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From Paper to Action: State-Level Interagency Agreements for Supported Employment of People with Disabilities

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**From Paper to Action:
State-Level Interagency Agreements
for Supported Employment of People with Disabilities**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the second in a series of three studies conducted by the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) that investigates the extent and role of interagency agreements between state agencies that fund and provide supported employment supports and services for people with significant disabilities. The intent of this study was to better understand the development and implementation of such interagency agreements for supported employment for people with significant disabilities. Supported employment is considered

...paid work in a variety of settings, particularly regular work sites, especially designed for handicapped individuals (i) for

whom competitive employment at or above the minimum wage is unlikely; and (ii) who, because of their disability, need intensive, on-going support to perform in a work setting. (Federal Register, 1984, p. 17509)¹

Interagency agreements have been defined as written documents that outline formal interagency activity between two or more state agencies (Foley, Butterworth, & Heller, 2000). Data were collected through 20 interviews with key personnel in six states and through review of the interagency agreements. Through constant comparison of the data, we confirmed the importance of previously identified elements--a target population and education about partner agencies' missions and scope (Elder, 1980) and resource commitment, specific roles and responsibilities of partner agencies, dedicated personnel, and satisfactory communication (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992)--that contribute to effective collaboration. We identified the importance of specifying a target population within the broad range of people with "significant disabilities" in these interagency agreements, regardless of the number of partner agencies.

Dedicated personnel, whom we refer to as "champions," and their relationships with others in the vocational rehabilitation and disability-specific fields, such as mental retardation/developmental disabilities and mental health, were, not surprisingly, crucial to effective implementation. Two other characteristics that were associated with these champions were an intense focus on supported employment for people with significant disabilities, and a strong personal investment in the interagency agreement, usually through ownership of the agreement as a result of the champions' involvement in its creation.

A single champion could not implement the agreement. There had to be at least two people, each from a different partner agency, in a good working relationship that was founded on a dedication to supported employment. These people also self-identified as active members of that working relationship and they relied on each other for support and information about their respective agencies. Champions also valued people outside of the state agency partners for the work the outsiders could do as external advocates, such as lobbying state legislators for funds for supported employment.

¹ Supported employment is one strategy to increase integrated employment. The Vocational Rehabilitation program regulations [34 CFR 361.5(b)(30)(ii)] describe integrated employment as "generally refer[ing] to those settings that are typically found in the community in which individuals with disabilities have the same opportunity to interact with others as is given to any person."

Ensuring a "common language" among the partner agencies was important so that terms had the same meanings for everyone. The value of physical proximity (Gray, 1985) was confirmed. Communication with people in partner agencies occurred through face-to-face contact enabled by physical proximity, as well as by phone calls and email.

Over the period of their agencies' agreements, most informants reported an increase in the numbers of people in supported employment due to the agreements, which we expected as an outcome. In addition, two longer-term outcomes were associated with effective interagency agreements: increased awareness/visibility of supported employment, and a belief in a future for the interagency agreement.

Finally, the data suggest that some differences in the implementation and outcomes of the agreements may be associated with the length of time that partner agencies had been working together under the agreement. This finding follows the direction initiated by Gray (1985) regarding the temporality of facilitating conditions surrounding collaboration.

In developing an effective interagency agreement for supported employment, the minimal essential elements are population specificity, resource commitment, and clear roles and responsibilities of the partner agencies. For effective implementation, dedicated personnel need to be identified and supported so that they may concentrate on the implementation of the agreement. Upper-level administrators need to allow time for good working relationships to develop among partner agency staff, especially when partner agencies have not worked together previously. In view of recent legislation that mandates or encourages interagency agreements, it makes sense to prepare the foundations for interagency agreements for employment supports as early as possible.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade there has been an increasing national emphasis on the participation of individuals with disabilities in the labor force. This concern was recognized through Executive Order No. 13078 signed by President Bill Clinton in March 1998, establishing the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities. The Task Force was charged with a mission "to create a coordinated and

aggressive policy to bring adults with disabilities into gainful employment at a rate that is as close as possible to that of the general adult population" (Section 1 (c)). Legislation and policy changes have also been directed to increase employment opportunities. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 (P.L. 105-220) was implemented with a broad goal of consolidating, coordinating, and improving all national workforce development initiatives, including vocational rehabilitation and youth employment programs. The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (P.L. 101-336), the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA) of 1999 (P.L. 106-170), amendments to the Vocational Rehabilitation Act (most recently included in WIA), and changes to Medicaid regulations are all intended to expand access to employment. One mechanism for improving employment outcomes that is increasingly being emphasized or required in legislation and regulation is interagency agreements or interagency collaboration. This manuscript will describe the components of six interagency agreements nominated as effective in facilitating access to supported employment.

Legislative Intent for Interagency Agreements

The interest in "linking together by various means the services of two or more service providers... in a more coordinated and comprehensive manner" (Gans & Horton, 1975) is not new, and variously has been referred to as service integration, interagency coordination, and collaboration (Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1980). Whatever the term, the intent of these relationships has been the same: to achieve a human services goal that cannot be achieved by a single agency, usually due to mission parameters or limited resources. Within that broad goal, specific objectives have addressed service gaps, duplication of services, cost-effectiveness, and inaccessibility of services.

Federal regulations regarding people with disabilities have long included language that "promotes interagency cooperation, nonduplication of services, and efficiency in service provision" (LaCour, 1982). The federal government has encouraged state and local vocational rehabilitation (VR), mental retardation/developmental disabilities (MR/DD), and mental health (MH) agencies² to develop ways to collaborate to serve the vocational needs of persons with these labels, but development and implementation of interorganizational plans have lagged behind. Lacking federal

² See the U.S. Comprehensive Mental Health Services Planning Act of 1986, P. L. 99-660

directives or tangible incentives, state agencies have been unlikely to collaborate (Conley, Elder, & Noble, 1986). At the federal level and across a broad range of agencies, interagency coordination has been impeded by competing missions, unclear roles, and incompatible procedures (particularly eligibility determination), processes, and data systems, leading to service duplication and overlap as well as service fragmentation (General Accounting Office, 1994, 1996, 2000). These same barriers exist at the state level for a variety of services for children and adults with disabilities (e.g., National Association of State Directors of Special Education 1980 cited in LaCour, 1982; Katz, Geckle, Goldstein, & Eichenmuller, 1990; Mazzella, 2000; National Center for Family Support, 2000).

From Encouragement to Mandate

Meanwhile, the shift from encouragement to mandate for interagency collaboration was noted. Writing about services for people with disabilities, M. Martinson (1982) pointed out that "developments at both state and national levels in statutory, judicial, fiscal and policy areas" contributed to the development of a "mandatory base for interagency program planning. Exemplifying that "coordination [of agency or program resources] is often mandated in legislation" (K. Martinson, 1999), federal legislation in the 1980s and 1990s signaled a systems change in the employment of people with disabilities.

