

Partnerships in Employment (PIE) Systems Change Project

Developed by the Lewin Group, July 2020

What is the Partnerships in Employment Project?

5-year grant awarded to 14 states: The Administration on Disabilities (AoD) awarded funding to eight states in 2011 and 2012, and six states in 2016: *District of Columbia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Utah.*

Focus on competitive integrated employment for youth with I/DD: This project promotes cross-systems and cross-agency collaboration to improve competitive integrated employment (CIE) outcomes for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

States form consortiums: The six 2016 Partnerships in Employment states each formed a consortium or coalition of stakeholders that include:

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

AoD contractors perform project evaluation and provide technical assistance: The Lewin Group conducts a comprehensive, longitudinal evaluation and the Youth Employment Solutions (YES)! Center provides training and technical assistance to states.

Cross-State Project Outcomes

The information presented below includes project outcomes from the six 2016 PIE states over the grant period from October 2016 to July 2020. While not exhaustive, the examples highlight various activities that states led or participated in to improve CIE outcomes for youth and young adults with I/DD. For more information about state activities, see each states' consortium website:

- [DC Learners and Earners](#)
- [Hawaii Jobs Now Partnership](#)
- [KentuckyWorks](#)
- [Massachusetts Partnership for Transition to Employment](#)
- [South Carolina Employment First Initiative](#)
- [Utah School to Work Interagency Transition Initiative](#)

Policy implementation

Improved environments for people with I/DD to work and live

Since receiving the PIE grant in 2016, several states supported legislation and policies that will further employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

DC supported the introduction and implementation of the [Disability Services Reform Amendment Act of 2017](#), a law designed to improve the lives of people with disabilities in DC through supported decision-making opportunities, improved processes for filing complaints, and changes to civil commitments.

Hawaii supported the [Hawaii Transition Success Network Legislative Act](#) to provide funding for and establish statewide transition centers; the state's Governor and the Mayor of Honolulu also signed a [Disability Employment Month proclamation](#) and endorsed making Hawaii an [Employment First](#) state. Hawaii also supported the state's [Earned Income Disregard Bill](#), which allows Medicaid to establish a percentage of an individual's income that will not be counted towards an individual's Medicaid eligibility.

Kentucky supported the introduction of [Senate Bill 53](#), a bill to exclude referrals to sheltered employment from the definition of "covered services and supports" and require new regulations for sheltered workshops. **Massachusetts** advanced the state's Employment First efforts by creating the Technology Forward Initiative to integrate technology into policies that support Employment First.

South Carolina pre-filed Employment First legislation and, like **DC**, **Kentucky**, and **Massachusetts**, launched [Achieving a Better Life Experience \(ABLE\) accounts](#). **Utah** developed a waiver to waive the requirement for individuals in the School to Work pilot program seeking services to take a Test for Adult Basic Education assessment to alleviate barriers to entry for students with disabilities. **DC**, **Hawaii**, **Kentucky**, **South Carolina**, and **Utah** were also involved in the revision and implementation of their [state Home and Community-Based Services waiver](#) programs.

Highlight: Kentucky

In May 2018, the Governor of Kentucky signed an Employment First Executive Order. The Order designated the Human Development Institute (HDI), the PIE lead entity, as the administering entity for the Employment First Council. HDI and Kentucky Works staff members were appointed to serve on the Council, which aimed to inform best practices and establish measurable goals towards employment, develop relevant trainings and resources for stakeholders, and provide an annual report to the Governor. The Governor signed another [Employment First Executive Order](#) in June 2020.

Increasing program capacity

Highlight: Utah

Utah increased engagement of self-advocates by featuring self-advocate presenters at Communities of Practice, supporting [Take Your Legislator to Work Day](#), and including self-advocates in conference presentations. Staff also collaborated with the Utah DD Council and the Utah Parent Center to develop the SHIFT self-advocacy training program. SHIFT is a training course for both parents and youth with I/DD to learn self-advocacy skills together.

