CAPE - Youth

CENTER FOR ADVANCING POLICY
ON EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH

Addressing the Needs of Youth with Disabilities and Other Intersecting Identities:

State Strategies for Program Design

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Summary

During their transition to the workforce, youth and young adults with disabilities (Y&YADs) can experience considerable challenges that can impact their employment outcomes. Y&YADs with additional intersecting identities, such as belonging to the LGBTQI+ community or being involved in the justice system, may experience additional barriers that limit workforce development opportunities and long-term employment. States have developed various programs and policies to support Y&YADs with intersecting identities and help them capitalize on their unique backgrounds to overcome specific challenges they may face in preparing for and attaining work. States are working to satisfy the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) purpose of improving workforce outcomes for underserved populations by designing and implementing programs, policies and services that meet the needs of youth with intersecting identities.

This brief is the second part of a two-part series; it focuses specifically on how states can design programs, policies and services to meet the needs of Y&YADs with intersecting identities. A companion brief discusses how states can implement the programs and policies they have developed.

State approaches for program design include:

1 Using data to identify the needs and barriers of youth with intersecting identities;

2 Developing strategies for directly engaging youth with intersecting identities and empowering them to participate in the design of youth-serving programs; and

3 Engaging in systems coordination and interagency collaboration to develop comprehensive programs for youth with intersecting identities.

Introduction

Y&YAD Intersectionality Profile

"The disability community is so broad, but there are so many shared experiences that make it a community. It's just a matter of being mindful that anyone who may access your service may be disabled, LGBTQI+, etc."

– Derek Schmitz, CAPE-Youth Working Group Member

Derek Schmitz (they/them) is a member of the CAPE-Youth National Working Group on Youth Transitions. Derek has overlapping intersecting identities that affect their needs and access to services; they self-identify as disabled, chronically ill, queer and gender fluid. Derek sees the need to design disability programs that effectively highlight intersectionality and include all youth. For example, Derek uses services from the Magic City Acceptance Center, an organization in Alabama that designs programs for LGTBQI+ people with various intersecting identities. The center promotes inclusion for Y&YADs through gender-neutral wheelchair accessible restrooms, sensory tools and a sensory room[1] accessible to anyone using the center's services.

Derek encourages disability services to emulate the Magic City Acceptance Center by intentionally designing and coordinating programming that is more inclusive. For example, Derek noted these services can be thoughtful and tailored to the individuals they serve (e.g., promotional material with gender-neutral language). This includes youth from many diverse backgrounds and those who may be uncomfortable with identifying both as queer and having a disability.

Y&YADs can face multiple barriers to employment and are employed at lower rates than youth without disabilities. Barriers may include lack of opportunity, low expectations, biases in hiring processes, limited opportunities for career advancement and lack of assistive technology. In 2022, the unemployment rate for individuals ages 20-24 with disabilities was 14.5 percent, while the unemployment rate for individuals ages 20-24 without disabilities was less than half that at 6.7 percent.[2]

Y&YADs with intersecting identities may face numerous additional employment barriers that can have compounding effects. As shown in the chart on the next page, Y&YADs who are racial minorities are employed at lower rates and experience higher unemployment compared to white Y&YADs. Y&YADs with intersecting identities also experience higher poverty rates than their peers without disabilities, especially during economic downturns. The higher unemployment rates for Y&YADs can contribute to a lack of work opportunities, further limiting opportunities for workforce development.[3][4] Individuals with disabilities who have additional intersecting identities may be less likely to advance in their careers or maintain long-term employment due to stigma and widespread workplace practices.[5][6]

For example, Native American Y&YADs in remote locations may lack sufficient social services and broadband infrastructure to access education and training or engage in job preparation and job search activities.[7] COVID-19 compounded issues of employment service delivery for many Native American youths, as they needed to focus on providing care to elders and meeting basic needs such as access to clean water and healthy food. Additionally, many were unable to travel to seek employment due to pandemic closures and lacked Wi-Fi access to continue online education or find employment support.[8]