The success of supported employment for people with significant disabilities, demonstrated in the early to mid-1980s, contributed to the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986 (P.L. 99-506). In Title VI, Part C (Supported Employment Services for Individuals with Severe Handicaps), funding was specifically authorized for supported employment which attempted to address "one of the most glaring examples" (Conley, Noble, & Elder, 1986) of a service gap: the lack of extended, or long-term, assistance for those who needed such support. Additionally, this title authorized grants to "assist States in developing collaborative programs with appropriate public agencies and private nonprofit organizations for training and short-term post employment services leading to employment for severely handicapped individuals"; however, this collaboration was not compulsory.

Subsequently, the Code of Federal Regulations, 34 CFR 363.11e(2), required that the State plan "demonstrate evidence of...efforts...to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with...[o]ther public or non-profit agencies or organizations...with respect to the provision of extended services." In

1991, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) issued a directive that more explicitly required the state rehabilitation agencies to "demonstrate evidence of collaboration by and *funding from relevant state agencies and non-profit organizations to assist in the provision of on-going supported employment.*" (Emphasis added).

Regulations drawn from the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 (P.L. 102-569) required that VR agencies incur "effective cooperative agreements with long-term funding sources." The requirement that "extended services must be immediately available to preclude any interruption in the provision of ongoing support needed to maintain employment" (Revell, 1992) was clearly intended to address previously noted service gaps. Similarly, it placed the responsibility for arranging extended services funding on VR since the incentive for a closure (VR status code 26) remained, making collaboration with an extended funding source necessary.

During the same period, other federal legislation continued to require interagency agreements or similar mechanisms. The Workforce Investment Act emphasized that "linkages between the vocational rehabilitation programs and other components of the statewide workforce investment systems are critical to ensure effective and meaningful participation by individuals with disabilities in workforce investment activities" [Section 100(a)(1)(G)]. Reinforcing this message of collaboration was the fact that the Rehabilitation Amendment Act of 1998 was one of five titles under the Workforce Investment Act. More importantly, under WIA state rehabilitation plans are required

to include assurance that the Governor of the State... will ensure that an interagency agreement or other mechanism for interagency coordination takes effect between any appropriate public entity.... Such an agreement or mechanism shall include the following:

- (i) Agency financial responsibility.
- (ii) Conditions, terms, and procedures of reimbursement.
- (iii) Procedures for settling interagency disputes.
- (iv) Coordination of service procedures.

With federal mandates for interagency agreements to support people with significant disabilities in the workplace, it is important to understand how interagency agreements for supported employment have been developed and implemented, and the elements of

successful interagency collaborations that contribute to a meaningful improvement in employment outcomes.

Collaboration and Interagency Agreements

Collaboration and interagency agreements are two important strategies that enhance system changes because they concentrate resources and intent (Foley, Butterworth, & Heller, 2000).

Collaboration requires "three elements: organizational machinery (structures, policies, etc.); the process of working together both formally and informally; and the output in terms of services and benefits" (Morrison, 1996 citing Challis et al., 1992).

A variety of tools can be used to create collaboration, such as working groups, special initiatives, joint funding streams, shared staff across agencies, and interagency agreements. The latter sometimes are used to outline the formal terms for implementing the other tools. One explanation of an interagency agreement emphasizes the importance of fiscal responsibilities: "Written formal agreements can allow for clear designations of obligation and authority and can be essential when fiscal obligations are involved" (Fink, Borgia, & Fowler, 1999). Without using the term "interagency agreement," Lynn and Hill (in press) imply that "binding contractual relationships with superordinate organizations such as a state agency... to initiate specific products or services" are one strategy used by human service agencies to achieve specific outcomes. They also define collaboration as "voluntary participation in interorganizational (horizontal) relationships that involve agreements or understandings concerning allocation of responsibilities and rewards among the collaborators." Interagency agreements may initiate collaboration or formalize a previously informal collaboration. For the purposes of this report, we will use the term "interagency agreement" to refer to the formal document and "collaboration" in reference to the actual informal or formal activities that evince the joint efforts.

METHODS

Research Questions

This study analyzed six state-level interagency agreements that had been nominated as exemplary and effective to determine:

1. What were the scope and goals of the interagency agreements?
2. What influenced the development and utilization of the interagency agreements?

3. What were the mechanisms for implementing the interagency agreements?
4. To what extent were the interagency agreements perceived as influencing practice?

Sample

Nominations were solicited through email requests to members of the Supported Employment Consortium and as part of the 1997 Supported Employment Implementation survey administered by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University (Foley & Green, 1999).

Twenty-one agreements were nominated, and six were selected through a two-step process. Step one entailed a preliminary screening of the twenty-one nominated agreements on the following criteria:

1. VR was one of the partners;
2. The agreement addressed employment or related issues;
3. The agreement focused on or was relevant to people with disabilities;
4. The agreement was active and in operation in 1998, at the time of nomination;
5. The agreement focused on supported employment.

Nineteen interagency agreements met these screening criteria. In step two, the agreements were independently read and categorized by three researchers for their type and potential as "best practice." Those agreements rated as "best practice" had to be so rated by at least two researchers. The expectation, then, was that these agreements would have positive outcomes related to supported employment for people with disabilities.

The reconciliation process resulted in a final group of six agreements. Each agreement was then categorized as a consortium, population-specific, or task-specific type of agreement.

1. Consortium agreements were those that included three or more state partner agencies.
2. Population-specific agreements identified a target population among people with severe disabilities who would receive increased supported employment services.
3. Task-specific agreements, which might or might not have a target population, were those that described one activity intended to increase supported employment outcomes.

Two agreements were chosen in each category. Table 1 presents a summary description of these interagency agreements.

Table 1
Characteristics of the Sample

State	Category	Population label	# of agencies	# of informants
Indiana	Task-specific: Matching funds	Mental illness	2	3
Rhode Island	Task-specific: Matching funds	Transitioning students	2	3
Minnesota	Population-specific	Mental illness	2	3
Oklahoma	Population-specific	Developmental disabilities	2	2
New York	Consortium	Most severe disabilities	4 + 2 "guest" agencies *	6
W. Virginia	Consortium	Most severe disabilities	7	4

* Guest agencies were those that were not signatories of the interagency agreement, but that had staff who attended and participated in meetings.

VR central office personnel and lead personnel from partner agencies who were the most familiar with the interagency agreement were the initial group of key informants. Using the snowball technique, researchers asked them to identify people in the partner agencies who were also involved in the implementation of the interagency agreement. A total of twenty informants were interviewed from May 1999 through January 2000. Most of the informants held various middle management positions in their agencies; thus for the purposes of this report the informants will also be referred to as "middle managers."

Procedure

Development of the interview guide

An initial set of open-ended questions, with probes (questions one through six), was developed for this study and later expanded by the addition of questions seven and eight based on themes that emerged through open coding of the transcripts of some of the earlier interviews. Questions seven and eight were asked only of informants who were interviewed subsequently to the inclusion of these questions:

1. What caused or promoted this agreement?
2. How does the agreement work?
3. What are the mechanisms?
4. What is the process?
5. What were the outcomes or what changed as a result of the agreement?
6. What is the future of the agreement?
7. Who were the leaders in getting the agreement started? How long have they been in the agency or field?
8. Was common language an issue when the agreement was first being negotiated? What is the importance of establishing a common language?