Strengthened new and existing programming with/for stakeholders and self-advocates

All states increased the capacity of employment programs through trainings. **DC** partnered with state and provider organizations to provide [Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators](#) (ACRE) training that, as of July 2020, resulted in 28 ACRE trainers, and began development of a DC-specific ACRE curriculum. DC also developed and implemented a Direct Support Professionals (DSP) Academy to create a career path for youth with disabilities. **Hawaii** held self-determination workshops and expanded Quarterly Transition Meetings to every island in the state. Between February 2017 and February 2020, **Kentucky** held nine local Community Conversations, and, in 2020, began implementation of a statewide transition

pilot designed to build on the existing [Community Work Transition Program](#). **Massachusetts** conducted a survey of self-advocates and engaged self-advocates in the presentation of findings to the full consortium, launched a [Charting the LifeCourse Ambassador Series](#), and offered an Employment Support Training Series. Massachusetts also supported, on average, 15 self-advocacy workshops per year. **South Carolina** held Employment First trainings for educators, service providers, and state and local partners; created a [three-part video series](#) on integrating students with I/DD into school career and technical education (CTE) programs; and implemented three youth peer support groups focused on employment. South Carolina also conducted trainings on alternatives to guardianship, supported decision making, and disability benefits. **Utah** conducted 11 person-centered planning trainings and held a training for employment provider agencies on hiring new providers.

Employer engagement

Improved employer perceptions of and commitment to hiring people with I/DD

All states engaged employers to increase the number of employers hiring youth and young adults with disabilities. **DC** participated in an Employment Engagement Cohort hosted by the Department of Labor and hosted a three-part webinar series on employer engagement. **DC** and **Massachusetts** supported regional Employer Collaboratives that connect job developers with local businesses. **Hawaii** and **South Carolina** created Business Coalitions with local employers. **Kentucky** developed trainings for employment specialists and held regional meetings with employers through the transition pilot. **South Carolina** engaged employers by holding over 25 employer trainings, creating an employer email series, and holding four Employer Summits on the importance of hiring individuals with I/DD. In 2019, 160 employees participated in trainings and 63 people attended the Employer Summit. **DC**, **Kentucky**, **South Carolina**, and **Utah** surveyed or met with local employers to assess needs and identify barriers to employment for youth and young adults with I/DD.

Highlight: Hawaii

Hawaii and the Employment First Work Group collaborated with [Disability:IN](#), the Hawaii Governor's Office, and State Legislature to hold Reverse Job Fairs in 2018 and 2019. The Reverse Job Fairs attracted 181 employers and 121 students. At least 11 students received job offers as a result of the Reverse Job Fairs. Hawaii obtained additional funding to expand Reverse Job Fairs across Hawaii and after the PIE grant ends.

Family engagement

Highlight: Massachusetts

Since 2018, Massachusetts regularly shared information and engaged families through a Facebook page, which has over 1,300 members. The consortium's leadership, the Steering Committee, facilitated administrative roles as needed. The group achieved high engagement and partner organizations promoted the page, including a family advocacy organization. Massachusetts also facilitated development of materials for families through the consortium's Family Work Group and shared the materials to the Facebook page.

Improved family expectations for employment

All states engaged families through various activities to support employment outcomes. Activities included trainings, home visits, and presentations, and some states included parents or other family members in presentations or consortium meetings. **DC** developed and shared an Employment and Discovery toolkit for families, and held a family webinar series. **Hawaii** engaged families through one-on-one consultations and personal outreach via phone, and included family members on their Executive Council. Hawaii also held 12 family engagement workshops. **Kentucky** regularly updated online materials, including an online module, specifically for families. **South Carolina** held disability benefits and employment workshops for families, and offered counseling to parents on alternatives to guardianship. **Utah** hosted family meetings and interviewed parents to better understand areas of need.

