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# Transforming Disability Employment Agency Strategies for the 21st Century

## Social Enterprises of the Future: Employer Perspective White Paper

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What is the business perspective on hiring people with disabilities? How do agencies need to change to meet new policy mandates and increase employment outcomes? The tight labor market and future demographic shifts mean that employers will need more workers, but jobs are increasingly bifurcated between well paying jobs that require education and technological expertise, and low wage service sector employment. This environment creates opportunities and challenges for those engaged in finding employment for people with disabilities and the organizations that hire them. Employment First, WIOA and the new Medicaid waiver HCBS rules all encourage more people with disabilities to work, expecting placements into integrated jobs in the community. This white paper reviews current literature and expert perspectives on this issue.<sup>1</sup>

The study draws on a literature review of academic and policy research on employment for people with disabilities, disability employment policy, and strategies for public and private sector employment related agencies for people with disabilities in the last 15 years, combined with analysis of disability employment policy statements and documents in five states and nationally. In addition to secondary research, the study examines perspectives of 16 industry experts and thought leaders on the future of employment for people with disabilities. Interviews were conducted with academic experts, disability advocates, small/medium and large private businesses, and large public agencies. Areas examined include legislative and societal trends on wages, settings, and entitlement programs and how they impact current/future employment of people with disabilities.

## 1. Employment Trends for People with Disabilities

Finding and keeping work remains a persistent problem for people with disabilities. In 2017, 33 percent of the U.S. population ages 16-64 with a disability was employed, compared to 74 percent of those without a disability.<sup>2</sup> Employment levels vary by type of disability, age, education, and where one lives, with those with hearing (51%) and vision (42%) disabilities working more than those with cognitive (26%), ambulatory (24%), and intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) (23%) (Kraus 2017, Livermore et al. 2017). Younger people with disabilities were more likely to be employed than older people.

	Employment Rates By Type of Disability
<b>Hearing</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>Vision</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>Ambulatory</b>	<b>24%</b>

	Employment Rates By Type of Social Security Recipient
<b>IDD</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Other Disability</b>	<b>11%</b>

Employment rates steadily increase with more education. While 28 percent of people with disabilities who have a Bachelor’s degree work, percentages drop to 22 percent of those with some college, 15

<sup>1</sup> This white paper provides an overview of research sponsored by SourceAmerica and conducted by TechnoMetrica in the fall of 2017.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Table 1: Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by disability status and selected characteristics, 2017 annual averages. <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/print.pl/news.release/disabl.t01.htm>.

percent for those with a high school diploma and 9 percent for those without a diploma.<sup>3</sup> In all categories, people with disabilities were more likely to work part-time than full time. People with IDD were most likely to be employed in congregate settings and earn special minimum wages.

	Employment By Education Level	
	Disabled	Non-Disabled
<b>No HS degree</b>	9%	54%
<b>HS degree</b>	15%	63%
<b>Some college</b>	22%	70%
<b>College degree or more</b>	28%	76%

A congregate setting can mean a segregated facility employing only people with disabilities, often connected with a disability services agency. However, work crews exclusively made up of people with disabilities and their staff, that work in the community but do not interact with other community members, are also considered congregate settings. A work crew is a team of employees that travel to various job sites to perform their work activities, such as a cleaning or grounds keeping service that works in office buildings. The technical term for work crews is “enclave work.” Integrated employment means work in the community along with employees without disabilities. Special minimum wages are lower wages based on productivity or other factors. Current disability employment policy focuses on moving people into community-based employment paying prevailing wages and closing congregate settings.

Low employment rates and part-time hours increase the likelihood of living in poverty. Mean annual earnings for people age 16-64 in 2014 were \$32,400 for people with disabilities and \$42,500 for those without disabilities. Those with cognitive disabilities earned significantly less (\$20,900). Poverty levels for people with any disability age 16-64 were 27.5 percent, compared to 12.5 percent for those without disabilities. Over one-third of those with cognitive disabilities lived below the poverty line (Butterworth et al 2016, 59).

**Declining Employment**

Employment levels for people with disabilities have decreased since the 1990s while Social Security Insurance/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI) rolls have steadily increased (Houtenville et al. 2009, Stapleton and Burkhauser 2003). Employment rates for people with disabilities dropped from 44 percent for men and 37.5 percent for women in 1989 to roughly 33 percent for both genders in 2000 (Stapleton and Burkhauser 2003: 4). Several studies report that the percentage of people with disabilities employed has gone down as policy initiatives have closed employment options in congregate settings in favor of competitive, integrated employment (Spreat and Conway 2015, Butterworth 2007).

While the reasons for this steady decrease in employment are the topic of much debate, a few factors are consistent across the research. Stapleton and Burkhauser (2003) note that changes in eligibility for SSDI, the major income support program for people with disabilities, in the late 1980s led more people to leave employment for government support. Nearly every study examining disincentives to work cite

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Table 1: Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by disability status and selected characteristics, 2017 annual averages. <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/print.pl/news.release/disabl.t01.htm>.

concern over losing SSI/SSDI and related benefits as a significant factor (Wittenberg et al 2013, Livermore and Goodman 2009, Chan et al 2005, Hall and Parker 2010, Harris et al 2013, Huang et al 2013). People with disabilities on SSI/SSDI may limit work in order to maintain benefits.

Analysis uniformly reports that the great recession caused many to lose their jobs, with a slow rebound for people with disabilities. Employer prejudices, lack of accommodations, other barriers like lack of transportation, and family concerns about safety or loss of benefits, are also frequently cited reasons for low labor force participation among people with disabilities.

### **Where do People with Disabilities Work?**

Studies show that people with disabilities are over-represented in production, transportation materials moving, and service occupations and under-represented in professional, management, business and financial occupations (Smith and Clark 2007, Boutin 2010, 2010b, Butterworth et al 2015, Livermore et al 2017, Kumin & Schoenbrodt 2016). Major job categories are building and grounds cleaning and maintenance (10.8%), transportation and materials moving (8.8%), personal care and service (8.6%), production (8.5%) and healthcare support (8.1%) (Smith and Clark 2007). People with IDD are particularly likely to work in these kinds of manual labor jobs (Butterworth et al 2015, Livermore 2017).

Numerous studies report that malemployment – or employment below potential skill levels – is common for people with disabilities. This includes studies focusing on IDD and autism (Barnhill 2007, Gardner and Carran 2005, Migliore and Butterworth 2008), mental illness (Barron 2000), and those with hearing impairments (Boutin 2010b).

### **Congregate vs. Integrated Employment and Special Minimum Wage**

Multiple studies report that people with IDD make up most of the people with disabilities working in congregate facility-based or work crew settings. Livermore et al (2017, 30) report that social security recipients with IDD were three times more likely to work in congregate settings (69 percent) versus people with other disabilities (23 percent). Butterworth et al (2007, 3) note that “approximately three-quarters of all workers receiving subminimum wage in sheltered workshops” have IDD.

Several studies noted that people who lived in their own apartments were much more likely to have integrated, community jobs than those who lived with family or in group homes. In contrast, those living with family, in adult foster care, or a community-based group homes were less likely to work in a community-based job and more likely to not be working at all (Butterworth et al 2015, Siperstein et al 2014, Spreat and Conway 2015). Those in institutions or community-based group homes were more likely to work in congregate settings. Butterworth et al (2015, 215) found that 35 percent of those living in an institution and 29 percent of those living in a group home worked in a facility-based job. Siperstein et al (2015, 171) found that those living in group homes were “three times as likely to be working in a sheltered setting than those living with family.”

## **2. Business Perspectives on Employing People with Disabilities**

Three key points emerged from review of literature and discussion with employers about hiring people with disabilities. First, while organizations that regularly hire people with disabilities have positive views, too few companies hire people with disabilities. Second, disability employment agency staff at nonprofits need to make the business case for employing the people they serve. Third, new technologies create opportunities for people with disabilities but may eliminate some jobs.

## Experience with People with Disabilities as Employees

Secondary source literature on businesses and employment experiences suggest that employers that regularly work with people with disabilities have positive experiences, but that many potential employers have little experience with people with disabilities or the agencies that help them find employment. In 2006, the Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR) convened a national summit on employment that brought together business representatives, government agency representatives and experts on disability employment. The report from this conference noted that agencies working with people with disabilities need to generate demand for employment by showing how hiring people with disabilities will have a positive impact on business profits and by developing positive marketing campaigns (ICDR 2007). Several recent industry reports provide examples of industry response to calls for increased employment for people with disabilities (Kalagyrou and Volis 2014, Feerasta 2017). As one employer observed:

*[Businesses] hire based on ability. They are not hiring out of benevolence, they are not hiring to gain an incentive, they are hiring a person based on their ability to do the work because they have the knowledge, skills and ability to do that job. When they are looking for qualified candidates, you hire a person who is qualified and you treat them the same as you treat everyone else. You give them the support required to get the job done. (Public Agency)*

Habeck et al (2008) developed a comprehensive literature review on the research on employers hiring people with disabilities. They identified seven major factors influencing positive outcomes (2008, 4):

1. Business policies:
  - a. Positive organizational culture
  - b. Policies and programs for employee retention
2. Policies to maintain the health and wellness of all employees, including rapid intervention policies.
3. Early and effective return to work policies to enable disabled workers to return to their jobs. These include ongoing communication between employer, employee and physicians and others involved in the return to work process, as well as effective accommodations.
4. Developing a systematic process to provide accommodation to newly hired employees with disabilities which is flexible and meets the needs of employee and workplace.
5. Working with supervisors to ensure they understand disabilities and provide positive supports to employees with disabilities.
6. Managing co-worker involvement to ensure that co-workers do not resent employees with disabilities and provide positive supports to their disabled co-workers.
7. A positive attitude toward the employer, co-workers and offered supports by the employee with disabilities.