Data collection

From May 1999 through January 2000 data were collected from informants who had been involved in the implementation of the interagency agreements, as well as from the written agreements themselves. Five researchers conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with the twenty informants via telephone. All interviews were tape recorded with the informants' permission and later transcribed. The interagency agreements themselves were a second data source and were reviewed for additional data as themes began to emerge from the interviews.

Data analysis

This was a qualitative data analysis, using the method of constant comparison of the data. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) describe qualitative analysis as "the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them...." Constant comparison involved evaluation of the data to determine the similarities and differences among them and identifying the concepts and categories that they represented. Additional techniques used to analyze the data included coding and memo writing. Coding is the

analytic process by which the researcher organizes data into categories or themes that relate to the original research questions and emerge from the research process (Strauss, 1987). Codes are meaningful labels for themes, concepts, actions, and statements, and allow the researcher to see connections and relationships between pieces of data. A reconciliation process was used to reach consensus on the coded text (Hanley-Maxwell, Whitney-Thomas, & Pogoloff, 1995). Once the initial coding of the data was completed, the data were sorted into categories. Memos provided the conceptual link between the data and the researcher's interpretations. They are the systematic writings of the researcher on the nature of code categories, themes that emerge, and relationships observed in the data (Strauss).

Groups of three and four researchers independently read and coded each transcript, and then reconciled the coding. As the coding proceeded, some data categories were deleted or subsumed into other codes, and a few new categories were added and applied to any interviews that had been coded before the categories were finalized. Reports were generated for each of the categories through NUD*IST software and further analyzed for themes within each category. Two researchers met for a final reconciliation of the themes.

FINDINGS

Purpose Statements

Each interagency agreement included a statement that expressed the purpose, or common goal, of the agreement as providing supported employment (one of the selection criteria) for people with disabilities. Four of these statements included adjectives such as "coordinated" and "cost-effective" to indicate the other important goals. The remaining two interagency agreements were written a little more specifically, "to delineate roles and responsibilities" of the partner agencies in one agreement, and "to facilitate the transfer of funds" in the other. It is interesting to note that only the Minnesota agreement used the term "commitment" in its purpose statement. Table 2 lists the titles and purpose or mission statements of all six interagency agreements.

Table 2
Titles and Purpose Statements of the Interagency Agreements

INDIANA	Memorandum of Understanding/Supported
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	<p>Employment</p> <p>The purpose of this agreement is to facilitate the transfer of State match funds from [the] Division of Mental Health to Disability, Aging, and Rehabilitative Services to assist the funding of establishment grants for supported employment programs at various managed care providers that contract with DMH and to provide continuous State match funds for the Supported Employment Consultation and Training (SECT) Program operated by the Center for Mental Health, Anderson, Indiana.</p>
<p>MINNESOTA</p>	<p>Interagency Cooperative Agreement/ Department of Human Services--Mental Health Division & Department of Economic Security--Rehabilitation Services Branch</p> <p>This agreement documents a joint commitment by [the] Rehabilitation Services Branch and Mental Health Division to improve the quantity and quality of rehabilitation and support services to persons with Serious and Persistent Mental Illness (SPMI) through: interagency systems planning and policy development, development of funding strategies, service delivery and implementation, information gathering and exchange, and training and technical assistance efforts.</p>
<p>NEW YORK</p>	<p>Memorandum of Interagency Understanding Regarding Supported Employment</p> <p>In recognition of the need for a coordinated and integrated statewide approach toward supported employment, the parties to this agreement are pursuing a cooperative process whereby services to New York State consumers with the most severe disabilities are ensured. Mutually agreed upon principles for the provision of vocational rehabilitation services and employment for persons with disabilities have been incorporated in this agreement and govern New York State's interagency supported employment programs in realizing the following [six] broadly based objectives [not listed here].</p>
<p>OKLAHOMA</p>	<p>Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of Rehabilitation Services and the Developmental Disabilities Division of the Department of Human Services</p> <p>The purpose of this agreement is to establish a system</p>

	of coordinated, cost efficient vocational services for people with developmental disabilities with minimal overlap of responsibility and maximum utilization of resources between the Department of Rehabilitation Services... and the Developmental Disabilities Services Division of the Department of Human Services....
RHODE ISLAND	<p>Cooperative Agreement for the Delineation of Responsibilities for Individuals with Disabilities between the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education</p> <p>The cooperative program will coordinate an interagency approach to transition services which promote the following key values and concepts: Students and families are the leaders and drivers of the career and transition process and can expect partnership and assistance from education and rehabilitation providers to achieve their goals.</p>
WEST VIRGINIA	<p>West Virginia Supported Employment Partnership Agreement</p> <p>Acknowledging that work is a valued activity for both the individual and society, the mission of this partnership is to enhance the capacity of people with the most severe disabilities to realize their dreams of full participation in the work environments of their choosing.</p>

Informants mentioned such things as "shared visions" and/or "common understandings." An informant from Indiana described the interagency agreement as a "formal recognition of the importance of supported employment," although it had started as a way to make partners more fiscally accountable for the implementation of supported employment. In New York, an informant felt that the interagency agreement was created as a way to "coordinate the systems to make it easier for people, so they would know where to go for the service. I think that was the big reason."

Context for the Creation of the Interagency Agreement

External influences, such as state policy in New York and Minnesota, or untapped federal funding in Rhode Island, fostered the development of the agreement but were less significant in the implementation of these agreements. Advocates, such as constituency groups in Rhode Island and Minnesota, were important at different points prior to the agreement, such as obtaining input from consumers and lobbying for funds with state legislators. An informant from Rhode

Island related the advocates' role in the development of the agreement: "The advocates were strongly interested in our state... and were very upset with our returning the dollars... and there was a lot of talking about how to change that, and the original cooperative... was to do a transition cooperative." The interagency agreement became a policy tool for advocates to bind the state agencies' commitment to maximizing resources and services.

In Indiana, a person in the Mental Health agency "had the initial idea of having a memorandum of understanding with voc rehab," because it was not clear how money from the MH agency was being used and how much funding was needed from year to year.

Elements of an Effective Interagency Agreement

A number of these findings confirmed those in the literature (e.g., Elder, 1980; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). Resource commitment and clearly delineated partner roles and responsibilities were confirmed as important elements in these interagency agreements. The findings are organized by the general themes or categories that emerged from the analysis. They include:

- characteristics of the written agreements;
- people,
- communication; and
- outcomes.

Some of the findings could be placed into more than one category. The overarching point is that these elements were significant to the development and implementation of the interagency agreements; it is less important how they are categorized. Table 3 summarizes the key elements found through the thematic analyses of the interviews.

