# LEAD Center Logo

# MAKING COLLABORATION REAL

***Building a Progressive Vision for a Policy and Service Delivery Framework that Promotes the Effective Leveraging of Resources to Improve Employment & Socioeconomic Advancement of Youth and Adults with Disabilities***

**Summary of the National LEAD Center’s First Annual National Policy Roundtable**

**July 17-18, 2013**

*Lisa Mills, Michael Morris*

**Making Collaboration Real:**

Building a Progressive Vision for a Policy and Service Delivery Framework that Promotes the Effective Leveraging of Resources to Improve Employment & Socioeconomic Advancement of Youth and Adults with Disabilities

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**LEAD Center’s First Annual National Policy Roundtable**

**to Improve Employment and Economic Status**

 **of Individuals with Disabilities**

## Background

On July 17 and 18, 2013, the National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities (LEAD Center) hosted their first annual Policy Roundtable in Washington, DC that brought together Federal agency leaders, state and local agency policymakers and practitioners, and subject matter experts on cross system collaboration. Funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) of the US Department of Labor, the core mission of the LEAD Center is to accelerate sustainable individual- and system-level change that advances employment and economic mobility for youth and adults with disabilities.

The purpose of the Roundtable was to build a progressive vision that promotes the effective leveraging of resources across multiple systems to improve employment and socioeconomic advancement of individuals with disabilities. The current national approach involves various agencies administering multiple funding streams at a Federal, state, and local level. Each service delivery system was created in response to varying public policy priorities and is governed by separate Federal statutes and regulations. Each system has a specific set of rules to determine eligibility for services and support, define scope of services, and allocate resources. No single source of funding or resource is able to respond effectively to all the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities, who often face multiple barriers to employment and economic advancement. The complexities created by the current fragmented approach hinder the nation’s ability to meaningfully improve the integrated employment rate of working-age Americans with disabilities.

In the last decade, the Federal government has sponsored numerous efforts to improve cost-sharing strategies among systems and strengthen coordination of public funding across service delivery systems. Two concepts, “blending” and “braiding”, have been designed to use resources in more coordinated and flexible ways.

**Blended funding** occurs when dollars from multiple funding streams are combined to create a single “pot” of dollars that is then used to purchase one or more specific services that support an individual with a disability in pursuing, obtaining or maintaining integrated employment.

**Braided funding** occurs when multiple funding streams separately and simultaneously, purchase and provide specific services that support an individual with a disability in pursuing, obtaining or maintaining integrated employment.

ODEP and the LEAD Center set three objectives for the first annual Policy Roundtable:

* Increase understanding of effective strategies for cross-system collaboration and blending and/or braiding resources;
* Identify policy and practice options with government at all levels to overcome barriers to blending and/or braiding of resources;
* Develop recommendations for government to increase scalability of effective practices and accelerate individual and systems change.

In preparation for the event, LEAD Center and ODEP staff identified innovators in service delivery and government leaders at multiple levels to be invited to the Roundtable. A draft working paper was developed to outline key themes, offer select examples of promising practices, identify common elements of approach and challenges to replication, and propose an initial framework to discuss policy options to accelerate knowledge translation and systems change. Fact sheets were developed to compliment the background paper and an agenda was crafted to optimize group discussion to capture the diversity of perspectives from public and private sector participants. (See Appendices for Background Paper and Fact Sheets.)

The two-day Roundtable brought together Federal Agency leaders and high level staff from the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and ODEP of the US Department of Labor, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) of the US Department of Education, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and Administration for Community Living (ACL) from the US Department of Health and Human Services, the Social Security Administration, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, National Council on Disability, and the US Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development. Federal agency representatives were joined by twenty subject matter experts (SMEs) who shared their experiences with integrating public resources through blending, and/or braiding strategies at a state and community level. (See Appendices for Agenda and Participants List.)

The agenda opened with Lisa Mills and Madeleine Will, two of the principal authors of the Roundtable background paper, providing a framework for group discussion with a summary of their findings regarding the challenges identified from multiple case studies and their common elements of success with blending and/or braiding public resources to achieve employment outcomes for youth and adults across a spectrum of disabilities.

