

# Initiatives and Activities to Improve Integrated Employment Outcomes

Accomplishments Report  
2024-2025



# Accomplishments Report 2024-2025

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## State Employment Leadership Network

The SELN is a place for states to connect, collaborate, and create cross-community support regarding pressing employment-related issues at state and federal levels for individuals with developmental disabilities.

The SELN was launched in 2006 as a joint program of the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services and the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

UMass  
Boston



NASDDDS

National Association of State Directors  
of  
Developmental Disabilities Services

[www.selnhub.org](http://www.selnhub.org)



*“Work transforms lives by fostering independence, purpose, and community connection. Through meaningful employment, individuals with disabilities unlock opportunities for personal growth and economic empowerment.”*

At the heart of the partnership between ICI, NASDDDS, and states lies a timeless truth: work transforms lives. Regardless of shifting eras or administrations, we partner with states to uncover bold opportunities for change, elevating employment for people with disabilities in meaningful ways.

Each year, the SELN network adapts swiftly to external demands, from economic shifts to policy winds, while states tackle their top priorities. Yet, perennial challenges—like workforce gaps and funding uncertainties—have shadowed our 19-year history. These realities demand vigilance: How do IDD systems simultaneously ensure continuity and agility?

For our SELN project team, the answer starts with people. We prioritize forging relationships, earning trust, and fostering candid dialogue. Member states, in turn, must also assess these factors in joint ventures with partners, steadying internal teams, reaching families, or rallying advocates.

As we spotlight the 2024–2025 membership year’s triumphs and chart Year 20’s horizon, pause to consider: Where can you plug in to amplify this momentum? Share your stories, insights, or questions with us—our contact information is at the end of this publication. We are eager to hear how this resonates and create the path ahead with you.

Suzanne Freeze, ICI

Wesley Anderson, NASDDDS

## MISSION

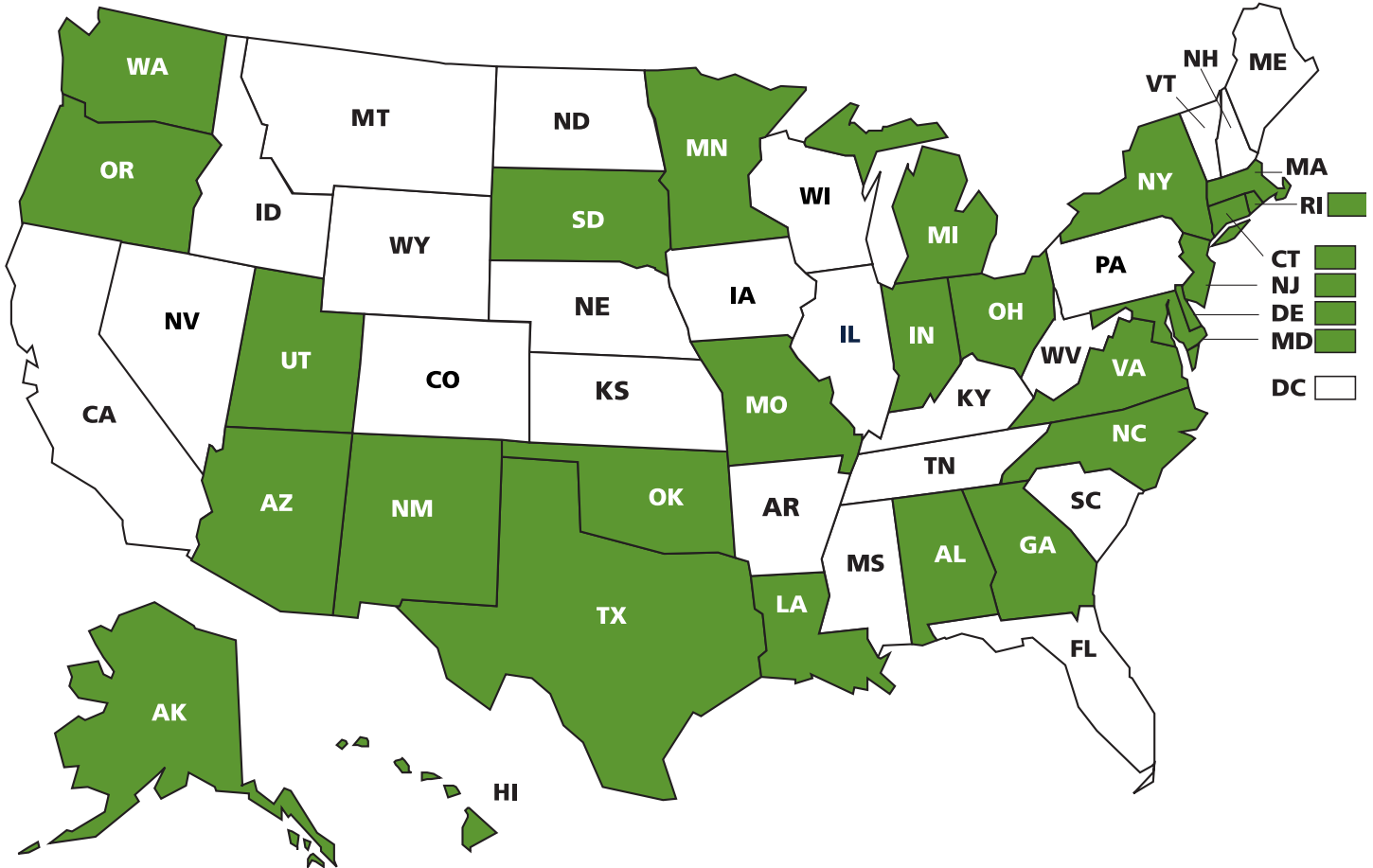
In coalition with state intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) agencies, the SELN seeks to transform employment policy, strategy, and expectations to increase the number of individuals with IDD engaged in their communities and working in competitive integrated jobs in the general workforce.