Table 3
Elements of Interagency Agreements for Supported Employment

Elements	IN	MN	NY	OK	RI	WV
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WRITTEN INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT						
Specific population	X	X	X	X	X	
Resource commitment	X	X	X	X	X	
Clearly delineated partner roles &	X	X	X	X	X	X

responsibilities						
PEOPLE						
Champions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on expanding employment opportunities and/or a specific population • Investment in the agreement 	X	X		X	X	
Good working relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation for the relationship • Mutual reliance • Value placed on external relationships 	X	X	X	X	X	
COMMUNICATION						
Common language	X		X	X	X	X
Satisfactory interaction with partner agencies	X	X	X	X	X	X
OUTCOMES						
Increase in supported employment	X	X	X	X	X	
Increased visibility of supported employment	X	X			X	X
Belief in a future for the interagency agreement	X	X	X	X	X	

Characteristics of Effective Interagency Agreements

- A specific population
- Resource commitment
- Clearly delineated partner agency roles and responsibilities

A common understanding of "why we are here" and "what will be done by whom" is a necessary starting point in interagency agreements. Goals and scopes that are clear and simple make it easier for partner agencies to agree on and implement the agreement. In addition to a common purpose, three other elements emerged that helped to clarify the goals and scope of the interagency agreements: a specific population targeted for services, resource commitment, and clearly delineated agency roles and responsibilities. The importance of

a specific population, resource commitment, and clear roles and responsibilities were confirmed in this study.

Population-Specific Agreements

A goal that specified a population was a strong indicator of an effective interagency agreement. By sharply focusing on a specific population, not just "people with disabilities," this type of interagency agreement helped to align values, resources, and personnel towards one clear outcome: increased supported employment for that population.

Specific tasks were associated with population-specific agreements. This led to the inclusion of the two task-specific interagency agreements into the broader category of population-specific interagency agreements, which is how they are referred to in the rest of this report.

Similarly, the consortium-type interagency agreements may also be thought of as "multi-population" agreements that indicate the complexity of relationships that are likely to surround a multi-partnered agreement. The New York agreement detailed the circumstances under which the different agencies would link services, and it clearly identified the funders for initial and extended or long-term services. This agreement also made a provision for funding extended services for people who had more than one disability, thereby encouraging interagency services among agencies other than VR. The West Virginia agreement identified each partner's role, but did not indicate linkages or points in service delivery where funding would shift from one agency to another. More research is needed to understand how consortium agreements are created and implemented, especially as One-Stop Career Centers, which are themselves consortia, are being established.

Interagency agreements that are targeted to a specific population may confer an advantage in implementation since their sharp focus provides a common ground for effective working relationships. This may be more useful when partners agencies have not had a previous relationship, when legislation does not require a specific structure, and when a specific outcome (e.g., an increase of 10% of people in supported employment over a time period) is not included in the agreement. It is easier to concentrate on improving employment outcomes for one population than for several populations,

and bureaucratic complexities may be reduced when fewer partners are involved.

Resource Commitment

Real resource commitment was perceived by middle managers as evidence of genuine commitment by the top administrators in their agencies. For this analysis, a valued and committed "resource" was defined as funding, staff, or a specific service.

The type or amount of committed resources seemed less important than the fact of the commitment. The fact that resources were committed, not the resource itself, was taken as a measure of the state agency's investment in the interagency agreement. Middle managers interpreted the commitment of tangible resources as agency recognition of the value of collaboration. One informant from Rhode Island emphasized that the money allocated by the top-level administrator at his agency "show[ed] [VR] that he was serious about going further with a co-op agreement that had some substance to it." Similarly, an informant in Indiana completely equated funding with commitment: "I think [the Memorandum of Understanding] has done much to make sure the money is there, make sure the commitment on both divisions is there."

This is further supported by this comment from a person in West Virginia, a state whose interagency agreement did not include a clear funding commitment or points at which the funding would shift from one agency to another. "We got the rhetoric and responsibility for this supported employment and there was no money committed to this. Just 'feel good and work together'.... And it wasn't real collaboration."

Although there was a statement by the West Virginia Office of Behavioral Health Services to fund supported employment services "in cooperation" with VR, this informant understood that there was little resource commitment towards an interagency supported employment effort, and this signaled a serious lack of commitment from the agencies.

Another informant from West Virginia also acknowledged that there was little true commitment, and spoke of the struggle to get the agreement signed and implemented. "It was a huge effort to get the backing of the top administrators to say they'd actually show up. They signed it, but change their policy, change in delivery of services? Not necessarily."

Documented commitment of resources gave the implementers the power to collaborate through the exchange of resources. Committed funding fostered collaboration by specifying how funds were to be used for targeted populations and under what circumstances. One of the strongest aspects of the interagency agreements was the specification that described the coordination of funding. In Oklahoma, for a population with developmental disabilities, the agreement established that VR was responsible for the initial phase of services and that the MR/DD agency was responsible for extended services. The New York agreement also indicated at what point funding would shift from one agency to another for several different populations. Table 4 presents the resources found or referenced in the agreements.

Table 4
Resources as Specified in the Interagency Agreements

INDIANA	The Department of Mental Health shall provide funds in the amount of three hundred forty thousands (\$340,000.00). Funds shall be used to provide the required State match for establishment grants for supported employment projects.
MINNESOTA	The Rehabilitation Services Bureau and the Mental Health Department commit to the development of complementary funding mechanisms and the maximization of existing resources for vocational and supportive services for persons with mental illness. Per the original Memorandum of Understanding related to transfer of Mental Health funds, RSB will continue to provide additional VR case service funds for counselor liaisons working with the Coordinated Employability Projects.
NEW YORK	Consistent with the provisions of Chapter 515, the Laws of 1992, the State Education Department (SED) has the primary responsibility for contracting for intensive supported employment services. Using both Federal Rehabilitation Act funds and State appropriations, SED through Vocational & Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) [VR], will develop contracts and assume administrative, monitoring and programmatic responsibility for funds

	<p>appropriated for supported employment intensive services and/or other integrated employment options related to supported employment for individuals with severe disabilities served by Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, Office of Mental Health and Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, including those who are legally blind, and Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped is responsible for individual specific case management for all individuals who are legally blind and in supported employment, regardless of which vocational agency is the contractor.</p> <p>After stabilization into the supported employment placement, Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, shall bear fiscal responsibility for the costs of extended services, for individuals with a developmental disability except when the service delivery team determines that the individual has destabilized on the job.</p> <p>Within... constraints, Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, Office of Mental Health will provide funding to people with developmental/psychiatric disabilities who enter supported employment after receiving VESID/Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped intensive services.</p> <p>As Office of Mental Health Special Employment Programs become VESID vendors and VESID assumes funding responsibility for the intensive phase of supported employment services, Office Mental Health funding will be targeted primarily for the extended care phase of supported employment services.</p>
OKLAHOMA	<p>Department of Rehabilitation Services sponsored ongoing support services are provided from the time of placement until the individual is stabilized on the job....</p> <p>Developmental Disabilities Services Division funds stabilization and extended services. These services are provided when the person with a disability meets criteria for "stabilization" in the Department of Rehabilitation Services milestone contract... Developmental Disabilities Services Division also funds job coaching when Department of Rehabilitation Services is unable to fund those services.</p>
RHODE ISLAND	<p>The Department of Education through its annual state appropriation will provide up to \$114,060.00 to the</p>

	Department of Human Services/Office of Rehabilitation Services in order to match Federal allotment to Office of Rehabilitation Services under the Federal Rehabilitation Act, as Amended.
WEST VIRGINIA	<p><i>From Division of Rehabilitation Services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide funding for time-limited Supported Employment services. <p><i>From Health and Human Resources Office of Behavioral Health Services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fund supported employment services for those individuals who are eligible under the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver in cooperation with Division of Rehabilitation Services. - Fund supported employment services for Medley Class Members as this funding is available, in cooperation with Division of Rehabilitation Services. <p>From the Bureau of Employment Programs, Job Training Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide training (in partnership with Department of Rehabilitation Services) for all staff who will provide services for individuals with severe disabilities.

