

Employment: How We Measure Success

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Here at the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN), our team is often asked what employment really means. Network members often request our feedback on state definitions of employment, including service descriptions and critical outcomes. So we decided to lay out our employment philosophy here.

State definitions of employment vary. Clarifying the term is a key strategic task states must tackle. It impacts many decisions, and affects other system issues--funding and reimbursement rates, service descriptions, provider capacity-building, and the developmental disability agency's role in collaborating with other state partners.

We believe that employment is simply a person working at an individual job in a local business, earning the prevailing wage for that position or industry, alongside peers who do not have disabilities. The business is located within the community, and is not owned or managed by the support organization (or provider).

In these integrated employment settings, individuals with disabilities acquire jobs within the general workforce that match their interests, where they can use their skills and talents. They build relationships with coworkers without disabilities, and gain more control over their own destiny. Employees with disabilities are on the business's payroll, and are paid in the same manner as their coworkers.

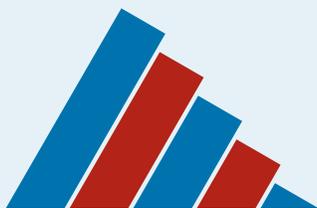
Research, data, and experience all fuel our team's long-term outlook. While systems change does not happen overnight, it is never too late to start. Each

person receiving public funding can and should be supported to explore integrated employment. Research shows that individuals with disabilities want to work in the community alongside their peers without disabilities. They want jobs where their abilities are recognized and valued. They want to earn money, accumulate assets, and build the life they desire. Employment is the key to making this happen.

Through our work, the SELN team emphasizes employment in the general workforce. Competitive jobs provide the greatest opportunity for meeting individual preferences, offering prevailing wages and benefits, and creating a strong match between employer and employee. In truly integrated employment, both the individual and the business are invested in making it happen. Our analyses, recommendations, and dialogue with our partner states all support this view.

As states implement twenty-first century strategic plans, service definitions must promote strong individual integrated employment outcomes. This is essential in terms of funding and in order to meet individual preferences. Developmental disabilities systems with robust infrastructure and planning will continue to meet constituent needs, even through turbulent economic times and bureaucratic and legislative changes.

The State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) was created in 2006 to support state developmental disability agencies working to improve integrated employment outcomes.



The State Employment Leadership Network is a network of 29 state intellectual and developmental disability agencies working together to improve employment outcomes for individuals. The SELN is a joint program of the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services.

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