

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Understanding the Effects of COVID-19 on the Six Partnerships in Employment States Working to Improve Employment Opportunities for Youth and Young Adults with I/DD

By The Lewin Group, National Evaluator for the PIE Systems Change Project

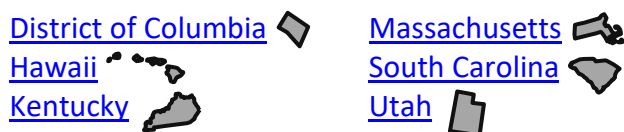
What is the Partnerships in Employment (PIE) project?

The Administration for Community Living's (ACL) Administration on Disabilities' (AoD) PIE grant, a five-year federal grant under Projects of National Significance, awarded funding to six grantees in 2011 in California, Iowa, Missouri, Mississippi, New York, and Wisconsin; two grantees in 2012 in Alaska and Tennessee; and six grantees in District of Columbia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Utah in 2016.

These grants prioritize competitive integrated employment (CIE) for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Grantees partner with state agencies and stakeholders to form a consortium that develops and conducts initiatives designed to improve employment outcomes, expand CIE, and strengthen statewide systems for youth and young adults with I/DD.

This issue brief focuses on the impact of COVID-19 in the six states awarded the PIE grant in 2016. Throughout this brief, "states" refers to state grantees.

Who are the 2016 PIE states?



How has the PIE project made a difference so far?

The 2016 states have achieved a variety of outcomes thus far in the PIE grant. Some of the top highlights include:

- Supported over 100 students in achieving CIE or other paid work-based experiences
- Hosted or participated in hundreds of trainings
- Supported Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts for people with I/DD

- Developed alternative certificates, credentials, and Individualized Education Programs to support educational attainment
- Utilized Charting the LifeCourse tools to increase person-centered planning
- Engaged thousands of self-advocates, family members, businesses, schools, policymakers, and other stakeholders to support disability advocacy

How does COVID-19 impact the employment of people with I/DD?

COVID-19, or the coronavirus, began its spread in the United States in early 2020. People with disabilities are not only at higher risk of adverse outcomes due to COVID-19,¹ they also experience job vulnerability at a higher rate than their able-bodied peers. Nationally, one in five workers with disabilities lost their employment during the pandemic, compared to one in seven workers without disabilities.² For context, in 2019 the labor force participation rate stood near eight in 10 people with disabilities, compared to three in 10 people without disabilities.³

1,000,000 jobs lost in the disability community nationwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic⁴

How does COVID-19 impact the work of PIE states?

All six PIE states reported varying experiences in executing project activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. State agencies and PIE consortia faced unprecedented decision making during the pandemic, such as transitioning in-person activities to virtual events.

PIE states considered how COVID-19 impacts employment and day services, trainings and other in-person events, school schedules and programming, and long-term sustainability plans for the grant's ending in 2021.

Impact of COVID-19 on the PIE Project

While each state experienced its own unique set of impacts from the pandemic, all shared similar challenges:

- Shifts in **priorities across agencies**, including changes in staffing, causing disconnect across partners;
- Changes in **budget priorities**, which may impact short-term activities and long-term funding opportunities post-PIE;
- Access to **technology and virtual supports**, most notably for students with significant disabilities;
- Access to **career and technical education** and other transition services, especially with uncertainties around post-secondary programming;
- Impacts on **legislative sessions**, particularly for states with employment-related legislation in progress;
- Changes to **provider payments** and the Medicaid payment system, which may depend on whether providers deliver services in-person or virtually; and
- Effects on overall PIE project **momentum** as the grant nears its final year.

How has COVID-19 impacted employment in the PIE states?

In addition to general concerns about COVID-19's impact on PIE activities, states had some employment-specific concerns. First, in-person work-based learning experiences may be limited or not available at all this year, impacting the criteria for obtaining alternative certificates. Second, several Vocational Rehabilitation agencies and providers recommend that individuals with I/DD not work in-person at this time. States raised concerns that this suggestion may take autonomy away from the individual.

Despite these challenges, states also expressed common employment-specific opportunities. State teams recognized that stay-at-home orders may present a unique opportunity for providers and parents to collaboratively prepare for employment at home. This may be facilitated through technical assistance, including trainings for parents. In addition, at least half of the states indicated interest in permanently integrating the modifications they made to PIE project activities during COVID-19, such as holding certain trainings or meetings online. Finally, many states reported that youth and young adults with I/DD maintained or even gained employment during the pandemic; possibly related to a sudden demand for essential workers.

1. ["The Forgotten Impact of COVID-19 on People with Disabilities."](#)
2. ["Workers with Disabilities Disproportionately Impacted by COVID-19 Pandemic."](#)
3. ["Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics Summary."](#)
4. ["COVID Recession Hits Workers with Disabilities Harder."](#)

If you have any questions or would like more information related to PIE, reach out to The Lewin Group team at PIE-EVAL@Lewin.com.

COVID-19 Spotlight

SOUTH CAROLINA

During the pandemic, a student involved in South Carolina's PIE activities gained employment at a local grocery store. The store manager, who said he normally would not have thought to hire someone with disabilities, was so pleased with the student's performance that he partnered with the state Vocational Rehabilitation agency to hire more people with disabilities in the future.



So, what are the PIE states doing about these challenges? What's next?

The states undoubtedly experienced setbacks to their grant activities, but still found ways to mitigate these challenges and continue working towards PIE goals. For example, when the pandemic hit, states prioritized outreach to individuals and families and developed virtual materials and trainings. Some state-specific examples included:

- **District of Columbia** held a [virtual webinar series](#) for families that included virtual employment strategies;
- **Hawaii** developed a *Safe Shopping Initiative* to link employers to individuals with I/DD to fill essential worker roles;
- **Kentucky** funded remote services, including for providers working virtually;
- **Massachusetts** leveraged technical assistance for virtual engagement best practices and ensured funding for remote services;
- **South Carolina** adapted disability benefits and employment workshops and employer trainings to a virtual environment; and
- **Utah** provided trainings for families and partnered with a provider to widely broadcast the trainings.

COVID-19 has pushed states to think creatively and engage stakeholders in unprecedented ways. While the pandemic certainly impacts how youth and young adults achieve employment, the way the PIE states have been able to respond so far shows signs of a promising "new normal."

COVID-19 Resources

The **Administration on Community Living (ACL)** published resources on health and safety and virtual engagement amid COVID-19. Visit the [ACL COVID-19](#) page to access these materials.

The **Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI)** created a bundle of COVID-19 resources designed for a variety of audiences. Visit the [ICI COVID-19 Publications and Resources](#) page to access these resources.