Money was typically the specified resource and the specific uses of the money varied. Agencies combined federal and state funds for new initiatives or expansion of existing supported employment services, while some funding was used for staff in various capacities. In Indiana, Minnesota and Rhode Island, state Mental Health and Education funds were used to match VR federal funds in order to expand state services. In Indiana and Minnesota, VR counselors were allocated specifically to work with people with mental health problems, and they were co-located in mental health centers. In New York, the VR agency supported the data collection and database management position for the partner agencies.

Middle managers perceive committed funds and other resources as significant proof of the value of interagency agreements for supported employment by the top-level administrators of the participating state agencies. Without this commitment, the mandate for action was not strong.

Specific Partners' Roles and Responsibilities

All of the interagency agreements outlined the roles and responsibilities of the partner agencies, although the degree to which these were clarified varied. As mentioned earlier, the Indiana and Rhode Island interagency agreements were single-task specific, and both involved the transfer of state funds to match federal VR funding. The four other interagency agreements listed agency roles and responsibilities as more general tasks.

Middle managers appeared to be most satisfied with an interagency agreement that spelled out "who was going to do what part of what... laying out what [the] rules were that everyone was going to operate by." Written delineation of roles and responsibilities laid down the parameters of the agreement, freeing the middle managers from having to negotiate those elements during implementation.

Agency roles and responsibilities that included verbs such as "assist," "promote," "coordinate" or "support" were too vague to be meaningful to middle managers. Some examples are:

Assist [state agency] in relationships with the various funded programs with managed care provider agencies.

Support and coordinate efforts to obtain additional funding for supported employment.

Promote and encourage [local mental] health centers to provide supported employment in their array of services.

Closer examination of the two consortium interagency agreements revealed an interesting difference in the degree of specification that was likely associated with agency commitment. The New York agreement detailed the circumstances under which the different agencies would link services; the funders for initial and extended services were clearly identified. The interagency agreement also made provision for funding extended services for people who had more than one disability, thereby encouraging interagency services. In contrast, the West Virginia interagency agreement identified each agency's role, but did not indicate at what point the responsibility for funding would shift from one agency to another.

The People Who Implement Effective Interagency Agreements

Champions

- Focused
- Invested in the agreement

Good working relationships

- A strong foundation
- Mutual reliance
- Value placed on relationships

Just as important as the identification of a specific population, resource commitment, and delineated partner agency roles and responsibilities were the presence of a champion within a partner agency and, subsequently, a strong working relationship between these champions.

The Champions

When asked how to create an agreement that would have an impact, an informant responded, "It has to have a champion who is respected by all parties." The "champions" had a passion for getting people with disabilities to work. In four of the six states, particular people were readily identified by informants as the leaders in the implementation of the interagency agreements, and those same people were also the ones who helped to create the agreements. Two characteristics that were associated with champions were their focus on a specific population and their investment in the development and implementation of the agreement.

Focus. People who were champions were intensely focused on getting people with disabilities into paid employment and saw the interagency agreement as one way to ensure that particularly underserved people (e.g., people with mental illness, transitioning students) got what they needed for successful employment. Some informants expressed this more passionately than other informants, but the overall sense was of a concentrated focus on this goal. Champions usually had considerable direct and programmatic experience with people labeled with particular disabilities.

I worked at a community rehab program for eight years.

[She] was running a program at Goodwill.

I have been doing this for 15 [years], on and off.

Their interest in people with a particular disability was the motivation for creating and implementing an interagency agreement for supported employment. In response to an interviewer's question about fundamental ingredients, one informant emphasized:

I think it's very important to have people that are specifically assigned to do this... and that they are passionate about this, they are not doing it just because they are assigned to do it. I think that's really important.

This quote points out an interesting dichotomy that appeared based on the categorization of the interagency agreements. In the four states whose interagency agreements were population-specific, champions were quickly identified. In contrast, in the two states that had multi-population agreements, no champions were indicated. Different circumstances surrounded the absence of a champion in those two states.

In West Virginia the four informants held differing views of the presence of a champion. One informant named a person as a possible champion, but when the interviewer brought this name up to another informant, he discounted the idea, and further added, "The problem is there ain't no mover and shaker."

While the middle managers in New York seemed committed and satisfied with their own and others' agencies participation in the interagency agreement, no single person was considered to be a "champion." Rather, each of the four informants indicated that VR was the proponent of the interagency agreement for supported employment. This agency had a special unit dedicated to developing interagency agreements, and the institutionalization of this process might have been a factor that contributed to the lack of a champion. If interagency agreements are already a common agency feature to the point of regularity, perhaps the involved agencies do not have the need for a champion since key people in the agencies have internalized the value of working through interagency agreements.

Investment in the Interagency Agreement. Middle managers who were directly involved in developing the interagency agreements in Indiana, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Rhode Island were more likely to

express positive outcomes than their counterparts in New York and West Virginia. The people who were the most committed to making the interagency agreements work were also more likely than not instrumental in the creation of the interagency agreements. This reinforces the importance of making the creation of the agreement the responsibility of the people who will also be responsible for its implementation.

An informant with the Department of Education (DOE) in Rhode Island outlined what motivated him to learn more about VR and the possibility of creating an interagency agreement:

1. VR and the agency were not collaborating at the time;
2. He had been invited to be a member of the state's VR advisory council; and
3. He had just attended a conference where he heard a presentation about the collaborative effort for supported employment between VR and the DOE in Oregon.

It is also important to note that these conditions occurred within a larger context created by advocates who had been pushing for VR to use untapped federal dollars for supported employment.

In Minnesota there had actually been a memorandum of understanding in place between VR and the Mental Health (MH) agency since the mid-1980s but, according to the MH informant, "It was just a paper... saying that we will do nice things and we will talk to each other once in a while and there really wasn't much in the way of policy [or] practice occurring."

Policy and practice changes began to occur after the VR and MH agencies each hired like-minded individuals who "have both always been very passionate about [supported employment]" and who both had strong backgrounds in mental health and employment. The person employed by the MH agency was experienced in MH with an employment background and was a member of the interview team who hired her counterpart in VR as a rehabilitation specialist specifically to work with the MH agency. The new rehabilitation specialist had previously worked as an employment specialist for people with mental illnesses. Their combined passion and dedication led them to rewrite the interagency agreement that they would be implementing.

Yeah, we wrote the agreement and set the agendas for the meetings and get people there and we do all the behind-the-scenes work that needs to happen to get decisions made. And we are the only two people who have been consistent pretty much throughout the whole thing. We have done the organization and have been the folks doing it.