Relationship building

Promoted sustainability and built capacity through partner networks

All states described expanding and strengthening relationships with partners as a valuable and integral part of their PIE grant achievements. Through these relationships, states developed and supported initiatives that focused on providing direct pathways to employment for youth with disabilities. All states included key agencies, such as their respective state Developmental Disabilities Agency, Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, Education Agency, and DD Council, among others, in their consortia. States met with stakeholders at meetings, shared employment success stories, developed conference presentations, conducted trainings, and disseminated information with and for partners to improve stakeholder expectations and awareness of employment.

DC created [nine videos](#) to share employment information, and formed relationships with various offices within the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs. **Kentucky** held focus groups comprised of family members and self-advocates to discuss the top ten things parents and youth with I/DD can do at different stages of life to prepare for and achieve their employment goals. **Massachusetts** conducted Bellwether interviews with key policy thought leaders that led to the creation of a summary document about strategies, tools, and resources that may inform the development of future PIE initiatives. **Utah** met with team members from their model demonstration project, School to Work, through a Community of Practice. The Community of Practice, which discusses various disability-related topics, met eight times since the start of the grant, with an average of 65 attendees per meeting. **DC, Hawaii, South Carolina, and Utah** also engaged consortium members in other groups, such as various Communities of Practice, state Association of People Supporting Employment First chapters, Disability: IN, and the State Employment Leadership Network.

Highlight: DC

In 2017, the DC grant leadership team joined the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Transition Unit. Through this collaboration, DC provided direct training and introduced promising practices to RSA staff, school professionals, and the youth they serve. In 2018, DC transferred PIE coordination from DDS to the RSA Transition Unit as a sustainability strategy. The transfer allowed DC staff to engage more closely with youth and families seeking Vocational Rehabilitation services and to support the development and alignment of policies, system-wide capacity-building, and partnership development. The partnership will sustain initiatives such as ACRE training and the DSP Academy post-PIE funding.

Information sharing

Highlight: South Carolina

South Carolina launched the rebranding of the [Hire Me SC](#) campaign to reach more stakeholders. Efforts included creation of a new website, promotion of inclusion through employment on 29 billboards, various outreach through podcasts, social media, and e-blasts. Staff also published success stories and employment-related events on the Hire Me SC website and social media pages from 35 youth.

Increased knowledge about disability- and employment-related topics

All states participated in knowledge sharing about disability-related issues through data collection, data sharing agreements, conferences, webinars, social media posts, website updates, and awareness campaigns. **DC** shared information on the [DSP Academy](#) through media spotlights in [BBC News](#), the [Washington Post](#), and [Disability Scoop](#). **Kentucky** shared [findings](#) for each Community Conversation held, produced a [Transition Overview Document](#), posted five [blogs](#), and created a [video tutorial](#) on creating vision statements. **Massachusetts** held a Customized Employment Community of Practice, published an [interagency group database](#), and developed a [data dashboard](#) to share user-friendly data about employment of people with I/DD across the state. **Hawaii, Kentucky, South Carolina, and Utah** developed or conducted surveys to collect employment data and student outcomes data. **Utah** also planned a public information campaign on understanding employment for people with disabilities.

Model demonstration projects

DC, Hawaii, South Carolina, and Utah launched PIE model demonstration projects, or, pilots, as part of the PIE grant.

DC trained 114 youth and young adults with I/DD

DC's pilot, the implementation of the People Planning Together for Employment (PPTTE) curriculum, has been used to train 87 young adults with I/DD. DC created three pilot sites at three Employment Readiness programs; one pilot site at DC's Summer Youth Employment Program, and two pilot sites at DC's two segregated schools. Staff also plan to expand into DCPS middle schools. Since 2019, DC worked with RCM of Washington to support an initiative that includes PPTTE and a curriculum to train direct support professionals (DSP) with and without I/DD. The initiative supports career pathways for youth in the DSP Academy, a program that implements a curriculum to train DSPs. As of July 2020, the DSP Academy has had 27 graduates.