While disability employment agencies and vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies have made a more concerted effort to reach out to employers in recent years, employer consciousness of people with disabilities as potential employees remains mixed. One recent study of Human Resource (HR) managers, experienced with working with people with disabilities, reported that the percentage with programs to employ people with disabilities is dropping in some sectors (Erickson et al 2014, 196).

Employment of people with disabilities is seen as a diversity issue. In service industries, employees with

disabilities are seen as a draw for customers who may have disabilities themselves or want to do business with companies that exhibit a commitment to diversity. One study reported that while 70 percent of companies had a diversity policy, “less than a third of those who reported having diversity programs had a disability-specific program and this number had decreased from nearly two thirds in 1995” (Erickson et al 2014, 196). Diversity is viewed as an asset for the business:

*The best groups and highest performing groups are diverse, so those having a disability can give better perspective on things and they just bring a holistic view on whatever is going on. So, it just makes us well rounded by having that representation. (Large Private Business)*

*I think, living with a disability, you learn a lot of adaptability and persistence, and it is most definitely a form of diversity, and also one that requires a lot of creative thinking to be successful. (Academia)*

Examining positive experiences employing people with disabilities, Erickson et al (2014, 196) noted that “managers play a major role in disability inclusion, the perceived organizational climate is essential” for positive employment of people with disabilities. Other recent reviews of hiring in the hotel and restaurant industries echo this finding, also stressing that training for co-workers is equally important (Kalargyrou and Volis, 2014, Feerasta 2017).

Employers who regularly hired people with disabilities found that employees with disabilities were just as productive, had nearly identical ratings in performance, stayed on jobs longer, and had better on-time performance (Henry et al 2014, Kalargyrou and Volis 2014). Kalargyrou and Volis, 2014, 448 noted that: “Findings show that adding persons with disabilities to the workforce can improve innovation and increase the ability to compete in all markets and react to the expectations of diverse consumers.” One expert noted: “A lot of people with disabilities once they find a place where they feel comfortable, included... will stay committed and loyal to that employer” (Advocacy). Another noted:

*One of the big things I've heard from several employers is that when they have employed people with disabilities that their attitude is contagious, that it improves the overall worker morale. That is no small factor for them. (Academia)*

Despite the positive views of people with disabilities as employees by businesses with active disability employment programs, advocates, service providers and business people themselves note widespread hesitancy to hire people with disabilities and potential challenges in the workplace. Employer prejudice, limited accommodations, and unfriendly work environments were also cited frequently as reasons for low employment for people with disabilities. One expert noted: “Changing attitudes of employers might be number one, number two and number three. I'll put that as number one with a bullet.” (Academia)

For example, a study of employers for the ICDR summit revealed that only 26 percent of employers hired someone with a disability and that 20 percent of employers said that the greatest barrier was “their own discrimination, prejudice or reluctance” (ICDR report 2007, 31). Houtenville and Kalargyrou (2012; 51) report similar results, commenting that “creating a disability friendly culture is paramount in overcoming biases and stereotypes about people with disabilities.” Ju, Roberts and Zhang (2013) note that employers generally report an understanding that people with disabilities should have equal opportunity, but express concerns about actually hiring those with disabilities. One expert observed:

*I think employers really need to understand that it's not that complicated to hire people with disabilities. I think there's a real fear. I think there's a big misunderstanding of how many accommodations you need to provide and/or how challenging it is to have somebody who has an intellectual disability as part of your staff... (Academia)*

Hagner (2003) examined co-worker relationships as a challenge to employment, noting that disability harassment on the job was the third most common complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The analyses observed that co-workers resent accommodations if they perceive them as unfair to themselves. Successful strategies for addressing co-worker resentment included management explaining the need for accommodations to co-workers, encouraging positive relationships, and educating co-workers about disabilities (Hagner 2003, Kalargyrou and Volis, 2014). Dunstan and Maceachen (2013, 2013b) report similar findings, noting that length of time that co-workers are expected to support an employee with disabilities, procedural fairness, and perceptions of the disability and disabled person influenced co-worker willingness to help. People with visible disabilities fared better than those with hidden disabilities.

In general, increased experience with people with disabilities and knowledge about disability is seen as improving the number of people hired:

*...the goal ultimately is increased awareness, knowledge, and capacity amongst employers to hire people with disabilities. Knowledge of where they can find employees, what their responsibilities are to employees, what the level of burden really is in providing reasonable accommodation, and understanding of the functional requirements of the jobs they have. (Advocacy)*

### **Disability Agency Staff Strategies to Improve Employment**

Both government agencies responsible for services for people with disabilities and nonprofit disability agencies that provide employment services need to sell the positive potential for people with disabilities to improve the bottom line for business in order to improve the poor employment statistics for people with disabilities. The business consensus from the ICDR summit and other literature on business perspectives notes that this will require that agencies understand businesses better, create strong connections to business, and creatively evaluate how each individual with a disability can best work in an integrated, community-based job that reflects his or her interests. While some agencies have made great strides toward this approach, disability employment agencies vary greatly on the level of sophistication of their operations, their approach to working with employers, and the services provided. A plethora of articles and guides have been published suggesting strategies to achieve this goal (Gingrich 2016, Harris and Strobel-Gower 2017, Royer 2014, Ketter 2013).

Both employers and analysis of agency activities stress the need to understand that employers hire to fill a need, not create a job for a person with a disability (Capella et al 2015, Erickson et al 2014, Harris et al 2017, Henry et al 2014, ICDR 2007, Kalygarou and Volis 2014). Most discussions with employers highlight the need for job developers and employment specialists to understand business:

*The major thing is telling success stories, whether it is giving data on productivity of people with disabilities or telling the individual success stories of what it has meant to an employer to have people with disabilities in their workforce... having a productive workforce is what drives them, and the more we can speak their language, the more it will...help promote employment. (Academia)*

Building relationships with employers is key to successful hiring strategies. This involves joining organizations where employers meet, networking, and developing collaborations for internships, volunteer opportunities, and jobs. As one expert noted: *“Develop really good quality relationships with the business community through membership and access, chambers of commerce and so on. Being there to listen to what they want. I think that’s critically important”* (Advocacy). Businesses encouraged networking among job developers so that they could share leads and candidates (Henry et al 2014).

One of the concerns regarding promoting people with disabilities as employees involves both staff and management looking at skills people with disabilities have to offer rather than their disabilities. Henry et al (2014, 241) comments that “When a manager is aware that a job candidate has a disability, the manager may focus on what the person cannot do, rather than what he or she can do.” In some cases, disability agency staff tend to do the same thing.

Another common perception in both the interviews and literature is that disability agency staff create more work for managers and get in the way of the work process. This is a particular concern with job coaches and other staff involved in customized and supported employment. That said, strategies to develop successful supported work programs were identified nearly 20 years ago and remain the same today. Rogan, Banks and Howard (2000, 9) noted that support program staff in successful initiatives developed long term relationships with employers and chose workplaces with a positive and supportive workplace culture. Good support staff also ensure that the employee has the supports they need over the long term:

*Again, I think any good program integrating people with disabilities into another organization, it's that monitoring piece: providing good information, checking in periodically, working to resolve problems that come up. (Large Private Business)*

### **Skills Needed to Compete in the Future/Opportunities and Threats Posed by Technology**

The changing nature of work and new technology creates both opportunities and challenges for people with disabilities. Studies that stress that people with disabilities can be hired for jobs across the organization mention using technology to facilitate employment. Experts interviewed for this study agreed that there would be some level of negative impact to occupations traditionally associated with people with disabilities, but also felt that technology could be a potential boon for employment, offering opportunities for new jobs and helping organizations be more flexible when making accommodations:

*Certainly technology, assistive technology enables people with a disability to do things that they couldn't do before, working from locations that they couldn't have worked from before. That's the positive part. The negative part is of course robotics is replacing a lot of workers. For people with a disability, I think it has opened up some...employment areas that are more doable by a wider range of people. They can be done from a sitting position. They can be done without having active participation in a verbal and audio meeting. Plus, all of the technology that's related to video relay services and other environmental control systems has made things easier. As that knowledge becomes greater among employers and that technology becomes more common that also helps employers in the reasonable accommodation process. (Advocacy)*

The ubiquitous use of computers can create barriers to, or facilitate, employment. Current automated hiring systems make it difficult for people with disabilities to gain entry to employment, a factor noted regularly by agency staff. Computer literacy requirements also influence hiring. One employer noted:

*I think it's going to vary [depending on] on their disability... everything is electronic now, either some type of computerized work environment, so they've got to be able to ascertain and have that competency to perform in that world, or in that environment. And if their disabilities will allow them to, then I think they can flourish. If their disabilities are going to prohibit them from doing so... it's going to restrict them from doing that type of office work... (Public Agency)*