Middle managers in both Oklahoma and Indiana were active in the development of the interagency agreements. In Oklahoma, although the initiative for an agreement came from the VR administration in Oklahoma, two middle managers were responsible for drafting the MOU that committed each agency to discrete and coordinated funding phases for supported employment for people with developmental disabilities.

New York and West Virginia reported different experiences. New York's interagency agreement was initiated from the top down. However, informants in New York felt satisfied with their work and saw increased numbers of people supported in employment and other positive outcomes, all of which were attributed to the good working relationships among partners.

It was unclear who actually initiated and wrote the interagency agreement in West Virginia. One informant spoke about having to refer to the signed agreement in order to get the top administrators to do what they said they would do.

These examples illustrate that active involvement in the development of an agreement by the people who will be responsible for its implementation is another predictor of an agreement that will work well. This may be because the people involved in the development stage are knowledgeable about both their agencies' parameters and how things work in the field. They are motivated to write an agreement that will enable them to achieve some measure of success.

Ownership of the agreement. As creators and implementers of the interagency agreements, champions spoke about the creation and operationalization of the interagency agreements in ways that conveyed a sense of ownership: "[The] MOU is me and [other person]." Once the agreement was created, champions felt it was up to them to ensure its implementation: "We spend a lot of effort making sure it has a good outcome," one person said.

While the middle managers recognized some degree of commitment by the agencies' top administrators, it was often perceived as being stronger at the time of creation of the interagency agreement than during its implementation. This perception or reality may have helped the champions to continue their dedication to the success of the agreement. When commitment by top administrators was perceived as unstable or low, champions seemed to feel more strongly about their responsibility to maintain and improve the interagency agreement to increase positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities. For example, in Minnesota, middle management had seen upper-level administrators come and go, and therefore what mattered to them was an official written commitment that allowed the champions to implement the agreement no matter who was in charge of the agency. An informant from Rhode Island also claimed responsibility:

The culture was that just including the kids in these activities was enough and that somehow it was someone else's responsibility to make sure that the kids were working and we are trying to say "no".... We are signing on to say that we own the responsibility to make this happen.

Good Working Relationships

Champions are essential to the good working relationship that is the basis for an effective interagency agreement. Working relationships between champions are valued as a foundation for the implementation of the agreement. Champions saw themselves as part of a team and relied on their counterparts in the other agencies.

The Foundation. One person said, "the way I see it, it's built on relationships. So there's good professional relationships across agencies on this and that lays the groundwork." Another person confirmed that, saying:

Informant: "We would have done it anyway. I don't think it's so much [a] part of who we are, but who the people are that work in the area."

Interviewer: "So you would lay the responsibility really to the relationships between individual people?"

Informant: "That's my opinion."

And yet one more: "I think it really depends on the personal relationships. That's my theme."

In West Virginia, only one person "love[d] supportive employment," No one else was identified as her enthusiastic counterpart in another partner agency.

While relationships were integral to the implementation of the interagency agreement, it is likely that the relationship operated at whatever level was comfortable for the champions. The relationships described by the informants ranged from cordial to more involved working relationships.

Mutual Reliance. Being able to rely on the other partner enhanced a relationship built on a shared vision for a specific population. Middle managers valued each other's knowledge of relevant rules, regulations, barriers and strategies for getting things done in their state agency. Reliance did not seem to be a function of the duration of the relationship, although preexisting relationships did confer a slight advantage since people had known each other to some degree and may also have had some knowledge about the partner's agency. One person related how relationships developed around the interagency agreement in New York:

Some [relationships] were already established by different kinds of ways. I didn't know all the people. I knew the person from the developmental disabilities office because she had been my supervisor years ago when I was in graduate school.... The mental health person I had never known, and I got to know the substance abuse person... through the [law] and the supported employment MOU... Different people have different connections, but everyone I think had connections with one person in some way... You did have some basic relationships to build on.

However, some champions were able to develop a working relationship where there had not been one before. In Minnesota, one champion was part of the interview team that hired the person who became the champion in the partner agency. Despite not having worked together previously, these two champions expressed the same passionate degree of commitment to securing supported employment for people with mental illness.

Champions were unwavering in their intent to get people with disabilities into the workforce, and they were often the same people

who initiated the interagency agreement and who see themselves as maintaining its viability. Yet champions could not work alone in an interagency agreement; there needed to be a productive working relationship between the champions so that they each could maximize the resources of their agency. As long as the middle managers perceived their working relationships as effective, it did not seem to matter if the relationships were characterized as personal or professional. Dedicated middle managers were likely to develop good working relationships with counterparts in other agencies, although the relationships may have taken time to build.

Value Placed on External Relationships. Likewise, these same middle managers also valued the relationships and interactions they had with external advocates. These advocates performed roles that the middle managers could not, and they also brought in a necessary perspective. An informant in Minnesota respectfully commented about a particularly effective advocate "[who] gets in places nobody else can get into and she demands the money and she has gotten it for us." Another Minnesota informant recognized the efforts of another group: "they threw their weight and support to [the coordinated employability] projects and went to the legislature with a proposal." In Rhode Island, an informant noted, "[The family advocacy organizations] were always part of the initial planning, the initial program development, and...the evaluation...." Informants in these states valued the advocates' involvement, illustrating the importance of developing and sustaining a relationship with key constituency groups that supported the mission and activities of the interagency agreement. In comparison, in West Virginia, the strongest advocate for supported employment was recognized as such, but she was not involved in the development or implementation of the interagency agreement.

Communication

- Common language
- Satisfactory interaction with partner agencies

Communication included two components: common language, or terminology, and a satisfactory degree of interaction, which varied over time.

Common Language

As the interagency agreements were being developed, common language was negotiated and established that helped outline the goals and scope of the interagency agreement for all parties. Particularly where there were more than two partners, as in New York with its four signatory partners, agreeing on common terms was necessary to define services, consumers, and roles and responsibilities of partners. A New York partner illustrated this, saying:

I think the definitions are very important so they didn't have people arguing, "Oh, I'm not going to pay for that because this person doesn't mean what I think this term means," so everybody had to agree what it meant.

Another NY partner agreed: "I know that if I say 'integrated setting,' that our DD and MH agencies know what I'm talking about."

Negotiating a common language was a process that also educated the middle managers about the other agencies' missions and scopes. This was especially beneficial when they had not worked with each other previously.

People have really begun to partner, to listen to each other, to try and understand the mission, [Department of] Education's mission, Rehabilitation's mission, what our focus is, developing common terminology or trying to understand each other's terminology and focus.

Once people were educated about the partner agencies, informants felt that it was easier to implement the interagency agreement, and that this also helped the development of good working relationships. Even in a state where the interagency agreement was between only two partners, establishing a common language helped to educate each partner about the other's agency and consumers. This "had to happen for [the interagency agreement] to be successful," commented one informant.

Satisfactory Interaction with Partner Agencies

Communication was repeatedly mentioned as an important element in good relationships. By "good" communication, informants meant satisfactory frequency, satisfactory access to key players in the partner agencies, and education about the partner agencies. Not

surprisingly, where there were champions and good working relationships, "good" communication was the most noted theme in facilitating implementation of the agreement.