## VISION

SELN will be a catalyst for systems change to ensure opportunities and access to competitive integrated employment and community engagement for all individuals with IDD.



## SELN Member States 2024-2025

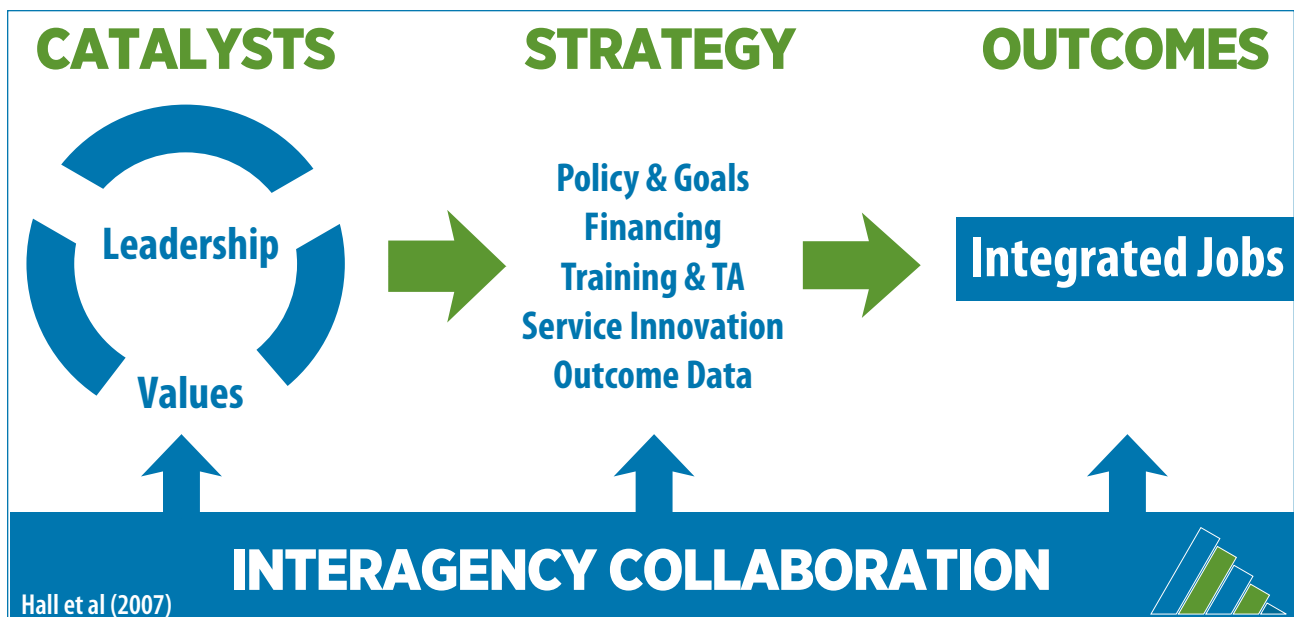


The SELN is a forum for this multi-state learning community committed to improving employment outcomes for people with IDD. To get the most out of membership, states must commit financial and staff resources to carrying out systems' improvements. To support a state's efforts to expand and improve integrated employment outcomes, project team members across ICI and NASDDDS assure states receive: state-specific technical assistance and coaching, ongoing opportunities to engage with peers across the country, access to resources through a members'-only online community, strategic assessment tools, work plan development, network events, and analysis of emerging state and federal policy and strategy.

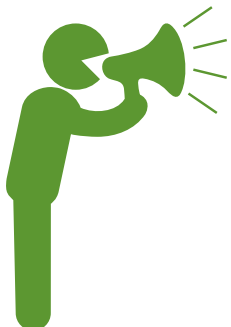


The High Performing States Framework (“Framework”), developed through extensive experience and research conducted within states, guides the SELN’s strategy for system improvements. The elements represent practices and outcomes to develop and sustain higher performing integrated employment systems. The heart of our employment systems work is represented in the graphic – the dynamic interplay between elements demonstrates the factors that, when working together, can lead to improved integrated employment outcomes. Just as no one system can produce desired outcomes alone, no one element is more important than the next. State coaching and guidance stems from discussion of the Framework elements with recognition on what is present or absent. The SELN provides guidance on how to explore the elements with states and determine where to focus resources and investments. Consistent application of these elements over time forms the opportunity for long-term systems change goals.

## ELEMENTS OF HIGH PERFORMING STATES EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM



## CALL TO ACTION! FOR MEMBERSHIP YEAR 2025-2026

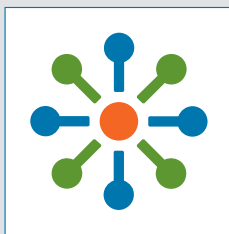


Systems-thinking in our field reflects the complex, interconnected web of components—people, policies, organizations, and resources—that interact to support individuals with IDD. Systems-thinking drives SELN’s work with member states. Our SELN customized coaching and technical assistance, rooted in the Framework, uses systems-thinking to emphasize understanding how the component parts influence each other to improve outcomes such as quality of life, community engagement, economic self-sufficiency, and independence.

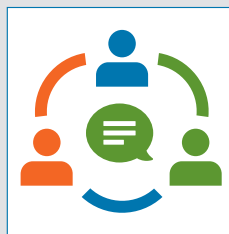


The national project team engages with member states individually and as a network to gather feedback on the most pertinent and driving issues. Facilitating dialogue based on the Higher Performing States Framework elements and listening to states' experiences guides development of our annual action agenda. These activities make up the bulk of network-focused activities throughout each membership year. States are offered small group, network-wide, and state-specific opportunities to explore what is impacting achievement of increased integrated employment outcomes. A tailored approach for each state assures customized options address real-time issues faced by state systems. The following graphic illustrates our core and ongoing network activities for all member states.

