement
- 2) effective employment supports
- 3) organizational change for community providers
- 4) state-level policy and strategy

## About the Authors

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The Arc is the largest national community-based organization advocating for and serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, and a partner on the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Advancing Employment for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.



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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