In the afternoon of the first day of the Roundtable, participants were divided into three smaller groups to develop policy recommendations to accelerate positive changes at all levels of government that embrace blending and/or braiding resources as an effective strategy to meet individual needs and improve valued-results.

On the morning of the second day after opening remarks from Assistant Secretary of ODEP Kathy Martinez and a summation by LEAD Center Director Michael Morris of the prior day’s discussion and policy recommendations, a Federal agency reactor panel featured the following government officials:

* Kim Vitelli, Chief of the Division of National Programs, Tools, and Technical Assistance, Employment and Training Administration;
* Sharon Lewis, Commissioner of the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities;
* Ralph Lollar, Director of the Division of Long Term Services & Supports, Disability & Elderly Public Health Group, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; and
* Sue Swenson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office on Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, US Department of Education.

The Roundtable closing presentation featured a facilitated policy discussion by Michael Morris, who summarized the comments from the Federal reactor panel and ensuing group discussion.

## Challenges Identified

The myriad of disability-focused programs funded primarily by the Federal government currently have no centralized consensus-based strategy to support individuals with disabilities to become economically self-sufficient. Historical assumptions that people with disabilities will be unemployed and without the capacity to generate income permeates outdated public policy, system practices and service models. Increasing competition for reduced public resources at a national, state, and community level provides the opportunity to update and re-engineer the delivery of services and supports to youth and adults with disabilities that prioritize public investment in achievement of integrated employment outcomes and pathways to greater economic stability and security.

Few Federal programs reward or incentivize cross-system collaboration efforts or evaluate performance based on an integrated service delivery model. The examination of rules and guidance from multiple Federal agencies [Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Employment and Training Administration (ETA)] reveal restrictions as “payer of last resort” that is inconsistent with a resource coordination and cost-sharing approach that is needed. State and community-level administrators and practitioners indicate that current regulations from multiple Federal programs are interpreted as prohibiting or significantly restricting the blending and/or braiding of individual funding streams. They cite examples of auditors from Federal agencies interpreting regulations in ways that sharply inhibit the blending and braiding of resources that is necessary to serve individuals with disabilities in a comprehensive and seamless way. The result is a hiding of innovative strategies at a local level to braid or blend resources which adds to the challenges of sustaining effective practices and taking them to scale.

Yet despite these challenges, there are limited yet promising efforts at a state and local level to integrate service delivery with the cooperation of multiple systems to blend and/or braid resources to support job seekers with disabilities. These system change efforts translate into significant improvements in the employment and socioeconomic advancement of individuals with disabilities in the areas where these efforts are being undertaken.

## Common Elements of Case Examples

In a post-ADA environment, a number of innovative service delivery strategies have been developed to increase employment outcomes and asset development for youth and adults with disabilities. These include Customized Employment, Individualized Supported Employment, a Transition Service Integration Model (seamless transition), Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship and the use of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). These strategies have enabled people with a wide range of disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, to work and increase income. What these and other contemporary practices have in common is an acknowledged need for resource and service coordination across multiple funders and systems.

The Workforce Investment system is a unique example of statutory authority that mandates partnership and collaboration. In 23 states with additional support of Disability Resource Coordinators, structures and processes are being tested to improve cross system resource integration and collaborative decision-making. The Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) is just one of multiple examples of efforts underway to braid and/or blend resources to bring innovative and effective practices to scale.

In case examples analyzed from New York, California, Delaware, and Maryland presented at the Policy Roundtable, common elements of success included:

* a leadership commitment to ensure frontline staff are empowered to commit resources as part of a comprehensive approach to cost-sharing;
* an alignment of values and high expectations across systems to do what it takes to achieve integrated employment outcomes;
* collaboration with a commitment to cost-sharing rather than cost-shifting;
* the commitment of funders and providers to implement effective operational changes which accelerated eligibility determinations across systems;
* the flexible provision of needed services for individuals within and outside the workplace; and
* shared outcomes supported by collaborative data collection and performance measurement.