Specific protective factors exist that can help Y&YADs with intersecting identities overcome employment obstacles. Protective factors refer to characteristics of an individual, family, school or community that are associated with a higher likelihood of positive outcomes, including in employment.[9 10 11] For example, LGBTQI+ youth with disabilities may have access to an association of mentors (e.g., through a university center) to support their postsecondary goals, address specific circumstances that hinder long-term outcomes and provide guidance for

students to succeed in their communities.[12] Many states face challenges designing programs and policies that successfully engage Y&YADs with intersecting identities and enable communities to capitalize on their diverse strengths. These challenges include insufficient data from multiple sources to identify and better address gaps in services; inadequate inclusion of youth with lived experience who can ensure programs and policies match their complex needs; lack of coordination among agencies to align services; and lack of accountability in measuring outcomes.[13 14]

By addressing and leveraging the unique strengths, resources and workforce needs of Y&YADs with intersecting identities, state policymakers can improve employment outcomes and expand the pool of diverse workers for employers. Addressing the needs of Y&YADs with intersecting identities also positions states to "strengthen and improve our nation's public workforce system and helping get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, into high-quality jobs and careers," [15] thereby advancing the vision of WIOA.[16]

Y&YADs Employment Statistics by Race/Ethnicity

This chart shows the disparity in employment between white and non-white Y&YADs.

Basic Labor Force Statistics, People Ages 16-24 with a Disability, 2022

	Hispanic	White	Black	Other	Total
Labor Force Participation Rate	36.7%	43.9%	36.7%	34.5%	40.8%
Employment-Population Ratio	30.8%	37.7%	27.2%	28.8%	34.3%
Unemployment Rate	16.2%	14.1%	25.9%	16.7%	16.0%

Source: Current Population Survey Monthly Datasets, Bureau of Labor[17].

State Strategies

State policymakers can consider several strategies for designing programs to address the needs of Y&YADs with intersecting identities.

1 | Use data to identify the needs and barriers of youth with intersecting identities.

States are increasingly expanding data collection efforts to better understand and respond to the needs and challenges of Y&YADs with intersecting identities and address gaps in serving them. These efforts include collecting data on:

- The number of Y&YADs with specific intersecting identities served by various workforce programs[18] compared to the total population of Y&YADs with intersecting identities across the state;

- Outcomes for Y&YADs with intersecting identities served by these programs, including program completion and employment rates; and

- Specific challenges that Y&YADs with intersecting identities face in accessing and succeeding in workforce programs and jobs.

States have focused on collecting data from a comprehensive range of sources to better understand the challenges and needs of Y&YADs with intersecting identities. This includes using multiple methods of gathering data from a wide variety of Y&YADs to ensure states understand the diversity of the population being served. States can supplement this information by gathering input from a range of other stakeholders who interact with and have insights into the needs of youth, including families, workforce system staff such as case managers and community partners, and other direct care service providers.

In addition, states can benefit from gathering both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data helps states capture numerical trends over time and link intersectional factors to measurable outcomes and qualitative data allows states to gather individual narratives and context for specific groups that quantitative data may not capture. For example, follow-up surveys from workforce development services may use quantitative data to track how many individuals found employment and use qualitative data to review how programs were developed and met individual needs.

States are also collecting and analyzing data to identify needs and direct resources through Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessments (CSNAs) that connect information from youth served across multiple systems. For example, some states crosslink data systems for youth in vocational rehabilitation (VR) and the juvenile justice system. This type of data partnership requires data sharing agreements among agencies to collect relevant data for identifying youth needs and resources available to meet those needs. These collaborations strengthen CSNAs and make sure data is effectively used rather than simply collected for compliance.

