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Delphi Panel Findings, Brief #7: Paths Toward Fair Wages

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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)

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

One specific strategy, using on-the-job training funds to offset wages while individuals learn the job and become proficient (25), was less highly-ranked than the other four.

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.

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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