In order to help the people they serve compete, agency staff will need to keep up with changing technology. One expert noted the need for:

*...constant education and awareness of staff [about] technology, assistive technology being plugged in, and having those collaborations with assistive technology folks to say ...what's available for accommodations, what's doable, what's useable, what helps people in terms of communication. (Advocacy)*

While literature generally acknowledges that many high paying jobs require advanced education that may be difficult for some people with disabilities to achieve, strategies to improve employment through post-secondary programs and internships have developed to provide needed skills (Wilson et al. 2017). Others note that helping employers focus on functional skills rather than previous experience could help with placement (Kurata and Brodwin 2012). One expert observed: “... it’s an understanding of the functional needs of the jobs. You know, if the job doesn’t actually require hearing something to be successful, then there’s no reason not to be open to be hiring someone who is deaf or hard of hearing. (Advocacy)”

The bigger issue for many observers is the bifurcation into high paying jobs requiring advanced education and low paying service sector jobs:

*From my perspective, the trends that are growing are service industry related jobs and jobs that require higher, more technical skill levels than simply a high school diploma. Unfortunately, we’re not seeing a great number of people with disabilities, advancing in an education the way they probably could if provided the opportunity and support...and then the service industry positions are what’s left and those are typically low paying. (Advocacy)*

Since research with businesses shows that many employers have little experience with people with disabilities (ICDR report 2007, Houtenville and Kalargyrou 2012), the challenge becomes helping agencies best reach out to business and working with employers to increase employment opportunities. Nonprofit disability employment agencies also need to transform their goals, structure and strategies to meet new policy mandates. Before looking at agency transformation, current policy changes are outlined.

### **3. Current Employment Policy for People with Disabilities**

Employment policy for people with disabilities experienced significant changes in 2014 when Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), new Medicaid Home and Community-based Settings (HCBS) rules, and section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act all went into effect. The new WIOA and HCBS rules both emphasize integrated, community-based employment for people with disabilities based on individual’s choice and interests. Both regulations significantly limit work in congregate settings and payment of wages below the state or federal minimum wage. Section 503 establishes a goal that government contractors to hire people with disabilities as seven percent of their workforce in each job category.

Each of these policies builds on years of initiatives designed to support employment for people with disabilities. The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which established minimum wages and other key labor statutes, included section 14(c) that established special minimum wages for people with disabilities based on their productivity in comparison to other workers doing similar work in order to “prevent curtailment of opportunities for employment” for people with disabilities (Butterworth et al 2007, 2). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 established protections from discrimination for people with disabilities, but it built on the earlier Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Developmental Disabilities Act of 1984. The Supreme Court Olmstead decision in 1999 stated that services for people with disabilities, including employment, should be in the least restrictive settings possible. While all current initiatives highlight individualized, integrated, community-based employment, policy and practice still

includes special minimum wages and employment in congregate settings. Key new current policies are:

- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA):** WIOA modified the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and Adult Education and Family Literacy Act with the goal of creating an integrated workforce development system that ensured collaboration across the various entities and programs providing services to all populations in order to obtain and keep employment in high demand occupations. WIOA only allows payments for job placement into community-based, integrated jobs with the same pay and benefits as workers without disabilities and restricts placing transitioning youth into facility-based congregate employment. WIOA funds can also be used for other support and training services.
- **Medicaid Home and Community-based Settings (HCBS) Rules:** Funding for services for people with IDD and some other disabilities comes through Medicaid waivers allowing community-based services. In 2014, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released new rules for the HCBS waivers refocusing on providing community-based, integrated employment that reflected individual interests and goals. The rules require phasing out facility-based employment and day services, replacing them with integrated services in community settings and integrated employment. All people with disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disabilities, are expected to work.
- **Employment First:** Employment First is a state policy initiative supported and promoted by the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) that promotes community-based, integrated employment as the primary goal for all people with disabilities, regardless of the severity and nature of their disabilities. Jobs are expected to pay the prevailing wage for that occupation - at least minimum wage and offer the same benefits as those received by employees without disabilities.

Taken together, these policies show initiatives to move away from facility-based and congregate employment toward community-based, competitive employment paying minimum wage or more. New policy directions focus primarily on implementing these recently enacted policies and are discussed in a companion report.

#### 4. Transforming Agencies to Employment First and Community-based Services

The research consensus suggests that WIOA, the new HCBS rules, and Employment First call for major changes in disability employment agency mission, program design, approach, and facilities. The shift to Employment First means moving away from programs that assume that people with disabilities need to learn life skills and practice employment in educational programs or congregate settings before placing them in jobs. While the transition to competitive integrated employment is designed to foster more integrated experience, meaningful work, and higher wages, a wide range of studies note that the percentage of people in nonwork activities, particularly facility-based nonwork activities, has steadily gone up as initiatives to promote community-based work and close congregate settings have gained ground (Spreat and Conway 2015, Butterworth et al 2007, Butterworth et al 2016, Nord et al 2013, Houtenville et al. 2009).

Most scholars do not speculate on the reasons for this shift, although budgets and priorities are mentioned by many. Experience with the employment system for people with disabilities suggests that finding community-based employment is slow, time consuming work and that people may be placed in day programs while the work search continues. The current design of SSI and SSDI programs that provide cash benefits and access to housing, employment supports, transportation and other services people

with disabilities need in order to work cuts off benefits for people earning beyond a certain amount. As wages that could impact social security rise, people with disabilities may work fewer hours. In states with waiting lists, people may simply stay at home while waiting to qualify for services.

The shift away from facility-based programming and congregate employment means changes in philosophy, procedures, staffing, and program design for disability employment (Kiernan et al 2011, National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities 2011, Sulwelski et al 2017). However, Sulwelski et al found that 89 percent of agency administrators thought facility-based programs were essential for those having difficulty with placement. Still over half had plans to expand integrated employment. Necessary changes will include (Sulwelski et al 2017, Kiernan et al. 2011):<sup>4</sup>

- **Changes in overall agency philosophy:** Agencies will need to shift away from expectations that people with disabilities can't work or need to remain in congregate programming. Missions will need to reflect an expectation that all people with disabilities can work or be involved in community-based integrated activities regardless of the nature or severity of their disabilities.
- **Program redesign:** All programs will need to be redesigned to offer community-based programs and seek integrated, community-based jobs.
- **Restaffing or training existing staff:** In order to successfully find community-based jobs, staff will need to develop new skills and some states are encouraging certification of staff in customized employment, discovery, and other skills needed to identify employment that meets the interests of people with disabilities. One expert observed: "... much more training is needed for direct support professionals, the pay needs to increase, and the value of the job itself needs to increase" (Academia). Another noted: "Training of their staff...firing the staff that is not on board with how things are going. Implementing best practices and investing in that training and in the best practices, to move towards...community employment..." (Academia).
- **Creating partnerships for community-based activities:** HCBS expects people with disabilities to participate in community-based leisure, volunteering, and related activities as well as community-based work instead of facility-based activities. This will mean learning about opportunities in the community and creating partnerships to facilitate activities, including pre-employment activities like volunteering. While each state develops its own specific policy, generally new strategies emphasize developing individualized programs that match the interests of the individual. Instead of large groups volunteering together (for example a group of day program participants sweeping the floors at a nonprofit), each individual is expected to have their own activities. This may include small groups of people with similar interests (for example 2 to 4 people) doing integrated community-based activities together. The individual with a disability will need to work with other volunteers, staff and participants without disabilities. For employment, this means networking with employers and creating opportunities for internships as well as jobs. Experts highlight the need for collaborations:

*You have to collaborate with everybody. Independent living, your rehab programs, businesses, schools, community colleges. It takes everybody at the table so you are looking for a totally inclusive environment to make that happen and definitely included is the customer with the disability. They are the ones who are the expert in their lives so we need to hear what their needs are... (Public Agency)*

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<sup>4</sup> This section is based on materials and observations from Employment First transformation events featuring ODEP subject matter experts in Maryland from 2015 to the present in addition to research for this study.

- **Redesigning transportation systems:** Rather than pick up and deliver people with disabilities served by the agency in large vans at set times, agencies will be expected to provide individualized transportation and be available to transport the people they serve to jobs during evening and weekend hours. This will mean redesigning transportation systems and outreach to community-based systems like disability transportation systems or ride share systems.
- **Changing hours:** Most disability employment programs operate on a 9-3 or 9-4 schedule, only supporting employment during these hours. WIOA and the new HCBS rules require supporting employees whenever they are expected to work, including evening and weekend hours.
- **Closing facilities and moving activities into the community:** HCBS bans on segregated settings mean eventual closure of facility-based congregate employment and other activities in congregate settings. ODEP experts for Employment First regularly talk about closing facilities, selling buildings, and moving all activities into the community. This means using libraries, fast food restaurants and other community venues for employment counseling and relying on virtual work strategies. This also means relying on web or cloud based applications to maintain records and communications among staff and with clients.