Regular and frequent meetings were necessary, especially in the early days of developing and implementing the interagency agreement, so that the partners could become familiar with the agreement and the partner agencies.

In the early days of the development of the system, we would meet practically everyday or several times a week... but over the past few years, the intensity of those meetings just isn't needed because we have set the system in place.

Besides access via telephone, faxes, and emails, physical proximity was appreciated in Indiana, where the DMH middle manager commented, "Go up the back stairs and everybody is easily accessible." Planned co-location may be an effective mechanism to increase collaboration.

Referrals to partner agencies and information sharing about budgets, especially in developing budget requests, programs, and mutual consumers also contributed to "good" communication.

Influencing Practice: Outcomes

- More people with disabilities supported in employment
- Increased visibility of supported employment as a service option
- Belief in a future for the interagency agreement

Successful interagency agreements had multiple positive outcomes, some intended and some unintended. Whatever outcomes that informants identified as successful or effective were accepted as outcomes by the researchers. The intended and most immediate goal of supporting more people with disabilities in employment was accomplished in five states.

Increase in Supported Employment

Informants in five of the six states reported definite increases in the number of people who received supported employment services,

and attributed these increases to the interagency agreements. In Indiana, an informant estimated a 25% yearly increase since 1994 to 1999. In Minnesota, informants estimated an increase of 30% in fiscal year 1997.

Three of the four informants in West Virginia noted an increase in the numbers served; however, they did not attribute this to the agreement. Instead, they mentioned other forces, such as legislative changes.

Not only did the number of people supported in employment increase, but within those numbers some informants reported that the interagency agreement had resulted in supporting people who had more severe disabilities. Some informants thought that the types of disabilities that people had covered a broader range than prior to the agreement. One person from New York commented, "There were people who would never make it through the regular system because that kind of intensity was never available to help them through." New services, new sites, and new staff resulted from the interagency agreements, and certainly these resources were important to the increase in the number of people served.

Increased Visibility of Supported Employment

One significant impact of the interagency agreement was the raised visibility and awareness of supported employment experienced by students with disabilities, other job seekers with disabilities, providers, and state agency staff. In Rhode Island, "when professionals sit down, they now are thinking about the supported employment program as one of the service options." More importantly, middle managers reported that students knew about supported employment: "There is a tangible service out there and... students are starting to talk about it and have talked about it among themselves and how it's made a difference for them." In Minnesota, the greater visibility of supported employment was interpreted as the start of a systems change, linked to the expansion of services for people with more severe disabilities. "Before we started this, VR was not funding any specific programs for people with mental illness. They were funding workshops." An informant from Indiana also recognized a systems change: "People are truly seeing employment, the outcome, not the service, as a desired thing, so I think that has been a systems change."

Interagency agreements favorably educated a number of audiences about supported employment, but the most important group to educate was other middle managers in the state agencies, since they were in the position to influence both top administrators and community-level staff. If community-level staff was invested in supported employment, community-level implementation of the interagency agreement would be more likely and, consequently, more job seekers would become aware of supported employment services.

Creation of an event, such as a public gathering of agency heads, may be included as a purpose of the interagency agreement, and therefore an outcome that can increase the visibility of supported employment among state agencies (Butterworth, Foley, & Metzel, 2001).

Belief in a Future for the Agreements

"Belief in a future for the interagency agreement" is a summary phrase signifying the value of the interagency agreement to the middle managers who were willing to continue investing time and effort in the project. In West Virginia, informants were not as optimistic about the future of the interagency agreement as were informants in the other states. There, the interagency agreement was perceived as lacking in both champions and resource commitment from the partner agencies. In the five other states, however, the informants felt that the interagency agreement definitely had a future.

Informants who had been involved in creating the interagency agreements felt that the agreements needed to be maintained. One informant observed. "I think in our state [the interagency agreement] is a good thing. We have given it constant attention.... It's not something you sort of put in place... and it just runs itself."

Some champions drove the changes to be made in the next version of the agreements since they were deeply invested in the project and wanted to improve it.

In contrast, informants in New York, where the interagency agreement had an assured future, indicated less attention was given to the agreement because "we've systemized the process." This may be due to the fact that VR, the recognized lead agency, had a unit designated to handle the creation and implementation of interagency agreements; VR had relatively long-term experience with such agreements; and the relationships between the various informants

were long-standing. Changes in this state's interagency agreement were made in response to issues raised by legislators after they reviewed the required annual report.

Obstacles to Implementing Interagency Agreements

- Bureaucratic barriers
- Turfism

Informants indicated that there were two primary obstacles, bureaucratic barriers and turfism that could hinder the implementation of the agreements.

Bureaucratic Barriers

Interagency bureaucratic barriers occurred in both consortium and population-specific interagency agreements. These barriers included incompatible fiscal years or contract periods and differing definitions of "severe" disabilities between VR and the other partners. One informant explained:

You're basically talking about three very large bureaucracies with different organizational identities and cultures and different management styles subject to forces that are larger than any of us at this level. I mean, political forces, for example. So to get such large bureaucracies to collaborate and cooperate is a big job even when all the forces want to see it happen.

Good intentions were thwarted by inherent differences in state agencies.

Turfism

Turfism was a term used by informants to represent protection of funding for an agency's target population, an atmosphere of competition for resources and a "lack of understanding about the other populations different than their own." This was mentioned primarily in states where one agency was a primary funder for all the other partners and where there was a multi-population agreement.

Bureaucratic barriers and turfism both point to the advantage conferred by having fewer partners in initial interagency agreements,

suggesting that interagency agreements with fewer partners may be more easily implemented by agencies, particularly if they have not previously collaborated.

Differences in the Consortium Agreements

The experiences and perceptions of the informants in the two states with consortium agreements, New York and West Virginia, are considered here because they differed from the population-specific interagency agreements not only in the number of partner agencies, but in motivation for the agreement, the maturity of the supported employment system, and the agencies' commitment to supported employment.

The experiences of creating and implementing an interagency agreement in New York differed significantly from the other states. The VR agency in New York had more experience with interagency agreements and had a specially designated unit to develop them. While all the partner agencies signed the interagency agreement as a consortium, VR was the significant funder of the partners, and at the time of the data collection, there was only one mention of future interagency resource coordination between two other partners. The agreement that all parties signed was written to encourage active interagency coordination between non-VR agencies; however, it had not yet occurred.

When New York enacted Chapter 515 [of] the Laws of 1992, the state legislature had the clear intention to "expand employment opportunities in integrated settings for persons with severe disabilities." In order to do this, "it will be imperative to have in place a coordinated, flexible service delivery system...." By the time this study was conducted in 1999-2000, the development and utilization of interagency agreements (Interagency Implementation Plans for Integrated Employment) were not novel, but rather a feature of the supported employment system. Informants felt that their agencies were committed to providing supported employment and that there had been definite positive outcomes.