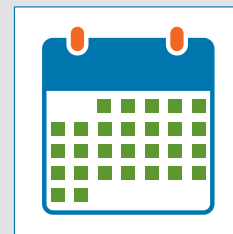
## Core events and ongoing activities



**BUSINESS MEETING**



**ANNUAL MEETING**



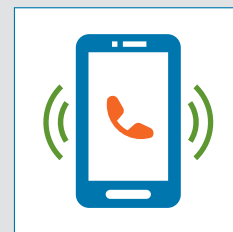
**MONTHLY NETWORK MEETINGS**



**ONLINE COMMUNITY**



**WRITTEN AND ONLINE PRODUCTS**



**RECURRING CALLS**

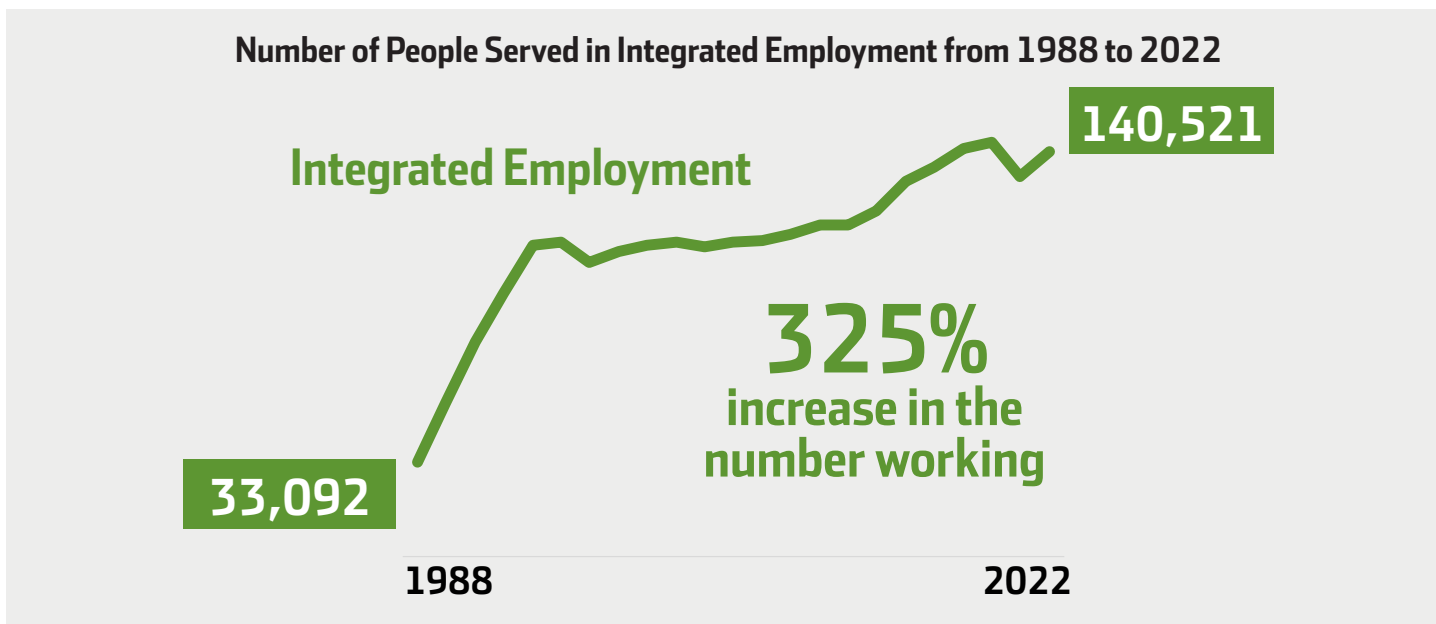
- » Annual business meeting with state leads to set upcoming membership year agenda
- » Annual meeting with member states to network and explore systems change
- » Monthly network meetings to share relevant and timely discussions and resources
- » SELN Hub online community to access active dialogue and posted materials
- » Routine development of written and online products
- » Recurring calls with member state teams on strategic priorities (typically monthly)

The SELN's investments in describing the national backdrop benefit states' employment systems change efforts by grounding future goals. When states better understand the dynamics of employment services and funding across the IDD system as well as partner systems, more realistic strategic planning is possible. What follows is an excerpt from the ICI's data work since 1988. This graph illustrates improvement over time and represents many lives impacted by employment opportunities for people with IDD, the businesses employing them, and the communities at large.



### Improvement in Employment Outcomes

Multiple sources indicate that employment outcomes for people with disabilities in general and with IDD have improved over the past decade. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025), the unemployment rate for people with disabilities nearly halved over 15 years, dropping from 14.5% in 2009 to 7.5% in 2024. The American Community Survey (ACS) shows a strong trend as well. The percentage of employed people with a cognitive disability increased from 28.6% in 2005 to 37.9% in 2022, a 9.3% increase. Looking further back, data collected through ICI’s National Survey of Day and Employment Services show that since 1988, the number of people with IDD who have received employment services has increased from 33,092 to 140,521—a remarkable 325% increase.