Nonprofit disability employment agencies can use a number of creative strategies to meet the new WIOA and HCBS rules. Work crews already working in community settings can be integrated with employees without disabilities or function as part of larger teams funded through other sources, mixing workers with and without disabilities. Agencies running facility-based work will need to move out of segregated settings. This can be accomplished in a number of ways. The most obvious may involve call centers or other activities that involve employees working in independent work stations co-locating with other organizations performing similar work, mixing employees with and without disabilities in the same setting and ensuring regular interactions as part of the work experience. For activities that require equipment like print shops or manufacturing, integration may mean bringing in non-disabled employees to work with those with disabilities and creating other ways that the building can become an integrated environment. Analysts note that this will involve moving funding:

*[Agencies should be] moving their funding from the more segregated day programs and workshops and really moving that funding into the community-based services so they can actually provide appropriate services that lead to community employment. (Academia)*

Policy analysis suggests a steady move away from special minimum wages, although this is likely to occur over a period of five to ten years. Levere et al (2017) note that this may mean some job losses for people with severe disabilities and may increase costs for some agencies. Agencies will need to re-evaluate their use of special minimum wages and develop strategies to replace them.

Our analyses of these changes acknowledge that they will happen slowly and require sufficient funds for transition and transformation activities and better qualified staff to sustain activities (for example Kiernan et al 2011). That said, Cimera (2016) notes that supported work costs about the same as sheltered workshops. Butterworth et al (2007) note that change is a gradual process that requires substantive investment in training and technical support. Current federal and state government timelines call for transformation to community-based programming within five to eight years, but these timelines are likely to be extended.

Push back currently comes from some providers, particularly those using congregate settings, family members, and some people with disabilities fearing change. Experts note:

*We've had contracts for 20 years and we have the same people on there. ... the initial intent was to get the individuals in, get them trained, and get them to a competitive employment type environment, so they could be out in the world. But the federal contracts, I've seen people on there for 20-25 years and haven't gone out to the commercial world, because they kind of like what they're doing and they're making a good buck. The older generation, they want to keep their social security, but they can make [only] so much money, so they get a part-time job. (Public Agency)*

*Now the big push is for competitive, integrated employment [but] there needs to be a place for everybody. I've gone out and talked to people in sheltered workshops and told them about options they have... What I find varies. Most everyone wants to stay right where they are. Change is difficult for everyone. They are... giving their testimony that I worked here for seven years and this is my family, this is my life, this is what I like doing. (Public Agency Employer)*

*...one of the big factors that we've run into is helping their families embrace this. A lot of them have worked very hard to get their adolescents enrolled in SSI and we've had to help them see why they would want to help their child now become employed and possibly move off SSI. So it's not just a matter of changing attitudes among business owners and employers, and among employment agencies, but it's also the individuals and family members as well. (Academia)*

These quotes highlight that concerns over losing benefits is a key barrier to program transformation. In addition, people with disabilities will need better education and more early experience with employment like internships while in school. Transformation does not simply involve changing agency strategies, but the entire system and environment serving people with disabilities.

## 5. Conclusion

Agencies will need to transform to effectively focus on community-based employment and activities. This will mean both physical transformation as they move away from facility-based programming and changes in mission, goals and programming. While this is likely to be a slow process, change is necessary to survive in the new policy environment. Experts identified the following key elements for a sustainable approach to integration:

**Build and maintain relationships with businesses and the wider community.** As with other social services, disability agencies tend to develop tight networks with those providing similar services and a small number of employers and other organizations they work with closely. To successfully integrate their clients into their communities, disability employment agencies will first need to become integrated into the community themselves. This will involve developing reciprocal relationships with a wide variety of businesses, entities offering services of interest to the people they serve, nonprofits offering volunteer opportunities, government services beyond those regularly used by people with disabilities, and public amenities like parks, libraries, nature centers and other venues. The breadth and nature of the relationships will vary in each community, but the idea is to become an active part of the community with the agency's participants contributing to the community like other residents.

**Share success stories and raise familiarity with people with disabilities to demystify accommodations and enhance buy-in from stakeholders.** All experts note that the more familiar employers and other stakeholders are with people with disabilities, the more likely they will be to hire them. Personal knowledge is the most successful strategy and creating opportunities for those without disabilities to work with people with disabilities in meaningful ways is important. Sharing success stories is another way to build familiarity with people with disabilities and was often named as a cost effective strategy to

follow.

**Early and ongoing education and training for people with disabilities and agency staff.** Types of training will vary depending on community needs and the nature of the disabilities but the point here is to prepare people with disabilities for the workforce and to participate in the community. Staff need to understand the latest strategies to best support the people they serve, current policies, and how best to work with employers.

**Provide technology training and prepare employees for more service-oriented jobs.** Technological training will vary but in general, people with disabilities should have the same general technological skills and access to technology as their peers without disabilities. Preparing people for service oriented jobs not only includes teaching them how to use computerized cash registers, ordering software, and other technology but developing soft skills needed in service sector jobs.

**Identify individual skills and interests and provide “best fit” insights for potential employers.** Employment First often focuses on customized employment, which involves creating specialized carve-out jobs for people with disabilities that meet an employer’s unmet needs. The first step in developing customized employment is discovery, working closely with the person with disabilities, family members, and others that know them well to discover their skills, interests, and special gifts. Jobs should reflect those interests and staff can explain what they learned in discovery to employers. Providing best fit insights for the employer involves both explaining the individual’s skills and interests and sharing other strategies to help them succeed on the job. These might include ways to relay instructions, modifications to work environments, or scheduling issues.

**Continue to provide support for employees after they’re in the workforce.** Traditionally, job coaches and other support staff are expected to gradually reduce their contact with the individual once they are successfully employed. This strategy involves continuing periodic contact with both the individual and employer once a case is closed. The agency should also continue to work with employed individuals to help them advance at the workplace or find better jobs. Another major issue for people with disabilities is that the people from their day program or others at their agency become friends and once they are placed in jobs people with disabilities miss these social contacts. Creating regular social activities for employed people with disabilities is an important ongoing function of their support agencies.

**Channel resources to support education, outreach and training for the integrated employment initiative.** This involves both shifting resources within disability services agencies and putting real initiative into outreach to the community. As one expert noted, changing employer attitudes is “number one, two, and three” in importance in increasing employment. Until the general public and employers are comfortable with people with disabilities as employees, customers and other community roles, the necessary changes will be difficult to make.

**Eliminate or mitigate work disincentives so that fear of losing benefits doesn’t eclipse rewarding work.** While the current structure of the social security program creates an ongoing challenge to employment above the income and asset limits established by the program, benefits counseling and other mechanisms can reduce the fear of people with disabilities working at all. Recent initiatives like Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts, which allow people with disabilities to save their earnings in accounts for specific needs that do not count toward the social security limits, also mitigates work disincentives.

All of these strategies involve agencies moving their staff, activities and people they serve out into their communities in ways that minimize disability and emphasize the gifts people with disabilities have to offer. The idea is to support individuals so that they can function as participating members of society, rather than provide alternative facilities and activities for them. Achieving this goal will require helping the community understand people with disabilities and learn to welcome them as another aspect of a diverse and vibrant community.

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## **Appendix A: In-Depth Interviews**

## Findings and Representative Quotes from In-Depth Interviews

As a complement to the secondary research component, in-depth interviews were conducted to examine market perspectives external to SourceAmerica of private- and public-sector industry experts and thought leaders on the future of employment for people with disabilities.

In-depth interviews were conducted among a total of 16 experts representing five market segments:

- Academia (n=4)
- Advocacy Groups (n=4)
- Large Private Industry (n=2)
- Small/Medium Private Industry (n=2)
- Large Public Agencies (n=4)

While it was not a factor in their selection for inclusion in the study, all respondents work for companies or in institutions that employ people with disabilities, and most have coworkers with disabilities. Some respondents also identified as people with disabilities.

### 1. Positives of Employing People with Disabilities

#### **Employment leads to inclusion, being a part of the general community, and having a purpose.**

Across all subgroups there was consensus on the value of employment for people with disabilities.

*“I think this is the most important issue for people with disabilities, this issue of employment. I think it has the potential to add greatly to quality of life. We all have an innate need to be needed and to make a contribution to society, plus it lets that person become self-supporting economically and move from being supported by tax dollars into supporting themselves. It’s an area where we really have not done well in the past but I’m really optimistic for the next couple of decades, for seeing really a revolution in this area.”* (Academia)

#### **People with disabilities are as unique as people without disabilities, and therefore can and should hold jobs at all levels within organizations and businesses.**

This view was virtually universal and was represented in all of the subgroups. As one respondent said:

*“...the talents that people bring really are as unique as each individual.”* (Advocacy)

#### **People with disabilities are very often the most loyal employees.**

*“A lot of people with disabilities once they find a place where they feel comfortable, included... will stay committed and loyal to that employer.”* (Advocacy)

*“Because people with disabilities generally have to, in some ways, put a lot of effort into getting jobs, finding jobs, and getting the right training; I think a lot of the time when people with disabilities find jobs that they have the skills for, they are really motivated to stay in those jobs and do a very great job.”* (Academia)

**Disability is a form of diversity, and people with disabilities bring unique gifts to their place of work. Businesses and institutions are better when they employ people with disabilities.**

*“The best groups and highest performing groups are diverse, so those having a disability can give better perspective on things and they just bring a holistic view on whatever is going on. So, it just makes us well rounded by having that representation.” (Large Private Business)*

*“I think, living with a disability, you learn a lot of adaptability and persistence, and it is most definitely a form of diversity, and also one that requires a lot of adaptation and creative thinking to be successful.” (Academia)*

*“One is their diversity of their experience. I think businesses are learning more and more that having a diverse workforce makes them more effective. People with different perspectives relating to other people, different perspectives on problem-solving and having that wide diversity really makes the business more able to respond to different situations and appeal to a broader segment of the community.” (Academia)*

## **2. Factors and Trends Affecting Future Employment Opportunities for the Disabled**

When asked to think about future trends affecting employment opportunities for people with disabilities, those in the academia and advocacy groups responded with broad views towards government policy and funding. Many were concerned about cuts in government funding streams for programs that help disability employment agencies and other entities serving people with disabilities. There was widespread concern that the current political administration in Washington is not as supportive of their work as the previous administration.