Blending and/or braiding multiple funding streams offered systems a way to fund activities outside of the specific limits of categorical programs, resulting in more efficient use of limited resources as agencies work together to overcome barriers and eliminate duplication, and offered a method to meet the range of job seekers’ needs that any single funder could not effectively respond to alone. The case examples demonstrated as well the value and cost-effectiveness of bridging resources from disability-specific systems with other “generic” systems.

## Building a Roadmap

Roundtable participants were challenged to answer two questions:

* “**Why aren’t these practices more common?”, and**
* “**What will it take to replicate and sustain these promising practices?**”

Nationally, there is a lack of clarity about who is primarily responsible to initiate efforts at a community level to lead across systems. Many professionals in the various systems lack the time and expertise to identify the full range of available community resources, navigate complex eligibility rules and procedures, and establish and sustain an Integrated Resource Team around an individual. There is the added challenge of inconsistent performance requirements across systems that deny the opportunity to share both the cost and credit for valued outcomes. Finally, the fragmented service delivery systems challenges the job seeker with disabilities, making it difficult to navigate and understand the requirements of each service delivery system (VR, Workforce Development, Medicaid, Social Security, Education, Transportation) and how one could expect each of these systems to work together to respond to individual needs related to employment and economic advancement.

Roundtable participants were asked to build a roadmap to take successful models of blending and/or braiding resources to scale. Such a roadmap must take into account the differences in needs and objectives of the individual job seeker with a disability as contrasted with the service delivery systems. From both individual and system perspectives, a roadmap must have a foundation of a common set of values and vision that is person-centered and outcome-driven to advance economic stability and mobility with active participation in the mainstream for youth and adults with disabilities. Such an approach must consider five essential elements of design: **structure, process, technology, capacity, and accountability**.

From an individual lens, Roundtable participants identified the need for the structure of the system to have no wrong door point of entry, streamlined and simultaneous eligibility determinations, one plan across systems, and a lead point of contact to help navigate and lead cross-system coordination of planning, resources and services. Regarding process, there was strong support for making the process far simpler for the end user with more flexibility, stronger access to effective practices that lead to employment and economic advancement, and more control for the individual. Overall there must be shared accountability, shared responsibility, and shared outcomes among systems engaged and the job seeker with disabilities.

From a systems lens, Roundtable participants suggested that there must be agreements across public funders on common definitions for services and supports, shared data access, and shared performance measures. Multiple individual program plans should be replaced by, or at minimum result in, one plan for the individual delineating how each system is participating in supporting the implementation of the comprehensive plan that moves away from any system being a payer of last resort. The common objective must involve adoption of a conceptual foundation that assumes employment is not the end goal. It is a means to a better future that ensures individuals with disabilities embrace - at a young age -the development of financial capability skills that will help advance economic stability and mobility. Roundtable participants concluded that if we want programs to work together, then we must do more to let the money work together. There is a critical need for all partners to embrace blending and/or braiding strategies as an acceptable, and indeed essential, approach to achieve common objectives. The need for cost-sharing strategies must focus not only on employment but all of the wrap-around supports that make employment possible (e.g., housing, transportation, health care). Efforts to convey leadership support for blending and/or braiding can be enhanced through publicizing positive examples at Federal, state and local levels. To stimulate scaling and replication, updating and expanding guidance to the field (i.e., state and local policymakers and providers) will provide a comfort zone that diminishes the need to hide or limit cross-system innovation.

## Work Group Recommendations

Roundtable participants were divided into three smaller groups to further develop the policy and practice roadmap. Each work ground focused on a different level of government action: local, state and Federal. All three groups were asked to explore the same three areas of focus: (1) create incentives in policy and/or practice to promote resource blending and/or braiding across systems; (2) recommend options to overcome policy barriers that discourage resource blending and/or braiding; and (3) identify professional development and continuing education needed for government staff to ensure scalability of effective practices. After the Roundtable, organizers further reviewed the notes from the workgroups and the entire two-day event and organized Federal level recommendations to identify both cross-agency actions and individual Federal agency actions that would be helpful in advancing resource blending and/or braiding across systems.

