

What is the Partnerships in Employment project?

Multi-year project: The Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) awarded five-year grants to grantees in 14 states.

- ▶ **2011 to 2016:** California Consortium on the Employment of Youth and Young Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (CECY), Iowa Coalition for Integrated Employment (ICIE), Mississippi Partnerships for Employment (MSPE), Missouri Show-Me-Careers, New York State Partnerships in Employment (NYS PIE), and Wisconsin Let's Get to Work
- ▶ **2012 to 2017:** Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative (AIEI) and TennesseeWorks Partnership
- ▶ **2016 to 2021:** District of Columbia Learners and Earners, Hawaii Jobs Now Partnership, KentuckyWorks, Massachusetts Partnership for Transition to Employment (MPTE), South Carolina Employment First Initiative (SCEFI), and Utah School to Work Interagency Transition Initiative (USWITI)

Focus on competitive integrated employment (CIE) for youth with I/DD: The project promotes cross-systems and cross-agency collaboration to improve CIE outcomes for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). *Competitive integrated employment* is when “individuals with disabilities earn wages consistent with wages paid to workers without disabilities in the community performing the same or similar work.”¹

States form consortia: All Partnerships in Employment states formed a consortium or coalition of stakeholders that include—

- ▶ **Individual Level:** Individuals with I/DD, family members
- ▶ **Community Level:** Pilot sites, school administrators, businesses, employers, service providers
- ▶ **State Level:** Developmental Disabilities Agency, Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, State Education Agency, State Developmental Disabilities Council, other state agencies

AIDD contractors evaluate and review grantee progress: The Lewin Group is conducting a comprehensive evaluation for all grantees and the Institute for Community Inclusion provided technical assistance to the 2011 and 2012 grantees. The YES! Center provides technical assistance to the 2016 grantees.

Project Overview

In 2011, 2012, and 2016, a total of 14 states were awarded the federal Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) Partnerships in Employment (PIE) Systems Change grants. These 14 states formed consortia, which conducted systems change activities related to PIE project objectives – developing or changing policies, removing systemic barriers, building cross-system and cross-agency collaborations, and implementing strategies and promising practices to support competitive integrated employment.

Many of the consortia’s activities shared the goal of dispelling myths about employment. Due to a lack of consistent communication, resources, and support for youth with disabilities, their families, educators, and employers; several myths related to employment for youth with disabilities exist. This fact sheet provides an overview of common myths related to employment that the 2011 and 2012 PIE states reported, and the steps the PIE state consortia took to combat these myths.

¹ Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act, Public Law 113-128 (29 U.S.C. Sec. 3101, et seq.).

What are some common myths surrounding employment?

There is a low employment rate among individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) compared to individuals without disabilities. At the beginning of the PIE project in 2011, the national employment rate in the United States for working-age adults (16 to 64 years old) with a disability was 32.6 percent (22.3 percent with a cognitive disability) compared to 70.7 percent for people without a disability². Additionally, people with I/DD served by state I/DD agencies are more likely to participate in facility-based and non-work experiences than in competitive integrated employment.³ Among people with I/DD, participation in integrated employment has remained constant around 19 percent from 2011 to 2014.⁴ To address this employment gap, PIE consortia sought to understand the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, communities, and state agencies. The consortia found that addressing common myths and misperceptions about employment for youth with I/DD is important in increasing stakeholders' expectations and enthusiasm for employing youth with I/DD. Some common myths noted by the PIE consortia include but are not limited to:

- Individuals with disabilities do not want to work
- Individuals with disabilities cannot find work
- Individuals with disabilities have few skills to offer employers
- Individuals with disabilities cannot succeed in the workplace
- Individuals with disabilities that become employed lose their disability benefits
- Employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities are limited to sheltered workshops, subminimum wage, or the service industry
- Employers do not want to hire people with disabilities
- It is difficult to recruit, hire, accommodate, or retain individuals with disabilities

To address these and other employment myths, state consortia conducted individual, family, and employer surveys to understand aspirations and expectations; and distributed results that encouraged employment for youth with I/DD. Consortia also created resources to inform individuals, families, and employers about the supports available for working as an individual with a disability, or hiring individuals with disabilities. The following sections will explain how PIE consortia dispelled myths regarding employment and youth with I/DD.

² Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2016). Disability Statistics from the American Community Survey (ACS). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute (YTI). Retrieved from Cornell University Disability Statistics website www.disabilitystatistics.org

³ Butterworth, J., Winsor, J., Smith, F. A., Migliore, A., Domin, D., Ciulla Timmons, J., & Hall, A.C. (2015). StateData: The national report on employment services and outcomes. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion. Retrieved from <https://www.statedata.info/>

⁴ Statedata.info. (2016). State IDD Agencies. U.S. Total: Integrated employment percentage. Retrieved from <http://www.statedata.info/data/showchart/452419>

Myth: Individuals with disabilities do not want to work

Educating Legislators

PIE consortia from Alaska, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, and Wisconsin facilitated Take Your Legislator to Work Day, where state legislators attended the workplace of a youth employee with I/DD to learn about the youths' employment experiences firsthand. This helped policymakers understand that youth are motivated to, interested in, and excel at working. For the same purpose, consortia from Mississippi, Tennessee, and Wisconsin also brought self-advocates to meet with state and national legislators to share their employment experiences and make the case for increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Supporting Families

To dispel misunderstandings about youths' desires for employment, support families to help youth reach their employment goals, and expose families to new opportunities and expectations around youth employment, PIE consortia engaged parents and families of youth with I/DD through various methods, including through surveys, trainings, and Parent and Family Coalitions. Consortia also leveraged funding and resources from other grants related to employment to enhance the depth, breadth, and reach of their activities. For example, consortia worked with subject matter experts from the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Project (EFSLMP) to engage family members and establish Parent and Family Coalitions in Iowa and Tennessee. Family Coalitions provided information about employment to families, and also provided forums for families to engage with state agency representatives to provide comments on state plans.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities cannot find work, or have few skills to offer employers

Changing Employer Attitudes

PIE consortia recognized that engaging businesses, changing businesses' expectations and attitudes about hiring youth with I/DD, and forming relationships with businesses are important to finding and creating job opportunities for youth with I/DD. As a result, grantees employed a variety of methods to engage businesses. For instance, Alaska's consortium, the Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative, created the Business Employment Services Team (BEST), an interdepartmental business engagement team that included support from the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Department of Health and Social Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, the Alaska Job Center Network, Division of Public Assistance, the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, the Society of Human Resource Management, and the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Services. Rather than only train youth to interview for a job, BEST proactively engaged businesses, learned about employers' needs, and showed businesses the value-add of hiring individuals with disabilities.

The Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative also directly addressed the myth that state or federal agencies and their contractors do not hire individuals with disabilities. After learning that Section 503 of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) Final Rule included a seven percent utilization goal for individuals with disabilities in the government-contracting workforce, AIEI also worked with the State as a Model Employer Task Force to plan and lead the OFCCP Workshop and State Agency Networking Session with 35 federal contractors.

Encouraging Self-Advocacy

Consortia also encouraged and supported youth self-advocacy and helped youth gain self-advocacy skills to help them more confidently express their experience and skills when finding employment. For example, Mississippi's consortium, Mississippi Partnerships for Employment, encouraged young adults to present at several statewide conferences, including the state DisAbility MegaConference. Tennessee's consortium, TennesseeWorks, hosted an annual Think Employment! Summit, in which students with disabilities, their families, and service providers participated in policy, provider, or self-advocate-focused sessions. This summit helped students develop their own elevator pitches, understand their strengths, and connect with employers.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities cannot succeed in the workplace

Self-Advocacy, Accommodations, and Resources

State consortia created and publicized resources and trainings for individuals to succeed in the workplace. For example, New York State Partnerships for Employment funded and finalized a self-advocacy curriculum, which includes eight units on subjects such as disclosure, employee rights, supports, and accommodations. NYS PIE tested the curriculum with active Project SEARCH™ sites in the 2016-2017 academic year.

TennesseeWorks members participated in the Occupational Diploma Task Force to develop a pilot Occupational Diploma for students with disabilities. As part of this Task Force, TennesseeWorks members developed a tool for pilot schools and provided input on the Skills, Knowledge, and Experience Mastery Assessment (SKEMA). Members also conducted statewide meetings to obtain feedback from employers on skills needed for employment. The Tennessee Department of Education then piloted the Occupational Diploma at four pilot school districts. TennesseeWorks partners also provided professional development on the Occupational Diploma and the SKEMA to the Tennessee Society of Human Resource Managers. The training focused on preparing large employers for hiring students with Occupational Diplomas.

New York State Partnerships in Employment also created MyPathNY.org, an interactive online tool that provides a single source of information and connections to employment services and supports for individuals with disabilities in New York. The content New York State Partnerships in Employment produced for the website includes resources on eligibility for Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation services and Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities services, and job readiness tools. The website also features content developed for the New York State Commission for the Blind and the development of accessibility features for website users who are visually impaired. Individuals can use the website to find resources to succeed in the workplace. Additionally, New York State Partnerships in Employment developed a MyPathNY.org folder and a version of the folder in Braille for distribution by schools to market and support use of the website. This folder accompanies the web platform, and includes a guide on how to use the website and a glossary of useful terms. As of August 2017, one year after the end of New York State Partnerships in Employment grant funding, New York State Partnerships in Employment had distributed 13,000 MyPathNY folders, and teachers were showing continued interest in receiving folders.