Based on data from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) dataset RSA-911<sup>4</sup>, the percentage of people with intellectual disabilities who received vocational rehabilitation services—in other words, those who had an approved Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)—increased from 71% in 2005 to 82% in 2024. This percentage is predicted to continue to rise over the next 25 years. Although receiving services is an important first step, the main focus should remain on how many job seekers progress from receiving services to achieving an employment outcome.

[Check out Data Note 75 to learn how your state is doing.](#)

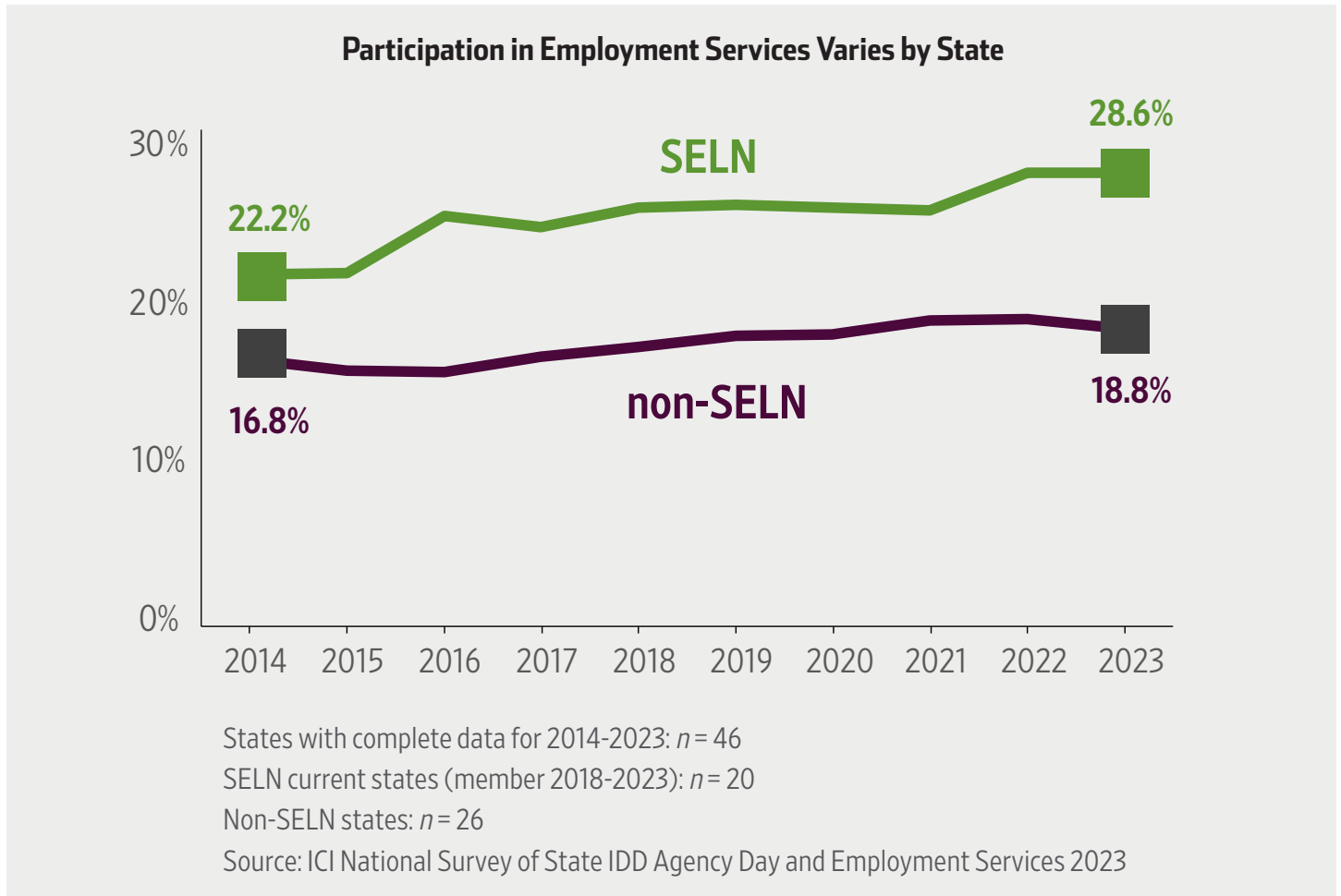
With an increasing emphasis on competitive integrated employment, the US continues a gradual transformation to support Americans with disabilities on a path out of poverty and toward economic self-sufficiency. While our data suggest progress, there is a need to continue strengthening policies, practices, and initiatives that prioritize employment.