In contrast, respondents from the private and public sectors responded from a practical standpoint, and considered future trends in employment in terms of the different types of jobs people might perform and how technology might impact that.

Respondents from all subgroups generally agreed in their views that technology’s impact can be both good and bad. While they agreed that there would be some level of negative impact to occupations traditionally associated with people with disabilities, they also felt that technology could be a potential boon for people with disabilities, offering opportunities for new jobs and helping organizations be more flexible when making accommodations for people with disabilities.

For most respondents, and especially for academic and advocacy groups, education was of key importance. There was general agreement that access to good employment for people with disabilities can be improved through education and training—early, often, and ongoing.

Respondents also agreed on the need for strategic outreach and broad collaborations with all stakeholders.

## **A. Impact of Technology**

**Technology's impact on people with disabilities can be both good and bad, but on a whole it will have a positive impact on their employment.**

It will create more opportunities for businesses to offer necessary accommodations, and it will allow for more flexible work arrangements. Across all subgroups there was agreement on this theme, as is illustrated in the following quotations from the interviews.

*"Certainly technology, assistive technology enables people with a disability to do things that they couldn't do before, working from locations that they couldn't have worked from before, so on and so forth. That's the positive part. The negative part is of course robotics is replacing a lot of workers. We haven't done a good job as a society figuring out what people who have been displaced in the workforce because of technology are going to be doing, what's the new role. For people with a disability, for a lot of folks I think it has opened up some areas, employment areas that are more doable by a wider range of people. They can be done from a sitting position. They can be done without having active participation in a verbal and audio meeting and so on and so forth. Plus, all of the technology that's related to video relay services and other environmental control systems and so on and so forth has made things easier. As that knowledge becomes greater among employers and that technology becomes more common that also helps employers in the reasonable accommodation process" (Advocacy)*

*"Probably a positive is assistive technology, cause that allows folks that maybe couldn't do what others can do, that equal playing field, so to speak. And it allows them to flourish with their abilities, versus their disabilities." (Public)*

*"...Technology can be used to make people with developmental disabilities much more independent. I think we've already kind of seen a way when we looked at iPhones and iPads and how they can be utilized for communication, time management, and organizational management. Really making people with developmental disabilities much more independent. I think looking forward to the possibilities of technology and what might be coming down the road like self-driving cars or things like that, I think they would all really be great technologies for people with developmental disabilities specifically, to get them to their workplace, help them be much more independent and not to rely on public transportation for example. I also think that a lot of the technology that's just general technology that we have will continue to help people with disabilities in terms of what apps are available and how they can help you with getting your job done or things like that. I think technology will play a big role and will continue to play an even bigger role than it does currently. I think there are exciting opportunities to help people with disabilities be much more independent." (Academia)*

*"People with disabilities tend to have a really intimate relationship with technology in terms of assistive technologies and needing to navigate with them, so I think that's something that people with disabilities very much bring to the work force that's a real gain for employers." (Academia)*

*"I think if someone had a disability like say they were hard of hearing or had a physical disability, that technology kind of only improves that or improves their odds of doing well in certain positions and kind of takes away some of the limitations." (Small Private Business)*

**Automation will replace jobs previously held by people with disabilities, but it will also create new jobs and opportunities for people with disabilities.**

Again, there was general agreement on this issue across all subgroups. One respondent from a large private company lamented the role automation had played in replacing a position previously held by a person with disabilities on his staff.

*“We have somebody that has worked here for 20 years, a high functioning gentleman with disabilities, and that position is now going away.”* (Large Private Business)

A respondent from the Public sector voiced an opinion shared by respondents from all subgroups that the impact of automation will depend a great deal on the abilities of the individual.

*“I think it’s going to vary on their disability... everything is electronic now, either some type of computerized work environment, so they’ve got to be able to ascertain and have that competency to perform in that world, or in that environment. And if their disabilities will allow them to, then I think they can flourish. If their disabilities are going to prohibit them from doing so, then I think yeah, it’s going to restrict them from doing that type of office work...”* (Public)

**B. How to Ensure the Disabled Have the Skills Need for Future Jobs**

**There needs to be adequate and reliable funding for programs that help people with disabilities.**

Academia and advocacy respondents believe that ongoing government support is necessary for the success and continuation of programs that help people with disabilities find and keep employment. These two groups agreed that how government funds are allocated and controlled will have a big impact on the future of employment for people with disabilities.

*“First, how much funding is available and second, how funding is distributed. For disability employment, we have federal funds and state funds that are combined in certain ways in different settings. When I think about the next five to ten years, what I would hope to see is we’d have a lot of funds used for more settings where people with disabilities were kind of segregated in workshops or day programs or things like that, I think that when I look at home and community-based services waivers, and when I look at where policies so far has pointed us to a much more individualized approach to people with disabilities to help them be part of their communities, to get the appropriate training that they need to hold a job in the community and really do what they’re good at.”* (Academia)

*“Well, I think that the biggest threat is whether or not there will be grant funding that will cover organizations as things keep changing in the scene both in Washington and in our state government. And so if we don’t have the funding to operate our doors won’t be open so therefore there won’t be jobs.”* (Advocacy)

**Education and training for people with disabilities from an early age is critical.**

This theme emerged predominantly in the academia and advocacy groups, but it was also echoed by respondents from the public and private sectors.

*“...you need to be doing skill-building in elementary school and you need to be planning for job placement in middle school and in high school, you need to be having real work experiences and internships because a very large number of people with acquired disabilities and with IDD are not necessarily going to be participating in post-secondary education. So, waiting for that step as part*

*of career development when it's probably not going to happen is not wise. So, we should be starting in school to prepare people. I know your question is probably more about adult vocational training and certainly we can talk about that, but to be most successful with adult vocational training, you have to start before you're an adult and what I think many people with intellectual disability find challenging about adult vocational education is that it's assuming some skills that they may not have, like reading or arithmetic or writing. Even many adults with acquired disabilities may have difficulty with reading and writing which may make traditional vocational education a bit challenging." (Advocacy)*

**Prepare workers for service industry jobs, as the US is increasingly becoming a service economy.**

This issue was a concern predominantly for advocacy groups. There is concern that the current US economy is divided between highly skilled work that requires a great deal of education and low-skilled, low-paid service industry work. Agencies need to keep these trends in mind when they educate and prepare people with disabilities for employment.

*"...our economy is increasingly a service economy. So as we prepare people with disabilities, whether they are acquired or developmental, I think it's important that people are prepared for the jobs that exist and the jobs that will be available in the future, not jobs that are only in our imaginations. So that means preparing people for working in the service industries, preparing people to have more segmented and specific jobs rather than generalist jobs..." (Advocacy)*

Another respondent put it this way:

*"From my perspective, the trends that are growing are service industry related jobs and jobs that require higher, more technical skill levels than simply a high school diploma. Unfortunately, we're not seeing a great number of people with disabilities, I guess, advancing in an education the way they probably could if provided the opportunity and support. We're not seeing a lot of high skilled level opportunities for many individuals and then the service industry positions are what's left and those are typically low paying." (Advocacy)*

**Some businesses currently have policies that promote the hiring of people with disabilities.**

Those in private industry were asked whether their business actively pursued hiring strategies that included people with disabilities. Most were vague and noncommittal in their answers; however, one respondent from a large private hospital did respond positively.

*"I think having a pipeline to start with is the first key. If you don't have a conduit in which to find applicants, or identify applicants... Our first conduit would be the entity that we work with currently in our public schools that bring the children on site; and the other agencies in our localities here that have individuals with those needs, and partnering with them. I think the first group focuses more on the youth, because I don't think many adults beyond 18 or 19 come through that program, and then the local agencies that have people with disabilities, and interfacing with those groups. That's our strategy at this point." (Large Private Business)*

### 3. Preparing Agencies for the Future with a Sustainable Model

Respondents from the public and private sectors generally thought about disability employment service agencies from the perspective of what services these agencies could offer their business or organization. Some of the respondents worked for organizations that contracted with agencies for services like janitorial work. Their views of these agencies were generally positive.

Advocates and academics offered a different perspective, and most were highly critical of congregate settings and non-integrated employment models. They all felt that subminimum wage is unethical, and voiced hope that it would end. If respondents from this group interacted directly with agencies that serve people with disabilities they did so as a partner or in a collaborative way.

