

# BRINGING EMPLOYMENT FIRST TO SCALE

## State of the Science as a Knowledge Translation Strategy

By John Kramer and Caro Narby

Key Findings  
from the RRTC  
on Advancing  
Employment

### Overview

To synthesize our findings to date, the ThinkWork team at ICI developed 3 draft papers that captured the core themes from our RRTC on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (IDD). We asked experts in the field to weigh in on these papers, and then broadly disseminated the papers to multiple audiences. Our primary goal was to engage with a diverse group with a range of perspectives and experiences, including fellow researchers, state agency employees, rehabilitation providers, and individuals with IDD and their families. To reach this goal we used a Knowledge Translation (KT) process. KT has many definitions, but the one that we used for our work is: “the multidimensional, active process of ensuring that new knowledge gained through the course of research ultimately improves the lives of people with disabilities, and furthers their participation in society (NIDILRR, 2005).

As part of the overall KT effort, the ThinkWork team developed multi-modal strategies to facilitate more productive engagement. Through a series of online and in-person events, we gathered structured feedback. The papers evolved based on this feedback, and are presented in multiple formats, including in accessible language. All publications related to our employment research are posted to the ThinkWork website ([www.thinkwork.org](http://www.thinkwork.org)).

You can find out more about the State of the Science initiative at [www.thinkwork.org/sos2017](http://www.thinkwork.org/sos2017)

This brief examines the strategies used during the State of the Science series of events sponsored by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Advancing Employment for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. This brief details the process for incorporating stakeholder feedback into the research findings emerging from the RRTC as part of its Knowledge Translation (KT) strategies. Researchers can use lessons in this brief to inform their KT efforts in: A. reaching a wider audience of stakeholders; B. improving research relevance to stakeholders; and C. setting future research agendas.

### Engagement Model

The primary goal of our State of the Science engagement efforts was to reach our audience more effectively, increase the relevance of our work, and generate ideas and priorities for future research. The State of the Science papers address our three overarching areas of research: state-level policy and practices, capacity building for providers, and family engagement in employment.

### Papers

- » 3 papers on 3 topics
- » Reviewed by experts in the field
- » Adapted into plain language
- » Presented to different groups of stakeholders for feedback
- » Revised according to community feedback and insights

The team presented the State of the Science findings through a variety of platforms and methods. A key component of our outreach is soliciting stakeholder insights and feedback on our findings. These outreach methods include synchronous events, such as in-person sessions and presentations and webinars, and asynchronous online events that allow participants to participate whenever they have free time.

RRTC on Advancing  
Employment for Individuals  
with Intellectual and  
Developmental Disabilities

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### In-person and virtual live events

We conducted a series of in-person events at 5 conferences put on by disability advocacy, self-advocacy, and professional organizations in summer and fall 2017. At each event, we advertised for attendees to attend one of our in-person focus groups.

Additionally, we held 2 webinar events: one with our partner, the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, for their Supporting Families series, and another as a kick-off for our IdeaScale event (described below). During these sessions, we presented our findings and solicited audience feedback and recommendations for future research areas.

### IdeaScale online discussion series

In fall 2017, we held a series of events on the IdeaScale platform. IdeaScale is an idea management platform that uses crowdsourcing to help refine ideas. These 3 discussion events focused on each of our 3 paper topics. The events each lasted 5-7 days, allowing for engagement from multiple groups of stakeholders.

**Sep. 11-15: How Do Families Enhance Employment Opportunities?**

**Sep. 25-29: Organizational Capacity**

**Oct. 9-13: Policies that help people get jobs in the community**

Our purpose for conducting these events was threefold:

1. To seek input from individuals with IDD, family members, and employment professionals.
2. To discuss the themes and ideas, brainstorm new ideas, prioritize ideas, and create an engaging, lively discussion for participants.
3. To inform the future of research and policy to make employment in the community a reality.

### Dissemination Strategy

To allow for greater exposure to the field, we published our work online and promoted our publications, in-person events, and virtual events through social media. We also created topical hashtags so that stakeholders who encountered postings from our proceedings could more easily find related posts on that topic. During our IdeaScale