### Local Government Recommendations

#### Create Incentives for Blending/Braiding of Resources

1. Create shared, collective responsibility across agencies to bring effective blending/braiding practices to scale through additional funding based on improved outcomes.
2. Promote the collective provision of long-term supports beyond employment to ensure holistic service provision and wrap-around supports with additional Federal funds that support Integrated Resource Teams (IRTs) being piloted in the ETA-ODEP Disability Employment Initiative (DEI).
3. Establish metrics and a system of measurement that rewards local communities with bonus funds from an innovation pool for implementing blending and/or braiding of public resource strategies with no wrong door point of entry, one individual program plan across systems, and option of individual person-centered self-directed budgets.
4. Educate local entities and providers about the Federal legislative/regulatory incentives that can be leveraged in support of blending/braiding of resources.

#### Overcoming Policy Barriers

1. Increase the outcome value for targeted/hard-to-serve populations that achieve standardized performance measures.
2. Discontinue the “use it or lose it” approach of no carry-over of public funds to the next fiscal year to encourage and reward cross-system financial and programmatic efficiencies achieved from blending and/or braiding resources.

#### Focus on Professional Development

1. Develop standardized training requirements to build core competencies to utilize blending and/or braiding resource strategies to achieve improved integrated employment and economic status.
2. Provide cross-systems training covering systems process, best practices and partnering strategies.
3. Ensure key staff and administrators (fiscal and programmatic) are equipped with standardized knowledge and tools to effectively blend and/or braid resources across systems.

### State Government Recommendations

#### Create Incentives for Blending/Braiding of Resources

1. Create financial incentives that prioritize and promote integrated employment and advance economic self-sufficiency across systems.
2. Have common performance measures across systems for common customers.
3. Promote leveraging/pooling of resources across state systems to address common “functional” challenges (transportation, benefits planning, case management).
4. Set aside an innovation fund at a Governor’s level to reward state systems and communities that demonstrate effective blending and/or braiding of resources to achieve integrated employment and economic advancement outcomes for youth and adults with disabilities.

#### Overcoming Policy Barriers

1. Catalogue all existing state policies and practices to facilitate blending and braiding in order to share strategies across systems within the state and make available to other states.
2. Request universal state guidance regarding payer of last resort and ability to fund key components of effective services across systems.
3. Align fiscal monitoring and programmatic implementation to validate innovations in program design and cohesive policies.

#### Focus on Professional Development

1. Increase and consolidate training and capacity-building efforts on work incentives and employment innovation.
2. Focus on training and continuing education for state agency directors and senior management to be part of leadership academies to build core skills and investment in cross system collaboration and blending and/or bundling resource strategies to achieve valued employment and economic outcomes.
3. Provide seed grants to create shared agenda between state and local agencies and other relevant private stakeholders.
4. Incentivize budgeting for staff development and joint professional training across state systems.

### Federal Government Recommendations

#### Create Incentives for Blending/Braiding of Resources

Cross-Agency Recommendations:

1. Adopt consistent view on business case for, integrated, coordinated service delivery through blending and/or braiding resources to cost-effectively leverage public systems and funding streams in empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve a career, economic self-sufficiency and all of the related benefits that come with these achievements.
	1. Convey consistent view to state and local partners though joint communication that clearly addresses the question of ***why*** partners at all levels should prioritize the development and implementation of coordinated policies and practices which result in blending and/or braiding of services and resources to benefit individuals with disabilities who are eligible for assistance from two or more publicly funded programs designed, in part or in whole, to advance employment and economic self-sufficiency.
	2. Create a clear understanding in the field regarding various benefits to individual systems and programs that accrue through leveraging involvement and investment from other systems in serving common customers through a blending and/or braiding approach.
	3. Define common principles that should characterize the individual user’s experience, regardless of how they enter, ensuring an approach that assumes ***no wrong door*** and a process map that demonstrates how entry through each system can still result in integrated, coordinated service delivery and resource allocation.
	4. Utilize a core set of common terms and definitions across systems, including terms like blending and/or braiding.
2. Build in extra points/credit for the incorporation of blending/braiding strategies within discretionary/formula grant review processes.
3. Combine grant/contract funding across multiple agencies and Federal Departments to accelerate adoption of blending and/or braiding of resources with needed changes in structure, process, technology, capacity building and performance measurement and shared credit for valued outcomes.
4. Explore/determine how an individual self-directed portfolio approach could be used which would establish multiple program accounts (to ensure funding from individual programs/systems can be separately accounted for) within an umbrella portfolio managed and directed by the individual with a disability with assistance from a navigator/support broker.
5. Offer Federal funding to states and communities who establish disability-specific points of contact to serve as key conduits to blending/braiding strategies and cross-system participation.
6. Test various waiver approaches/authorities to promote blending/braiding across systems.