#### A. Congregate Settings vs. Integrated Employment

##### 1. The Shift Toward Integrated Employment Is Underway

**The shift away from congregate settings and toward integrated work has started and will continue to grow in the next 5 to 10 years.**

As a whole, respondents view facility-based settings as declining in the next five to ten years, because of current policy and because of pressure both from people with disabilities and those who advocate for them. Additionally, many spoke to the need for training and innovation as agencies move away from congregate settings and towards community integration.

*“I think that is going to drive change in a way that nothing has in my lifetime. I think that agencies who before have not really sought and promoted competitive integrated employment are now doing that. Actually, one thing I haven’t talked about that is probably a need for someone to fill is giving training and technical assistance consultation to agencies who are making that transition. Moving from center-based employment from sheltered workshops to competitive, integrated employment.” (Academia)*

*“I would say [congregate settings] are definitely declining. I do a lot around transition for youth and young adults from school out into the workforce. When I look at the current families, they want the community integration. The kids have been in school with their peers. They’re moving towards like they don’t want this segregated setting or this workshop kind of thing. They’re looking at their kids’ strengths, opportunities and interests when they are younger, and trying to go this way. I would say they most certainly are going to be declining and continue to decline.” (Academia)*

*“... working towards community employment...it’s the general trend in the next five to ten years that I see; there are certain barriers to that but I think overall the philosophy is to move clearly into more community-based settings and more opportunities in the general workforce.” (Academia)*

*“Well specifically with regard to sheltered workshops, they are in the process of being disbanded. There is not really much that can be done to improve them, because they are closing. The major challenges with those kinds of settings is that people did not actually move out of them into jobs in the community. They were not really a temporary fix. They were not really a training program. What they were was the final placement. So, I’m not so sure that since they are in the process of*

*being closed that there is much more to be said about that. But the rest of them, again, are focused on getting people employment.” (Advocacy)*

*“...public policy and people with a disability are not being supportive of facility-based, if there is facility-based then I think it’s a case of folks that are looking for integrated places that excel in providing reasonable accommodations and access to people with a disability, but that are integrated so there are people without a disability employed there as well. The real push is for every place to provide that level of access; not to have special separate entities. I think they’re phasing out. I really do and I think that’s going to continue because there are just too many people with a disability that are thinking along those lines and a lot of professionals involved as well thinking that’s not real employment and that’s not sustainable forever. We want folks to be a part of society and society to recognize all of its folks.” (Advocacy)*

Respondents from the private sector were not that aware of current policy trends regarding the transition from workshops to integrated employment; however, when prompted for an opinion on the issue most of them spoke in favor of integration. For example, a respondent from a small private business said:

*“I definitely think it would be more beneficial for someone to be integrated and to be a part of the company and to be a part of everything that’s going on. I mean I would say that. Unless there is an individual that doesn’t particularly want to be integrated, I mean that’s a different story, but if they were wanting to be a part of the team and part of the company and part of the culture, then by all means I would definitely say it is more beneficial for the company and the disabled employee to be integrated.” (Small Private Business)*

### **Most oppose the special wage certificates that often go along with congregate work settings.**

*“...Our organization believes every individual should not be making anything less than minimum wage for whatever amount of time they’re putting into what they’re doing. With supported employment roles they’re not making minimum wage. The organizations that are working with people are making a whole lot of money and that’s a problem for me. I would like to see everybody making minimum wage, it may be that that person can only work a few hours, they can’t work a full day. Well, then they don’t work a few days. If a few hours is what works then you work a few hours. And you get paid the living wage that anybody else doing that job would get paid, not substandard employment.” (Advocacy)*

*“There are reasons why sheltered workshops have historically been a really poor path to the mainstream labor market... there’s historically been a very poor tie to actually placing people in the market. It’s more about, “Oh, it’s great to employ them,” and that becomes the focus rather than actually placing them in the market...in the mainstream labor market for real wages, not for ten cents an hour.” (Academia)*

*“There are states that have barred below minimum-wage wages for sheltered workshops, and that’s a really good thing for disability rights.” (Academia)*

## **2. Potential Barriers**

**The complexity and lack of flexibility in the system can have a chilling effect on innovative models of change.**

*“I think what’s hard is that there are so many restrictions of how some of the funds that are available are actually used. If funds [could be used] in a more creative way, I think that would make a huge difference. State agencies just don’t have business thinking. Businesses invest in a start-up for example...You try something because it’s new and innovative and it could lead to great things. Sometimes it works out and sometimes it doesn’t. If [state agencies] were more flexible, if they could cut through the red tape and would allow some of the things that currently are not doable because policy says so, I think would make it much easier and better for families too... But the complexity of the system, services, how you get services, how you have to apply, and what you have to do is so overwhelming for families. I’m sure a lot of times opportunities are missed because people simply don’t know that they could use the funds a certain way. We hear this all the time from families. I think that’s a huge issue that could be resolved.” (Academia)*

**Agencies will need to redirect funding from congregate setting so that strategies supporting integrated employment can be implemented.**

*“[Agencies should be] moving their funding from the more segregated day programs and workshops and really moving that funding into the community-based services so they can actually provide appropriate services that lead to community employment.” (Academia)*

**Work disincentives act as another barrier to change.**

A challenge to effective integration is the SSI disincentive to work.

*“We’ve had contracts for 20 years and we have the same people on there. I know with the Ability One program... the initial intent was to get the individuals in, get them trained, and get them to a competitive employment type environment, so they could be out in the world. But the federal contracts, I’ve seen people on there for 20-25 years and haven’t gone out to the commercial world, because they kind of like what they’re doing and they’re making a good buck. And still keeping their social security income, because you can only make so much ... they want to keep their SSI and still make a buck. It’s like folks on social security, the older generation, they want to keep their social security, but they can make so much money, so they get a part-time job.” (Public)*

**A potential barrier to full integration is some people’s preference for the status quo.**

Not all respondents felt that this transition would be smooth. One from the Public sector voiced concern about some individuals with disabilities being unwillingly uprooted by the current trends.

*“Now the big push is for competitive, integrated employment [but] there needs to be a place for everybody. I’ve gone out and talked to people in sheltered workshops and told them about options they have and that there is vocational rehabilitation they can work with, there is something for independent living that they can work with, departments of community mental health that they can work with if they want to change. What I find varies. Most everyone wants to stay right where they are. Change is difficult for everyone. While they might have the ability to change, they are standing up and giving their testimony that I worked here for seven years and this is my family, this is my life, this is what I like doing. I don’t want to change anything. In one sense, here is legislation that is telling you this isn’t acceptable, we need to move them out to*

*integrated employment, because this isn't integrated it's just all people with disabilities. Yet, when you've got people that this is all I've known and this is what I want, and it's scary to train or go outside of this, and I really don't want to do anything outside of this, well it's your choice. You make that choice. I think there is nothing wrong with offering people that opportunity to make a choice and do something different, but if they are perfectly fine with that, it fits with them and they don't want to make any of those changes, it's their life. Let them be the expert in their life. Why force the change." (Public)*

## **B. How Can Agencies Facilitate Hiring/Retention of the Disabled?**

### **1. Better Outreach to Employers**

**Agencies need to develop relationships with the business community, not only to raise awareness about accommodations but to make a better business case for hiring people with disabilities.**

*"I think what's critical is ongoing education and training support about reasonable accommodation issues. Basically awareness that I think will have a greater impact. Hopefully the continuing support of programs that educate business and public entities will continue that trend." (Advocacy)*

*"In some circumstances, referring to people with mental disabilities, the better you can facilitate those, the better outcomes as well, because people will have moments where their mental situation slips. Providing the leaders, whoever their reporting to, or their coworkers, to be more aware and thoughtful to when those moments might occur, and what that might look like, so that they can be helpful. It's like people with epilepsy, you really know there's a problem because they're on the floor having a seizure, people with diabetes might get a little shaky, but people with mental disabilities, you really have to be looking for different things. So I think just a good solid education of where problems might arise, and how they might deal with those, is really the key to success." (Large Private Business)*

*"I guess with larger corporations... if they are not willing to make accommodations in their hiring process and how they look at people, that is a huge barrier. That comes from educating employers and something that takes time." (Public)*

*"Develop really good quality relationships with the business community through membership and access, chambers of commerce and so on and so forth. Being there to listen to what they want. I think that's critically important." (Advocacy)*

*"Build relationships and connections with employers and different job sections so that people with disabilities can get whatever job they're good at and interested in, just like anybody else." (Academia)*

*"I think what would be helpful for them to be able to improve would be greater strategies to connect with possible employers, whether that is through the Chamber of Commerce or more time dedicated to job development." (Advocacy)*

*"It really takes the collaboration in getting information from both ends. The customer with the disability, what is their aspiration and what their goals are, and the part they are going to play in that, what their roles and responsibilities are in that. It's hearing from business where their needs are and what they are looking to get...we have to work smarter, not harder. If one entity tries to*

*be everything for that person we delude ourselves and we don't do the quality work that we need to do, and we serve less people than we are able to do.” (Public)*

## **2. Broad Collaborations Are Essential**

### **Integration requires buy-in not only from private industry but from the wider community as well.**

Respondents agreed that in order to have the greatest impact, buy-in is needed from all entities involved or to be involved in the ultimate goal of increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This includes not only businesses, but schools, agencies, advocacy groups, and government, as well as people with disabilities and their families.