For more Information, endnotes, and references: [National Data Show Rising Employment and Opportunity for People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)



In addition to the data on the previous page showing improvements over more than three decades, we see increases in employment participation when states elect to focus specifically on the dynamics of employment systems.

The following chart illustrates data submitted annually through ICI’s National Survey of Employment and Day Services SELN member states (green/top line) versus non-member states (dark gray/bottom line). SELN member states’ efforts reflect a 28.6% increase in employment services’ participation compared to 18.8% in non-member states. The SELN provides an opportunity for targeted and deliberate systems-change leading to needed improvements.



Through membership, the network has built strong relationships with state systems for people with IDD forging a platform to spotlight potential and opportunity. Our strength lies in collaboration and collaborative partnerships. The SELN creates spaces for state teams across the country to reflect and learn together. We ask: What’s working? What’s next? These questions drive our actions and engagement throughout the membership year.



[www.thinkwork.org/statedata](http://www.thinkwork.org/statedata)



The following pages describe key discussions during the 2024–2025 membership year hosted by the national project team as part of the SELN’s overall technical assistance efforts.

### SELN 2024 Annual Meeting



# The Shared Drive

## Annual Meeting | October 7-9, 2024

SHERATON SUITES OLD TOWN • 801 NORTH SAINT ASAPH STREET • ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA • 22314

### State Employment Leadership Network

[www.selnhub.org/am24](http://www.selnhub.org/am24)



The 2024 SELN meeting, themed “Shared Drive,” focused on collaborative approaches to enhance outcomes for people with disabilities across the IDD and vocational rehabilitation (VR) systems. Many attendees joined from member states across those two systems emphasizing shared learning during the event. Members engaged in discussions on community life engagement and non-work alternatives, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) in the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and mental health supports, emphasizing data collection, early outreach to students, and trauma-informed care. Strategies to strengthen the DD/VR partnerships included improved referral processes, benefits counseling roles, and smoother case transitions. Jointly the attendees strengthened their understanding of what each system does best and the role of collaboration in maximizing outcomes. Presentations from external guests included: Taryn Williams (ODEP), Mark Agosto (DC DDS), Alison Whyte (DC Developmental Disabilities Council), and Curtis Cunningham from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).



**SELN: Supporting a Vision for Employment** is a 4-module course crafted for case managers and those in similar roles responsible for advising, assisting, and advocating for individuals with IDD seeking employment. While the challenges are numerous, so are strategies and best practices. The course uses a problem-based learning approach to help case managers increase competencies and capacity to support individuals on an employment journey.

It covers overcoming employment barriers, discussing work in service planning, coordinating services, and more through interactive exercises.

**The course’s value is evident in its high completion rates and positive evaluations, reflecting its impact on learners.**

*“I loved seeing the real-life employment experiences of people in services.”*

*—Learner from Utah*

*“This information is fantastic... There are so many team members, and we all benefit from seeing what the other team members’ jobs are as well as knowing the types of information that is most helpful to share in order to assist our job seekers to reach success. Thank you!”*

*—Learner from Oregon*

*“I thought it was thorough and very to the point. It was well worth my time.”*  
*—Learner from Indiana*

**20 states participated**

**467 learners**

**72% overall completion rate**  
 (this is a 9% increase from previous year)

**92% agreed content covered matched their learning needs**

**96% agreed the exercises furthered their understanding of the topics discussed**

**92% would recommend this course to other people**



This year, the SELN Hub ([www.selnhub.org](http://www.selnhub.org)), a closed online community for member state contacts and partners only, was revamped with a modern, user-friendly interface. Members find it simple and inviting, with resources and a space for candid discussions aligned with the Higher Performing States Framework. Enhanced events feature centralized SELN engagement tools. The SELN team and network member states curate Hub content, focused on connecting members to resources and peers to boost employment outcomes for people with IDD.