State Examples:

In **Georgia**, a cooperative agreement linking data from the VR agency and various other youth serving agencies — including the departments of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Human Services, Juvenile Justice, Education and Early Care and Learning — promotes sharing data through development and implementation of formal agreements among parties wherever possible to "better coordinate and serve the child and youth population in Georgia."[19] [20]

In **Nebraska**, Vocational Rehabilitation's CSNA included surveys with VR clients, employers, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) students, VR staff and other stakeholders. Results from the survey helped VR identify the need to foster cultural competencies, including through mandatory staff trainings, addressing barriers presented by poverty and prioritizing the hiring of bilingual staff.[21]

In **Arizona**, VR and the state Department of Education initiated a data sharing agreement to provide essential information for student transition services. Specifically, VR uses data comparing post-school outcomes for students connected with VR to students not connected to improve school outreach that encourages student referrals to VR.[22]

2 | Develop strategies to directly engage Y&YADs with intersecting identities and empower them to participate in the design of youth serving programs.

By directly incorporating youth voices into program design, policymakers can better serve the needs of the community. Extensive, inclusive and meaningful engagement of Y&YADs with intersecting identities in agenda setting and policy and program formulation and evaluation can be valuable for:

- Identifying critical gaps in services that multiple groups experience;

- Understanding the differences between the intent of a policy and its unintended consequences on certain populations;

  - *For example, a policy requiring Y&YADs who either completed or dropped out of high school to provide an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) as documentation of disability for workforce development eligibility may create barriers to accessing programs.*

- Developing programs and policies more likely to be used by Y&YADs with intersecting identities as a result of their participation in design and development; and

- Empowering Y&YADs to develop self-determination and take action.

Increasingly, states involve Y&YADs in outreach and engagement efforts and combine these efforts with programs that support youth leadership, including public speaking and dialogue with policymakers. These experiences help youth develop the skills to effectively contribute to policymaking. Other states, such as California, mandate engagement of individuals with intersecting identities on public councils. For example, some states require a certain proportion of participants on state disability councils to be individuals with disabilities from minority racial groups. States can also require the inclusion of individuals with disabilities on other councils, such as those focused on transportation or workforce development. Though WIOA no longer requires states to develop youth councils[23], the U.S. Department of Labor encourages local workforce

boards to designate a standing youth committee to contribute a youth voice and perspective for workforce board planning and operations.[24]

Notably, opportunities for direct engagement by Y&YADs must be meaningful and varied. Engaging Y&YADs with intersecting identities means involving youth with different perspectives, experiences and disabilities in a variety of ways. Meaningful participation influences policy or elicits responsiveness from policymakers; occurs without significant barriers to participation; provides individuals with a sense of agency and purpose; and produces programs and policies more responsive to the unique needs of youth with intersecting identities.

State Examples:

California Assembly Bill 1595 (2014) expands requirements for the California State Council on Developmental Disabilities to increase intersectionality in voices advocating for and informing policy on issues impacting people with developmental disabilities. AB 1595 assigns 20 at-large seats on the council to individuals who have a developmental disability. These members must reflect the socioeconomic, geographic, disability, racial, ethnic and language diversity of the state. Accordingly, AB 1595 requires that the council include members with developmental disabilities who belong to minority racial groups.[25]

Colorado's Statewide Youth Development Plan engages youth voices to support educational and workforce opportunities. The plan also considers how certain youth populations face intersectional disparities and compiles best practices, networks and action steps through authentic youth engagement in each phase of decision-making. Programs emphasize disparities and needs of youth at various life stages, including during job searches and transitions to adulthood.[26]

New Mexico's Developmental Disabilities Planning Council initiated a task force on school-to-work transition led by young adults with disabilities in addition to state and community stakeholders. The council facilitates compliance with WIOA by addressing barriers for Y&YADs and their postsecondary outcomes and maximizing long-term outcomes for competitive integrated employment.[27]

3 Engage in systems coordination and interagency collaboration to develop comprehensive programs for youth with intersecting identities.