*“You have to collaborate with everybody. Independent living, your rehab programs, businesses, schools, community colleges. It takes everybody at the table so you are looking for total inclusive environment to make that happen and definitely included is the customer with the disability because they are the ones making the informed choice. They are the ones who are the expert in their lives so we need to hear what their needs are, as well, to incorporate that into the picture.” (Public)*

*“I think it's really important to include disability studies programs. They're growing rapidly. There's a lot of interest. I think another one is people with disabilities really need to be involved, and it needs to not be able-bodied people doing things for people with disabilities. Just that. I think making sure that whatever programs there are have a really big voice and a lot of leadership from people with disabilities is really...that's the end goal, in any case. Yeah. I would say those two. And I think drawing on disability rights groups is also really important. And universal design people.” (Academia)*

*I do have one other thing that is an important component. We've been operating a demonstration project to help young adults to become employed and one of the big factors that we've run into is helping their families embrace this. A lot of them have worked very hard to get their adolescents enrolled in SSI and we've had to help them see why they would want to help their child now become employed and possibly move off SSI. So it's not just a matter of changing attitudes among business owners and employers, and among employment agencies, but it's also the individuals and family members as well that we have some work to do to change attitudes. (Academia)*

### **The goal of these collaborations should be employment and the full integration and inclusion of people with disabilities in the community.**

*“I think the goal ultimately is increased awareness, knowledge and capacity amongst employers to hire people with disabilities. Knowledge of where they can find employees, knowledge about what their responsibilities are to employees, what the level of burden really is in providing reasonable accommodation and understanding of the functional requirements of the jobs they have.” (Advocacy)*

*“We need to connect with individuals who are seeking employment, individuals who are in the communities. There needs to be more grassroots involvement to really say what are people thinking, what are people wanting. The other side of that is public officials. Rather than giving away tax breaks to companies coming in to give minimum wage jobs instead of meeting and*

*being part of that process to say how can we strengthen the quality of the employee pool and the labor force and therefore the businesses and then the tax base in our communities.” (Advocacy)*

### **3. Share Success Stories**

**Sharing success stories is a powerful way to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities.**

Respondents stress the importance of success stories to educate and break through negative perceptions and resistance. Success stories demonstrate results—and that is the language of business.

*“I think case studies are always very telling... when you have a spokesperson get up and say how their life has changed for the better because such and such company invested in them and hired them. I think it’s those success stories as an outreach and going to places where people with disabilities would go, like veterans and what have you. I mean, I just think the success stories are very powerful.” (Large Private Business)*

*“The major thing is telling success stories, whether it is giving data on productivity of people with disabilities or telling the individual success stories of what it has meant to an employer to have people with disabilities in their workforce. I think those of us in the disability field for too long have tried to promote employment by it being the altruistic thing to do. We’re not part of the business world. We don’t see things the way they do. I won’t say that altruism isn’t a factor for them, having a productive workforce, having people that meet their productivity needs is what drives them and the more we can speak their language, the more it will gain traction and help promote employment of people with disabilities.” (Academia)*

### **4. Demystify Hiring the Disabled**

**Employers need to understand that people with disabilities are just like everyone else.**

This theme emerged in all subgroups. Many respondents remarked that most people will eventually become disabled as they age. An academic respondent pointed out that people with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the US, and it is “the only minority group that everyone can join.” Ultimately, people with disabilities should be seen by employers for their abilities and not their disabilities.

*“I think the major thing is to understand that people with disabilities are like everyone else. They have various strengths and weaknesses, but to be able to see past the disability. So often when we look at a potential employee with a disability we only see the disability and we don’t see all the abilities and the motivation to work and the joy that may come from having employment. One of the big things I’ve heard from several employers is that when they have employed people with disabilities that their attitude is contagious, that it improves the overall worker morale. That is no small factor for them.” (Academia)*

**Employers need to understand that it isn’t difficult to hire people with disabilities, and that accommodations need to be demystified.**

There was consensus across all groups that hiring people with disabilities is a good thing and should be encouraged. Everyone agreed that employers should be required to make necessary accommodations for people with disabilities. There was also agreement, especially by Academic and Advocacy respondents, that businesses need to be educated about accommodations, in terms of what their responsibilities and requirements are.

*"I think employers really need to understand that it's not that complicated to hire people with disabilities. I think there's a real fear. I don't know where it comes from, but I think there's a big misunderstanding of how many accommodations you need to provide and/or how challenging it is to have somebody who has an intellectual disability as part of your staff..." (Academia)*

**Work to change negative attitudes that employers may have about employing people with disabilities.**

*"Changing attitudes of employers might be number one, number two and number three. I'll put that as number one with a bullet." (Academia)*

**5. Better Training and Support for Agency Staff**

**Agency staff needs to be aligned with the concept and goal of integrated employment, and needs better training and support in implementing best practices. Additionally, staff members should be better educated, and better paid.**

This theme emerged in the advocate and academia groups. There was general agreement that the staff members at disability employment support agencies are undereducated, ill informed, and poorly paid. Without good staff these agencies can not properly support people with disabilities.

*"... much more training is needed for direct support professionals, the pay needs to increase, and the value of the job itself needs to increase. When I look at this, I think people with disabilities can only be successful if they get the same training, knowledge, and skills like anybody else so they are competitive in the market. However, right now in terms of their teachers, the people who help them, those teachers don't have the same knowledge and skills to help them get that training. I think the direct support workforce really needs a lot more training on what's best practice in terms of effectively and efficiently helping people with disabilities gain the skills they need to be competitive in the market. I don't think we do a good job with that. we might have training modules that people can take online or we may do a workshop here or a workshop there or maybe we even have a daylong training program; but what we're really not doing I think or not doing a good job of is investing in that whole field. Looking at what is best practice. And then using that best practice to train people who support people with disabilities and valuing their jobs. That position is really like the most important position. That transition from school to workforce or school to college and having the right support, I think is where we need to do a lot more." (Academia)*

*"Number one is training of their workforce. By training, I mean real training. Best practice. Investment in the training. Not just telling them to "take this online module." (Advocacy)*

*"I think if they have access to evidence to the data on trends: economic trends, employment trends... that would help them in making some choices about training programs. I think what would be helpful for them to be able to improve would be greater strategies to connect with possible employers, whether that is through the Chamber of Commerce or more time dedicated to job development. Again, it comes down to money and resources. Do they have the resources to do that?" (Advocacy)*

*"Training of their staff...firing the staff that is not on board with how things are going. Implementing best practices and investing in that training and in the best practices, to move towards...community employment... I think there are lots of opportunities for them to think outside the box and be creative. I also think for people who are having a harder time either*

*finding employment, holding employment, or having a hard time figuring out what their interests are, or how to best support them, I think doing smaller pilots and looking at innovative models from around the country are all ways in which the current service providers should look and move.” (Academia)*

**Stay abreast of new technologies that can help people with disabilities.**

*“...constant education and awareness of staff and technology, assistive technology again being plugged in and having those collaborations with assistive technology folks to say what’s happening in...what’s available for accommodations, what’s doable, what’s useable, what helps people in terms of communication.” (Advocacy)*

**6. Emphasize Individual Capabilities and the Specific Needs of the Job**

**Match the skill set and interest of the individual with the job.**

The disabled employee is as unique as their able-bodied counterparts. Successful job placement will benefit from agencies identifying individual talents, abilities, and interests, and providing “best fit” scenarios for each candidate.

*“So it’s, again, going back to putting the right individual with the right slot. You have to assess their capabilities, and make sure that you select the right individual for that right position. And that would be in any [situation], whether it’s a person with disabilities or a person with non-disabilities. You’ve got to make sure you’ve got the right person doing the right job, and that sometimes is a task within itself, depending on the pool of people you’re pulling from.” (Public)*

*“...filling people in where they are passionate rather than just trying to find someone a job that they are able to take. I think that would be the most beneficial.” (Small-Medium Private Business)*

*“...using motivational interviewing as a standard technique is I believe helpful for individuals to find their way, not an overlay, or checkbox system of what we won’t do for you, or to you, but really having that time and this is usually a time issue of being able to explore with somebody where they really are at in terms of their thoughts about employment and what they want.” (Advocacy)*

**Employers should look at the outcomes of work and not the process of work.**

Academics and Advocates were concerned with the perception from employers that an employee needs to be able to do everything. Employers should look at what they want a worker to accomplish, not the process they think needs to be used in order to accomplish this goal. They need to think outside of the box and use creative ways to utilize the different skills offered by people with disabilities.

*“What I will say is true and I keep hammering this home... it’s an understanding of the functional needs of the jobs. You know, if the job doesn’t actually require hearing something to be successful, then there’s no reason not to be open to be hiring someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.” (Advocacy)*

**People with disabilities should be hired because of their abilities, and they should be promoted to businesses and organizations as productive employees.**

*"[Businesses] hire based on ability. They are not hiring out of benevolence, they are not hiring to gain an incentive, they are hiring a person based on their ability to do the work because they have the knowledge, skills and ability to do that job. When they are looking for qualified candidates, you hire a person who is qualified and you treat them the same as you treat everyone else. You give them the support required to get the job done." (Public)*

**7. Continue to Provide Support After Job Placement**

**Agencies need to offer support to people with disabilities even after they have been placed in employment positions.**

There was widespread agreement, especially for advocates and academics, that agencies need to continue to offer support to persons with disabilities after they have a job. This support can take many forms, like offering transportation and continuing to offer coaching and counseling to people once they are placed in employment.