#### Overcoming Policy Barriers

Cross-Agency Recommendations:

1. Release updated and/or expanded guidance (or re-release existing guidance if sufficient) to address critical areas of concern to state and local partners administering federal funding and seeking to increase integrated service delivery and resource allocation through blending and/or braiding.
	1. Provide updated or expanded guidance on how *payer of last resort* regulations[[1]](#footnote-1) can be complied with while blending and/or braiding of services and resources is accomplished.
	2. Provide updated or expanded guidance on how multiple systems and programs can simultaneously enroll an individual with a disability, subsequently serve that individual through an integrated approach that involves blending and/or braiding of services and resources, and ultimately share the ability to count that individual in performance data when a successful outcome is achieved.
	3. Include approved examples of working models (either real or conceptual) to stimulate implementation at state and local levels.
2. Include blending/braiding requirements within agency performance/GPRA goals and standards.
3. Draft, for the White House to consider, an Executive Order to create a time-limited cross agency working group on the blending/braiding of resources with dedicated staff support to improve career-track employment and economic self-sufficiency pathways for individuals with disabilities.
4. Establish a portal on the LEAD Center website to serve as a Clearinghouse and Resource Center for identified statutory language, regulations and guidance across public funders and systems at a federal level that allow and/or promote blending and/braiding strategies.

#### Focus on Professional Development

Cross-Agency Recommendations:

1. To maximize effective implementation of existing, updated and/or expanded guidance, establish cross-agency effort to support the development of the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs) in direct service staff across systems (e.g. HCBS case manager/broker, VR counselor, WIA case manager and Disability Resource Coordinator, special education local educational agency (LEA) representative) in order to ensure the implementation of blending and/or braiding at the individual level. Also focus education on key state officials and system/program oversight boards.
2. Undertake efforts to increase alignment between program and audit personnel within each federal agency to ensure progressive practices being expected and encouraged by agency program staff are understood and supported by audit personnel.
3. Add to Senior Executive Services (SES) staff training and continuing education on effective blending and/or braiding strategies as part of leadership development.

## Policy Summit Reactor Panel

On the second day of the Roundtable, a four-member panel of Federal leaders from the Employment and Training Administration of the US Department of Labor, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Administration on Community Living of the US Department of Health and Human Services, and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services reacted to the issues and recommendations presented. There was general agreement from the panel members that current rules and guidance across systems are more flexible in allowing blending and/or braiding of public resources than understood by state decision-makers. The panelists encouraged Roundtable participants to work with the Federal agency senior management and ask for guidance and further explanation of existing rules. On the issue of understanding customer needs, panelists urged participants to move beyond the suburban ring to learn more about the diversity of our audience with different needs and expectations with poverty, an overwhelming challenge. More market research is needed so that government redesigns solutions that take into context individual needs and environmental challenges. No wrong door point of entry, a more streamlined process that brings to the table for person-centered planning, better collaboration across systems with the integration of multiple public resources to provide supports for employment outcomes were all reaffirmed as common objectives. However, the panel members cautioned that accountability requires auditors to be able to clearly follow their stream of funding to protect against waste and fraud. Separate system auditing processes are a barrier to cross-systems resource coordination at a local/state level.