Sharing Success Stories

To dispel myths about individuals' lack of employment success, state consortia shared success stories as compelling proof of how individuals with disabilities can excel at their jobs. For example, TennesseeWorks featured individual employment success stories, including Tennessee's Employment Idol video success stories on the consortium's [website](#). TennesseeWorks also produced success stories from the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and added links to success stories on the TennesseeWorks website. Individuals also shared their stories about employment on Vanderbilt's Kindred Stories [website](#).

TennesseeWorks also collaborated with the Employment First Task Force Communicators Workgroup to disseminate videos that include success stories. The most-viewed video (with more than 63,000 views on Facebook) featured employment of people with disabilities at Sodexo at University of Tennessee-Martin.

Mississippi Partnerships for Employment also created a monthly video series with a self-advocate on YouTube called "[Chit Chat Thursday with Taylor](#)." The series includes more than 20 episodes promoting self-advocacy activities and success stories in Mississippi, with a focus on self-advocacy efforts and successes related to employment. Some episodes are broken up into multiple videos, and each video usually takes the form of an interview, with a self-advocate as the interviewer.

Additionally, a member of the California Consortium on the Employment of Youth and Young Adults developed a five-minute video called "Hire Value" highlighting five businesses who have employed individuals with I/DD in paid positions. This video is featured on the California Consortium on the Employment of Youth and Young Adults website's [resources page](#).

Myth: Individuals with disabilities that become employed lose their disabilities benefits

Benefits Education

States created tools and resources to help youth and families understand the impact employment will have on benefits. For example, Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative collaborated with the Trust and the Alaska State Independent Living Council to develop the state's Disability Benefits 101 (DB 101), an online disabilities benefits calculator for individuals with I/DD and their families to understand the effects of employment on disability benefits. After the DB 101 website launched, Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative conducted presentations about DB 101 and created a resources page about how to use the tool. Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative also continued to update and improve the DB 101 website so that the main page would include links to interactive tools to be more user-friendly after the launch.

Myth: Employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities are limited

Job Fairs

Several consortia, including those in Alaska, Mississippi, and Missouri, hosted job fairs to showcase the range of jobs available to individuals with disabilities, and to make applying for these jobs more accessible. For example, BEST in Alaska (see above) began hosting the annual Employment First Job Fairs, hosting thousands of job seekers and hundreds of employers. For example, in February 2016, BEST hosted the annual Employment First Job Fair that included 1,146 job seekers and 85 employers in

attendance. The Mississippi Partnerships for Employment hosted annual EmployAbility job fairs with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security and the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. At the 2016 job fair, 80 applicants were hired after on-the-spot interviews.

Myth: It is difficult to recruit, hire, accommodate, or retain individuals with disabilities

Supports for Employers

PIE states created resources and trainings to help employers better support and provide reasonable accommodations for employees with I/DD. In Alaska, BEST held monthly events including trainings aimed at improving employers' competencies in accommodating individuals with disabilities and changing employers' attitudes towards hiring people with disabilities. In Missouri, Show-Me-provided trainings for local businesses by pilot community teams, including the "Accommodations for Success" seminars, "Reaching Qualified Applicants with Disabilities" training, and "Enhancing Employee Performance through Reasonable Accommodations" training.

New York Partnerships for Employment also developed eleven videos featuring businesses and business leaders explaining the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. As of September 2017, the series had been viewed a total of 7,937 times. Let's Get to Work, Wisconsin's consortium, filmed videos to engage employers at the local level. For example, Let's Get to Work filmed a [90-second video](#) of one of the Let's Get to Work pilot students working at American Family Insurance. The video was created and disseminated to 10,000 American Family Insurance employees. After viewing the video, American Family wrote a supporting article including background on the student and the agency that employed the individual. Let's Get to Work embedded this video on several websites and in three employment trainings for Aging and Disability Resource Center staff, for the Wisconsin Statewide Parent Educator Initiative's parent trainings, and the statewide Transition Improvement Grant trainings. Let's Get to Work also completed a video of a student working at Best Buy, a student working at a video game store, and a student who makes jewelry for a local bead store that features the workplace usage of supports derived from personal associations and relationships formed naturally in the community.

Debunking Myths Promising Practices

As the consortia pursued various strategies to debunk myths, several promising practices emerged. Some of these are listed below:

- Examine which stakeholder groups (e.g., youth, families, educators, staff) believe and perpetuate the identified myths and conduct targeted outreach to these groups individually;
- Understand and tailor the language of different stakeholder groups to personalize myth-busting content;
- Identify and share success stories through easily consumable or spreadable content such as online videos;
- Encourage and support self-advocacy for individuals with disabilities;
- Create and distribute resources that offer consistent and clear information.



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