

Background

This is the fourth 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 the role of education and training for job seekers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), which was the third-ranked overarching priority among the Delphi panel members.

Understanding the role of education and training for job seekers

This category of policies and practices was focused on effective use of job skills training and/or postsecondary education to prepare people with IDD for jobs. Recommendations are grouped into two sub-categories:

1. Increasing the use and effectiveness of job skills training (69*)
2. Increasing the use of postsecondary education as a step toward integrated employment (31)

Increasing the use and effectiveness of job skills training

Of the two sub-categories, the higher-ranked priority was increasing the use and effectiveness of job skills training for job seekers with IDD. The panel's recommendations were the following:

- Providing skills training that is aligned with the individual's strengths and interests and is required to meet their vocational goal. These trainings can be formal, within a separate training program, or less formal (such as an on-the-job training) (66)
- Developing training to facilitate the transition from sheltered settings to community employment (63)
- Tailoring training to fit sectors that are hiring (54)
- Promoting vocationally specific or pre-employment skills-based training (46)

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

There were two lower-ranked recommendations: developing trainings designed in collaboration with local employers and offered by CRPs (37), and ensuring agency and staff buy-in for training of individuals with disabilities (34).

Increasing the use of postsecondary education as a step toward integrated employment

The other major aspect of education and training discussed was increasing postsecondary education opportunities for individuals with IDD. Recommendations related to postsecondary education were:

- Developing certificates which can be attained by attending postsecondary education programs in the local community that match the training and skills that local businesses seek (59)
- Tapping the direct link between postsecondary institutions and business to find work opportunities (54)
- Developing job training and technical skill classes for people with and without disabilities within the community college system (53)
- Promoting greater demonstration of outcomes, data collection, and dissemination of information on the impact of postsecondary education (including

* 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)



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comparisons of those who access postsecondary education and those who don't, and longitudinal studies that assess impact and benefit over time) (50)

- Promoting access to and funding for postsecondary education (47)

This area also had two lower-ranked recommendations: promoting dual enrollment in high school and postsecondary education (44), and increasing support for meaningful disability services in colleges for youth with IDD (38).

Conclusions

Job skills training can be controversial within the supported employment field, due to past misuse of the term to place individuals in long-term sheltered “training” programs that did not lead to integrated employment outcomes. The Delphi panel's responses, however, have indicated a need to rethink the role of training, including both postsecondary education and job-specific skills training.

Panelists recommended improving the skills training options available to job seekers with IDD, with a focus on training aimed at specific job skills related to vocational goals and to employers' hiring needs. Postsecondary education, while lower-ranked than specific skills training, also emerged as an important goal. Recommendations in this area emphasized both increased access to postsecondary education options and better linkages between postsecondary education and employment opportunities.

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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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