The Panelists echoed a core theme of attention to shared responsibility. There is government and systems responsibility to improve outcomes. There is a tension in points between the individual (whose focus is to maximize freedom) and for the government (whose focus is to minimize expenditures). With more spending, there are more rules, more controls, and more complexity. The individual shares with government responsibility to identify the pathway that advances self-sufficiency, and simultaneously explore options for leveraging private as well as public resources. More needs to be done to identify and disseminate the rules and guidance from agencies that promote flexibility and the blending and/or braiding of resources. State and community examples of promising practices need to be elevated, acknowledged, scaled, and rewarded as opposed to hidden, penalized, or discouraged. Innovation funds could be used to support the development and replication of innovative strategies and promising practices.

A final theme echoed by panel members was the opportunities available and emerging from technology. Cloud based systems can store electronic individual records and make it easier for multiple systems to access needed data, target rather than duplicate spending, and better track performance results from blended and/or braided funding. Technology would enhance use of common assessment tools and make it easier to have one plan for supports and services for customers being served by multiple systems. Finally, technology based distance learning could facilitate cross system training and continuing education that embraces blending/ braiding promising practices as a part of needed core competencies at a leadership and frontline levels.

### Call to Action

Assistant Secretary for ODEP, Kathy Martinez pledged to utilize the recommendations from the first annual LEAD Center Policy Roundtable to engage other Federal agencies in a coordinated effort to improve integrated employment outcomes and economic advancement of youth and adults with disabilities. More can be done that embraces and promotes blending and/or braiding of resources to more effectively and efficiently respond to individual needs and meet common system performance requirements. In formula and discretionary grants, affirmative action and documentation of cross system collaboration to effectively integrate resources on an individual basis to achieve integrated employment and economic empowerment goals can become the norm across agencies.

The LEAD Center will work collaboratively with Assistant Secretary Martinez and ODEP staff to develop specific action-oriented strategies that will be presented by ODEP to other Federal agencies (ACL, CFPB, CMS, ETA, HUD, OSERS, SSA, Transportation, and others) to promote the implementation of the recommendations that evolved from the LEAD Policy Roundtable.

As part of this process, the LEAD Center will establish a Clearinghouse and Resource Center on its website to make available rules and guidance from the multiple service delivery systems and public funders that explain options for cross-system collaboration and flexibility to blend and/or braid resources.

### Conclusion

The diverse stakeholders from the public and private sector that participated in the LEAD Center Policy Roundtable share a strong commitment to refine and re-engineer structure and process that will improve performance at an individual and systems level. To achieve improved integrated employment outcomes and advance economic self-sufficiency for the target audience, the infrastructure at a community-level must support no wrong door point of entry, a lead point of contact to persistently support an integrated resource team, a streamlined and consolidated eligibility determination process with common assessment tools, a single comprehensive individual plan for employment and economic advancement, and a single account that holds all resources to support the plan. There must be shared roles and responsibilities, shared outcomes, and cross system accountabilities. A new set of performance requirements based on cross system collaboration must be established and innovation funds must be earmarked to encourage design and adoption of blending and/or braiding promising practices.

ODEP and the LEAD Center will continue this important dialogue at a Federal, state, and local level to improve cross system collaboration and the replication of effective strategies to blend and/or braid resources that support employment and economic advancement for youth and adults with disabilities.

## APPENDICES

1. **Annual Policy Roundtable Agenda July 17th and 18th 2013**
2. **Fact Sheets**
	1. Definition of Terms
	2. Resources for Blending and/or Braiding
	3. Representative Examples of Strategies for Leveraging Resources across Service Delivery Systems to Promote Effective Practices that Lead to Integrated Employment & Socioeconomic Advancement of Individuals with Disabilities
	4. Decision Point Options for Blending and/or Braiding Resources and Cross System Collaboration
	5. Common Elements in Successful Case Examples
	6. Building a Roadmap at an Individual and Systems Level
3. **Background Paper (Making Collaboration Real)**
1. Cite each system’s specific regulation(s) in each system-specific memo. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)