Numerous government programs provide services to Y&YADs with intersecting identities. The decentralized and fragmented service delivery may make navigating and coordinating services challenging. For example, state VR agencies and child welfare agencies may each provide services to youth with disabilities in foster care. However, a lack of coordination can lead to the duplication of services or gaps among services. When state entities coordinate their efforts, agencies can more effectively serve youth with intersecting identities. State entities can strive to identify and braid funding, to provide comprehensive services, to eliminate redundancies and to address gaps in programs.

Interagency collaboration can stretch scarce resources to better support Y&YADs through specific strategies like signing memoranda of understanding (MOU), co-locating services and initiating data sharing agreements.

States can resolve programmatic gaps by evaluating how agencies deliver services. States can then determine how to leverage various public, private and nonprofit organizations to reduce barriers to accessing those services. Addressing specific barriers for Y&YADs with intersecting identities requires a holistic view of a young person's needs. States can address youth needs through a coordinated response that uses an array of resources across systems that no single entity is able to provide. For example, VR agencies can deliver transition programming at juvenile justice facilities; human services departments can coordinate with transportation offices to provide transit options for Y&YADs experiencing homelessness; and foster care systems can partner with local education agencies to provide mentoring to Y&YADs in foster care.

State Examples:

The **Alaska** Transition Outreach Project is a partnership between the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). These agencies jointly fund camp experiences that provide transition services at juvenile justice facilities and for students in foster care. DEED covers coordination costs for the Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC) team facilitating the transition camps. DVR contracts with SERRC to deliver Pre-ETS services to camp participants, and DVR braids funding with the Division of Employment and Training to further expand the reach of the program.[28]

The **Indiana** WIOA Combined Plan explicitly recognizes the importance of intersectionality in how the youth and workforce service systems are integrated. By improving data-sharing on overlapping populations, co-enrolling in programs via braided funding, co-locating services in community hubs and cross-training and professional development for staff working with youth with intersecting identities, Indiana has committed to providing solutions for specific intersecting identities and for identifying opportunities for agencies to work with other partners.[29]

The **New Mexico** Division of Vocational Rehabilitation established an Interagency Agreement with the Jemez Vocational Rehabilitation program to provide Pre-ETS for students with disabilities ages 14-21 and established additional MOUs with tribal VR programs throughout the state.[30] In addition, the New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Department offers transition services through Juvenile Justice Services to meet the high levels of social, mental or behavioral health needs of youth post-incarceration. Coordinators work with clients to develop transition plans addressing areas like housing, behavioral and mental health, education, employment, vocational training and life skills.[31]

WIOA and State Systems Coordination

WIOA outlines a broad vision for youth through integrated service delivery systems and frameworks for leveraging federal, state, local and philanthropic resources. In their WIOA plans, some states address the needs of certain populations such as Native American youth with disabilities or low-income students with disabilities. However, WIOA plans generally do not include a comprehensive component focused on serving youth with intersecting identities. States can support youth with intersecting identities by planning to specifically focus on how state partners can work together to support this population. The planning process can help identify a network of stakeholders and encourage policymakers to collect data on the outcomes of youth with intersecting identities in their state.

Conclusion

Y&YADs are a diverse population with intersecting identities; states can better support these youths by designing programs, policies and services that integrate and leverage their distinct strengths. Such programs should focus on expanding data collection to better understand needs and challenges of Y&YADs, incorporating and empowering their voices in policymaking, and collaborating with multiple partners to leverage resources and strengthen service delivery.

This brief is the second part of a two-part series.

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

1   Note: A sensory room is a dedicated space designed to add support and therapy, often for individuals with disabilities.

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17 Note: Compiled by David Rosenblaum from the Current Population Survey Monthly Datasets, retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/cps/tables.htm

18 Note: Y&YADs with intersecting identities may be served by various workforce programs, including WIOA Title I Workforce Development System; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); and WIOA Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation, including Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).

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