*"Again, I think any good program integrating people with disabilities into another organization, it's that monitoring piece: providing good information, checking in periodically, working to resolve problems that come up... Even with our on-site group here, the younger people I was speaking of, I think that partnership is really key in the beginning because, again, you've got an individual that may not fit perfectly into the system, that the more you can resolve problems and issues that come up, the better." (Large Private Business)*

*"...sometimes there is a little bit of this old philosophy of "once we find a job that's it." The person can do the job and they're doing the job well. Instead of looking at strengths and opportunities and looking at are there future opportunities to develop further?... I think that sometimes it's still not done mostly because of time and funding." (Academia)*

*"[It is important that agencies are] prepared to support people who need support in the interoffice relationships, social skills, dealing with frustrations on the job, and that sort of thing." (Academia)*

*"Working and succeeding in a career isn't just about getting the job and the job skills. It's about the rest of your life. Do you have transportation? Is your housing adequate? How is your health care?" (Advocacy)*

*"Maybe even partnering, once you have somebody that's employed, helping them to continue to develop skills that will keep them employed. That might be the silver bullet right there, we've got somebody who is employed, how do we keep them employed? We go check on them periodically, once a month, and we work out with their employer to give them additional... I'm just trying to think realistically what would help. Maybe change training." (Large Private Business)*

**8. The Disabled Should Be Part of Agency Staff**

**Some felt employment service agencies need representation by people with disabilities on their staff.**

*"I probably would start by having people with disabilities as part of the staff of that agency. I think for too long we have tried to do things for people with disabilities that we need to model what we're promoting." (Academia)*

## 4. Conclusion

While the backgrounds of respondents varied widely, there was agreement on many key issues.

Respondents from all subgroups view the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce and wider community positively.

There is widespread consensus that entities serving people with disabilities need broad collaborations to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Buy-in is needed not only from businesses, but from all stakeholders connected to the ultimate goal of increasing employment opportunities for the disabled. This includes family, schools, agencies, advocacy groups, the community, and government.

Sharing success stories to demystify accommodations and enhance buy-in from stakeholders, and identifying individual skills and interests for “best fit” insights for potential employers are suggested as potent strategies to accelerate the pace of change toward integrated employment.

Most respondents believe that technology is ending many jobs that in the past could be performed by people with disabilities; however, technology’s positive impacts, through improved accommodations and assistive technology, will ultimately outweigh its negative impacts.

Early and ongoing education and training is essential for people with disabilities. Support should continue even after placement in the workforce.

Training is also critical for the people who work for the agencies that serve them. Employment services agencies that want to succeed in the future need to educate their own staff members about trends in the field and assistive technologies so that they are better able to serve the needs of people with disabilities.

Finally, a major deterrent to the goal of integrated employment is current policy around SSI/SSDI benefits. Work disincentives need to be eliminated or mitigated so that fear of losing benefits doesn’t eclipse the pursuit of rewarding work.

## **Appendix B: Discussion Guide**

## In-Depth Interview Discussion Guide

(ALL) For the purposes of this study disability is defined as: (READ)

- a. **People who became disabled as adults.** These could be physical disabilities, health issues like cancer, or mental health issues.
- b. **Intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).** These are disabilities acquired before age 21, including people with intellectual disabilities or autism, but also people with cerebral palsy, spinal bifida and physical injuries that happened in childhood.
- c. **Deaf or hard of hearing.**

### I. Positives and Challenges of Employing People With Disabilities

1. (ALL) For the purposes of this study disability is defined as: (READ)

- a. **People who became disabled as adults.** These could be physical disabilities, health issues like cancer, or mental health issues. Please talk about those with mental health issues and other disabilities separately.
- b. **Intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).** These are disabilities acquired before age 21, including people with intellectual disabilities or autism, but also people with cerebral palsy, spinal bifida and physical injuries that happened in childhood.
- c. **Deaf or hard of hearing.**

2. (ALL) What experience do you [or your company] (for business) have with people with these kinds of disabilities as employees or in other aspects of your life?

*INTERVIEWER: No need to break out specifically by subgroups; let them answer per their experience/opinions*

3. (ALL) Think of people with disabilities as potential employees. How would you describe the people with disabilities that [you would potentially hire] (for businesses) /[businesses would potentially hire] (for advocates/academics/public sector)? In other words:

PROBE:

- a. (ALL) What kinds of jobs do you see them taking [in your company] (for business) now or in the future?
- b. (ALL) What special talents or positive attributes would people with disabilities bring to [your company] (for business) [a company] (for advocates/academics/public sector)

### II. **Skills Needed To Compete In The Future/Opportunities And Threats Posed By Technology**

(ALL) Think about the direction [for your field] (for business)/[for industry] (for advocates/academics/ public sector) in the next five to ten years.

1. (ALL) What factors and trends do you see affecting future employment opportunities for people with disabilities? Which ones will have a positive effect? A negative effect?
2. (ALL) In five to ten years from now, what new opportunities and work environments will exist?
3. (ALL) (For Business): How do you see technology impacting your industry and firm now and in the future? (For advocates/academics/public sector): How do you see technology impacting employment in the future?
  - a. How would that impact people with disabilities as potential employees? PROBE for positive and negative impacts.
  - b. Would automation create new jobs? Could people with various kinds of disabilities perform these new jobs?
4. (ALL) What would you suggest that those providing education, training and support to people with disabilities do to ensure that they have skills needed for these future jobs?
5. (BUSINESS) Some businesses actively pursue an inclusive hiring strategy to include people with disabilities. Does your organization employ any such strategies?
  - a. (IF YES-BUSINESS) What strategies do you use? How successful are these strategies?
  - b. (IF YES-BUSINESS) What accommodations do you offer to potential employees with disabilities?

### III. What Should Disability Employment Services Agencies Be Doing Right Now To Prepare For The Future?

*(INTERVIEWER: These agencies tend to offer a variety of services for the disabled: for example, some employment, skills development, job placement and/or activities at their facilities during the day. Some of them are pure employment agencies or employers - particularly for those doing big contracts for grounds work, cleaning, or call centers, but most of the others are really a mix of service and employment.)*

1. (BUSINESS) Does your company have experience working with companies that facilitate employment for people with disabilities? Some of these agencies host sheltered workshops or sponsor work crews. Others don't and may instead provide training or other activities for people with disabilities. (Have you contracted with disability services agencies that fulfill contracts through either services at their facility or work crews?)
  - a. (IF YES-BUSINESS) What was your experience working with those agencies? (PROBE for Positive/Negative)
2. (ALL) Given your experience with or knowledge of disability employment agencies or firms that offer in-house services that employ people with disabilities:
  - a. How do their services facilitate hiring, retention and employee functioning on the job?
  - b. Are there any aspects of their services would you think should be done differently or better?
  - c. Do you see this type of employment growing or declining in the next 5-10 years? Why?
3. (ALL) What would you suggest disability employment agencies do now to prepare for the future? PROBE: How can these agencies and the disability community better market people with disabilities as a viable, skilled and reliable workforce?

4. (ALL) What do public and private sector employers need to understand in order to foster employment opportunities for people with disabilities?

**IV. Other Collaboration Opportunities For Creating Greater Impact**

*(Interviewer: Pointed toward employment, advocacy, supportive policies – business relationships as well as focus on public/social sector actors)*

1. (BUSINESS) Does your firm collaborate with your state’s vocational rehabilitation agency, or other government entities that serve people with disabilities?
  - a. (IF YES-BUSINESS) What is your experience with these collaborations?
  - b. (IF YES-BUSINESS) What could improve these collaborations to enhance employment for people with disabilities and better serve your business?
2. (ALL) Who do you think should be involved in collaborations between business and entities serving people with disabilities to improve employment and enhance people with disabilities’ contribution to your company?
  - a. What should be the goal of these collaborations?

**V. How Does The Disability Employment Services Agency Of The Future Remain Sustainable And Relevant In Providing Employment Opportunities?**

1. (ALL) Think about an ideal disabilities employment services agency. How would it be organized and what services would it provide to meet business needs now and in the future?  
PROBE:
  - a. In terms of how these agencies might need to change to meet current and upcoming employment needs, what are the 3 most important things a disabilities employment services agency needs to do right now to prepare for the future?
2. (ALL) Federal rules and industry standards in disability services are moving away from facility-based employment and toward individualized jobs in the community:
  - a. (For businesses) Do you see this trend changing how you (or businesses in general) work with disabilities employment services agencies? How?
  - b. (For advocates/academics/public sector) Do you see this trend changing the field? In particular, how it will affect agencies, or individuals, primarily offering, or employed through, facility-based employment or work crews?
3. (ALL) What types of skills and expertise will disabilities employment services agencies need to develop to assist people with disabilities find and keep employment?

IF THERE IS TIME:

**How long do you think it will take for federal rules and policy changes to be enacted in order to see substantive changes in the area of employment of the disabled?**