## **Selected Hub activity: July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025**

- » **People active on the Hub increased 28%**
- » **Members interacting with discussion forums increased nearly 8%**
- » **Members uploading and downloading resources increased 67%**

We curate resources tailored to our network’s needs from diverse sources, including member states, federal partners, ICI, NASDDDS, and related projects. A few highlights include:

- » SELN State Spotlights
- » Feature or Flaw? The Growth of Non-Work Services
- » State materials on a range of topics such as benefits management, person-centered planning, specific phases of employment services, and overall quality efforts

Discussion forums provide states with the opportunity to ask others what is working in their state and to share their own successes and lessons learned. This allows states to make connections with employment leaders in others states that help them consider innovative approaches and how they might fit within their own state system. Recent discussions include:

- » data-sharing and tracking methods for successful competitive integrated employment outcomes
- » data sharing agreements with VR
- » formal collaborations with education agencies
- » contracting with employment providers
- » state IDD Employment Lead job descriptions
- » service flows as diagrams/flowcharts/process mapping
- » AI (artificial intelligence) technology and upskilling



## Monthly Network Meeting Topics 2024-2025

All network member state teams are invited to our monthly network meetings throughout the year. Topics and meeting structure reflect members' interests and needs. We strive for variety in format and approach throughout the membership year and routinely collect feedback on effectiveness.



**July 2024:** Annual business meeting kicks off each new membership year with member state leads positioned to assist in decision-making, course-setting, and topical ranking.

**September 2024:** Preparatory reveal on the annual meeting theme of collaborative partnerships between the IDD and VR systems, and Connecticut's "one-slide" featuring DDS' efforts to increase employment outcomes.

**November 2024:** Through a series of state highlights, attendees learned about Employment First Minnesota, North Carolina's quest to fund evidence-based job coach practices, and the 2025 community life engagement (CLE) working group.

**December 2024:** Rhode Island's "one-slide" featuring educating employers on competitive integrated employment, and discussion of what a realistic national goal for employment would be given current circumstances and capacity.

**January 2025:** Michigan's "one-slide" on the impact of state data to set priorities and partnerships, the Department of Labor's Notice of Proposed Rule-Making on the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), and updates from the National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (NEON), and the Medicaid Home and Community Based Services Technical Guide.

**February 2025:** SELN Winter Showcase annual event highlighting related projects to expand states' investments in fundamental principles and innovative strategies.

**March 2025:** National team led discussion on importance of creating teams and partnerships, internal team structure, and succession planning.

**April 2025:** Walk-through of the new SELN Hub website, and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disability Services' Federal Information Hub.

**May 2025:** A "SELN open floor" opportunity for states to bring hot topics and top of mind questions.

**June 2025:** The SELN celebrated the StateData 100th Data Note and discussed self-directed services.



In the 2024–2025 SELN membership year, interactions and insights that highlight meaningful progress in employment systems for individuals with IDD depend highly on collaborative partnerships, open communication, and responsive leadership. To act on these insights, we urge member state agencies, provider organizations, and advocates to prioritize relationship-building, evaluate their efforts' impact on stakeholders, and tap into SELN's resources for tailored solutions.

Each state has enormous capacity to design a dynamic system capable of weathering a wide range of challenges. Federal regulations provide a floor upon which to build the system that is needed through active dialogue with engaged stakeholders. There are often flexibilities and opportunities that states have yet to use, and much of our technical assistance coaching is sharing these examples.

Reflecting on the past year, our achievements showcase advancements in systems improvement, stakeholder engagement, and innovative practices. These successes demonstrate SELN's commitment to peer-to-peer learning, data-driven decisions, and better employment outcomes. While systems-change challenges persist and always will, our focus is to empower states to address them through a network of shared experiences and innovative solutions.

By welcoming new states and strengthening our learning community, SELN continues to drive progress toward robust employment systems. These investments lay the foundation for individuals' vibrant experiences securing meaningful paid roles, reducing reliance on public supports, and improving overall well-being. Together, let's commit to another dynamic year of bold goals and new horizons!



# THANK YOU TO THE 2024–2025 STATE LEADS AND DIRECTORS!



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Agnes Zalewska—ICI annual national survey



[www.selnhub.org/accomplishments](http://www.selnhub.org/accomplishments)

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**Far and away the best prize that life offers is the  
chance to work hard at work worth doing.**

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—Theodore Roosevelt