Hawaii engaged 68 families and guided two students to employment

Hawaii's pilot includes parent workshops, parent engagement activities, and pre-employment activities with students, such as workplace readiness, skills training, self-advocacy training, and work-based learning experience. Hawaii has held four Individualized Education Program (IEP) workshops, two [Charting the LifeCourse](#) workshops, two benefits planning workshops, a self-determination workshop, a social skills workshop, and an employer roundtable. Hawaii also provided individualized family support to pilot participants, which included IEP consultations for four families and one-on-one benefit consultations for six families. As of July 2020, 68 unique families engaged in workshops, 22 students from 21 families are participating in the pilot, two students gained work, and one student began a certificate program at a community college program.

South Carolina supported 62 students in gaining work experiences

South Carolina's pilot project goal is to implement Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) in school districts across the state and achieve a 20% increase in students with I/DD who are engaged in a CIE experience during high school and at high school completion. There are a total of six pilot programs with 136 students involved. As of July 2020, 62 students gained community-based work experiences. South Carolina also revised the pilot to focus on fundamental collaboration barriers at the local level, including ensuring teachers understand available services and how to make referrals. South Carolina collects monthly data from all pilot sites to determine pilot site outcomes.

Utah facilitated paid work experiences or CIE for 29 students

Utah's pilot, School to Work, had three active pilot sites prior to the PIE grant and has implemented six additional sites since the beginning of the PIE grant. The pilot has 66 participants across the nine sites; thus far, 21 students gained CIE and eight students participated in paid work experiences or internships. Utah staff held Customized Employment trainings, parent meetings, on-site visits, and monthly meetings with pilot teams. Utah also developed several tools to track the progress of pilot participants. This includes a School to Work tracking form, Continuous Quality Improvement Tool, a student tracking sheet, a student outcomes chart, a student enrollment tracker, and a Student Timeline Tool.

Sustainability

As states enter the final year, sustainability becomes an important component of the PIE grant project. All states have begun to discuss sustainability and continuation of PIE activities. Specifically:

- **DC** created a sustainable approach to engaging consortium members, joined the RSA Transition Unit to closely engage with Vocational Rehabilitation transition staff, and joined the Cultural and Linguistic Competence Communities of Practice to better engage diverse partners and build infrastructure to support individuals with I/DD.
- **Hawaii** sought additional funding to sustain PIE activities after funding ends, including the National Governors Association Learning Lab and [Hawaii Statewide Family Engagement Centers](#) grants.
- **Kentucky** established the Sustainability Work Group to support pilot activities post-PIE funding. Kentucky staff collaborate with other Kentucky agencies and organizations to promote capacity-building for community-based services such as Supported Employment that will be maintained once funding ends.
- **Massachusetts** updated its work plan to emphasize sustainability efforts, including expanding interagency teams and data sharing, creating policy guidance documents, and disseminating [COVID-19 resources](#).
- **South Carolina** established the [South Carolina Disability Employment Coalition](#) (SCDEC) prior to PIE in 2014 to advance CIE. Many of South Carolina and SCDEC's activities overlap, and the coalition will help sustain PIE activities after the grant ends. In addition, Employer Summits were fully funded by registrants' fees, vendors, and sponsors; a trend expected to continue.
- **Utah** procured an evaluation contract with the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University. External evaluators and subject matter experts will work with School to Work pilot sites and consortium staff to identify pilot promising practices for successful post-school outcomes, including employment.

COVID-19

In general, states raised concerns about changes in priorities, including among partner agencies and within state budgets; access to technology and virtual supports, especially for students with the most significant disabilities; access to CTE and transition services as universities and other post-secondary programs modify fall programming; and overall momentum for PIE as the grant nears its final year. Related to employment, states expressed concerns over the availability of in-person work-based learning experiences, and the ability for youth and young adults with I/DD to make autonomous choices about returning to work amid the pandemic. States also provided virtual webinars, trainings, and check-ins with individuals with I/DD and their families with many reporting higher attendance for online events typically held in-person. In addition, many people with disabilities were able to maintain or gain employment during the pandemic as the demand for essential workers increased.