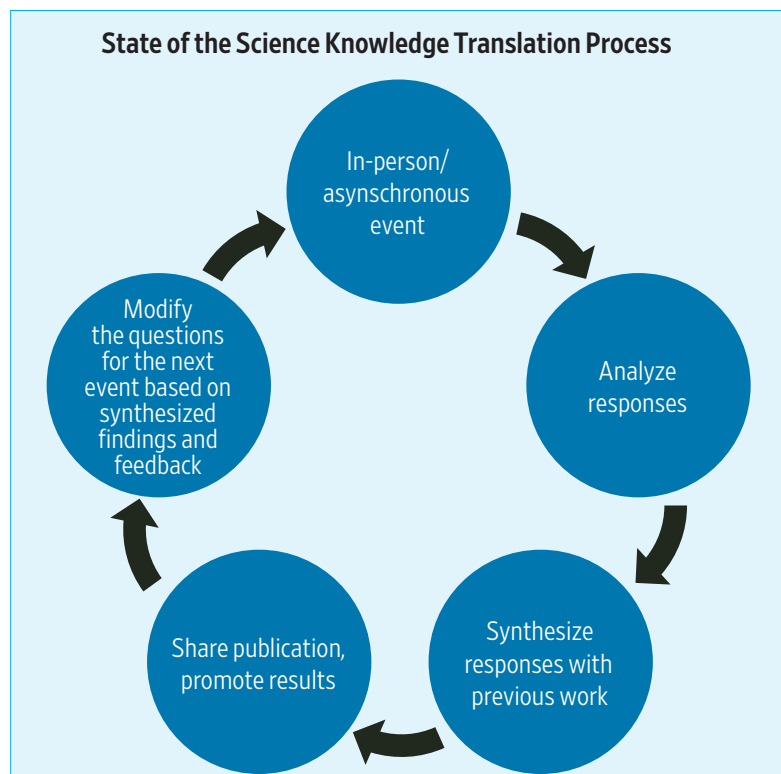
Online Discussion Series, we posted about trending, popular topics on social media to help elevate the profile of the State of the Science initiative.

In addition to posting publications on [thinkwork.org](http://thinkwork.org), we also posted to ScholarWorks, the institutional repository of the University of Massachusetts Boston. The advantages of posting to an institutional repository is that it indexes more effectively to open access to other scholarly databases and Google Scholar, thus increasing our reach.

### How We Incorporated Feedback

At the end of each event, we summarized its highlights, which included the main points of feedback we received from stakeholders. We then analyzed that summary and compared it with current findings in our State of the Science papers. We incorporated the feedback into the next version of our papers, forming our “synthesis” stage.

Finally, we used that feedback to inform subsequent events. This gave us the opportunity to confirm feedback and confirm our original findings at the same time. As we proceeded through our series of events, stakeholders provided less feedback on the findings themselves, and began to focus more on implications or “what comes next” for the field of disability employment research.



## Suggested Strategies for Replication/Lessons Learned

Engaging stakeholders in the production and analysis of knowledge is essential to maintaining the relevance of research to populations on whom the research is focused. We chose to make the State of the Science, in that respect, not simply a culminating event with experts, but an ongoing process that provided many opportunities for different stakeholders to participate.

Making use of a variety of engagement methods allowed the team to reach as wide an audience as possible and maximized the relevance of our State of the Science findings. Inviting participation and gathering feedback from our target populations has long been a core component of our engagement efforts. This allows us to conduct research and engage in analysis that is participatory. It also strengthens our findings by introducing a form of triangulation through member-checking.

As other research teams and projects engage in similar efforts, we suggest the following strategies to promote greater inclusion and buy-in from multiple stakeholders in the knowledge translation process.

- » **The rigor of your product can improve.** Seeking feedback over an extended period of time and including that feedback at different stages of events will improve the rigor and relevance of the work to a wider group of stakeholders.
- » **Engaging stakeholder feedback in advance makes in-person events more effective.** Providing many opportunities for feedback and input helped to clarify the research findings. Having strong stakeholder engagement also made the culminating event more thorough and robust, and allowed us to cover more ground in one day.
- » **Using a variety of modalities is more inclusive.** Using a broad-based, multi-method engagement strategy allows for more authentic participation for diverse learners.
- » **Choose a preparation strategy.** It helps to provide extensive information about the findings ahead of the in-person events. This is not

always possible given the nature of some of the conference events we attended. However, we provided attendees at our final in-person event in Washington, DC with information in advance of the event. This allowed a shared broader and deeper understanding of the findings going into the event. Because of this, we could focus more of our time on discussing the direction for the field and providing next steps.

## Conclusion

This paper highlights some of the strategies that we used in our State of the Science series of events. For a more detailed look at the events, please visit: [www.thinkwork.org/sos2017](http://www.thinkwork.org/sos2017)

## Reference

National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research. (2005). What is Knowledge Translation? FOCUS: Technical Brief, No. 10. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Retrieved March 7, 2007, from [http://ktdrr.org/ktlibrary/articles\\_pubs/ncddrwork/focus/focus10/Focus10.pdf](http://ktdrr.org/ktlibrary/articles_pubs/ncddrwork/focus/focus10/Focus10.pdf)



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## For more information

John Kramer, PhD  
john.kramer@umb.edu  
617-287-4369

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