One of these was increased capacity of the system. Middle managers in New York felt that the education they received about each other's agencies had enhanced interagency efforts towards supported employment. One informant described it thus:

We came in with preconceived notions, and I think they had preconceived notions too about our population.... There's been a lot of give and take that begins to help...I have had some talks with some of the partners where we are beginning to say, "I wonder if there's a spot for this group?"... and we're still thinking that out, but I don't think that would have ever come about if we hadn't gotten involved in this. [Emphasis added.]

A satisfactory experience of creating and implementing an agreement had the capacity to help build other interagency projects for people with disabilities.

In contrast, the experience in West Virginia was very different. First, the motivation for the interagency agreement, signed in 1997, was ambiguous. According to an informant, the agreement was more of an "end product" and an objective of a systems change grant awarded in 1994 that focused on training activities for supported employment and a supported employment resource center. The interagency agreement established common terms, identified each agency's role, and "encourage(s) the development of local interagency agreements among providers to facilitate timely referral and access to [Supported Employment] services." The final sentence of the agreement stated that the agencies also "agree to participate in state interagency planning activities for implementation of this agreement, including the upcoming statewide summit to develop a five-year plan for supported employment services in West Virginia." This suggests that the intent of the agreement was geared to outlining a coordinated system, with common language and principles, and to get the agency heads to commit to working on the planning that would actually result in a coordinated system of supported employment for people with severe disabilities. The statewide summit was a one-time public event to make their commitment visible.

But most of the informants felt that agency commitment to the actual work of planning was dubious. Several of the middle managers spoke of the efforts it took to get the top administrators to come together to sign the document. Some noted the evident lack of commitment by their agencies. One person felt that the signing of the agreement was just a public relations effort, "not something where people are held to it." Although seven agency heads signed the agreement, the only real interaction seemed to be between VR and the Office of Behavioral Health. Notably, these were the only two agencies that specified their intention to provide funding in the agreement.

The New York interagency agreement, required by state law since the early 1990s, clearly delineated how the agencies were to work with VR. The West Virginia interagency agreement, written in 1997, was said to be a product of a grant for increasing supported employment, and it framed a coordinated system and stated that the partner agencies were to begin to plan to implement the agreement. It is not surprising, then, that there were differences in their outcomes. In New York, the agreement resulted in increased numbers of people in supported employment; in West Virginia, the increases were not attributed to the agreement.

POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Interagency agreements that lead to positive supported outcomes for people with disabilities display specific elements. One set of elements is associated with the written agreement, while the second set is related to the resources for implementation. Together they demonstrate state agencies' commitment to expanding supported employment for people with disabilities. This section also considers recommendations for communication and outcomes. Finally, the need for increased efforts towards resolving higher-level obstacles among state agencies is reiterated.

Write a Clear and Specific Agreement

The written interagency agreement needs to be clear and simple. The purpose statement is important in explaining the intent of the agreement, but the agreement must:

1. Identify the specific population to receive services and supports;
2. Commit resources; and
3. Delineate partner roles and responsibilities.

The shared focus on a specific population of job seekers brings clarity to the agreement by establishing a common ground. Particularly for agencies that have not previously worked together closely, emphasis on a single population seems to have the potential to reduce the complexity of implementing the agreement, since it is likely that fewer bureaucracies will be involved. The interagency agreement in New York fits this model if understood as a number of population-specific agreements with VR. While classified as a consortium agreement, its implementation at the time of data collection was between VR and each state agency, rather than between the non-VR agencies, thus replicating the population-specific model.

Middle managers perceive the degree of commitment through resource commitment. Subsequently, once resources are assured, roles and responsibilities must be specified to a degree that allows the middle managers to proceed with implementing the agreement with their allocated resources. Interagency agreements will not succeed if the middle managers have nothing concrete to offer their counterparts towards achieving their mutual goals. A number of activities specified in the interagency agreements were services intended to "assist," "promote," or "support," but were not resources that could actualize the agreement.

Support the Champions

Equally important are dedicated middle managers, i.e., "the champions," who:

1. Are invested in the agreement through their work in its creation and implementation;
2. Have strong working relationships with other middle managers and external advocates; and
3. Have clear responsibilities for implementing tasks.

Senior managers need to develop and nurture champions, those people with a passion for getting people with severe disabilities into employment. Finding the right people for the job of creating and implementing the interagency agreement may be the best time and effort investment that top administrators can make to ensure the agreement's success. With a counterpart from another agency, dedicated individuals are likely to be instrumental in creating and negotiating the agreement and building the good working relationships that are necessary for implementing the agreement.

Since dedicated individuals are crucial for good working relationships to occur, people who self-select to work on interagency agreements for supported employment are often the best people to be involved. Good working relationships may be extended through previous working relationships; however, new working relationships can also be successful, though they will take time to develop. Additionally, middle managers who develop relationships and work with external advocates appreciate the resources and efforts that these advocates direct toward the shared goal of supported employment for people with disabilities.

Resources and dedicated middle managers are core elements of an effective interagency agreement, and they can be summarized in

one word: commitment. Lacking either element, it is unlikely that an interagency agreement will be implemented with any success, no matter how success is defined.

Some of these data suggest that the current trend toward co-location of state agencies may increase collaboration by providing an opportunity for personnel to become more knowledgeable about each other's agency. While mere proximity is insufficient to lead to real change, it may make the development of collaborative efforts easier.

Foster Communication and Relationships

During the early development period, time should be allowed for people to negotiate their roles and responsibilities, to work on a common language and to start building the necessary working relationships. Other worthwhile relationships to develop are those with external advocates who may have more freedom to draw attention to employment issues for people with disabilities as well as to apply grassroots pressure on legislators.

Set Measurable Outcomes and Expect Other Impacts

An annual report with measurable 7 (?) supported employment outcomes is required from the New York partners. The Rhode Island agreement listed the results that were expected in Years 1 and 2. While the Oklahoma agreement did not list specific outcomes, it did include reporting requirements from the vendors, offered software, training, and technical assistance support to the vendors. The OK DDSD described examples of the reports: "the monthly progress reports to case management, the employment service plan, implementation strategies, vocational services timesheet, billing documentation, and quarterly reports on client status." In the face of demands for accountability, we recommend that measurable outcomes be specified so that success can be handily demonstrated.

Start to Resolve State-Level Bureaucratic Differences

Partner agencies are usually intent on collaborating and cooperating through interagency agreements. Most aim to increase cost-effectiveness and service efficiency by decreasing service fragmentation and reducing service duplication. The context in which supported employment is delivered should enable, not hinder, the common goal of partner agencies. Though obviously challenging, a commitment by state agencies to resolve some bureaucratic

differences, such as incompatible data systems, fiscal periods, terminology, and eligibility criteria would be a good first step towards resolving the more complicated obstacles in providing and increasing supported employment services for people with significant disabilities.

CONCLUSION

Besides increasing the number of people who receive supported employment services, "committed" and effective interagency agreements result in related impacts that have broader implications at a systems level. One was a systems change that occurred as a result of increased awareness of supported employment. The potential of interagency agreements for short-term direct and long-term indirect positive outcomes has been recognized by federal and state agency human services administrations and mandated or encouraged through policy statements. However, policy formation does not guarantee policy implementation.

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