Feature or Flaw? The Growth of Non-Work Services

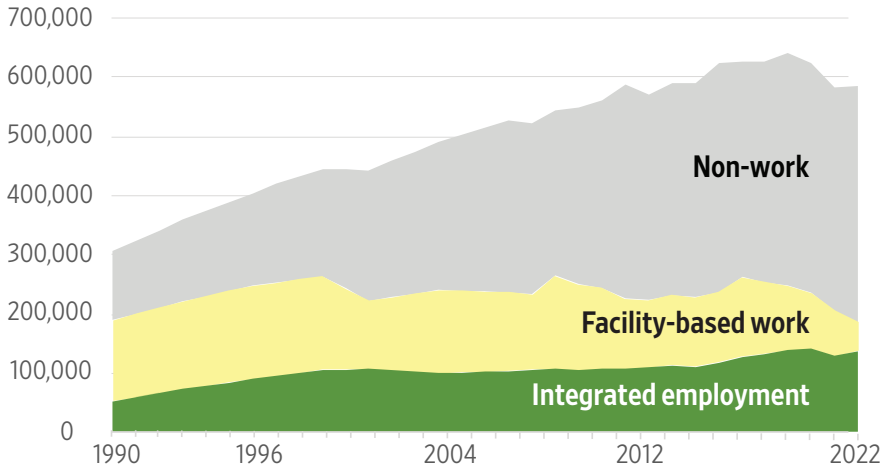
History and Evolution of Non-Work Day Services

Non-work day services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have existed for decades and were originally a response to institution closures and a need for daytime support options that were seen as predictable and separate from residential settings. The non-work category of services typically includes day habilitation, community-based support, and personal support or community living services that are not directly tied to paid employment. Historically, day services and employment services have been seen as separate; funded and managed by different teams with different goals.

Just as sheltered workshops are being replaced by more inclusive employment models, non-work services are also evolving. There is a growing trend to move away from facility-based, one-size-fits-all programs toward community-based, flexible supports that wrap around a person's employment and create meaningful community life engagement outcomes. Many states and providers are now focusing on more individualized services that support people holistically and help maintain momentum toward employment for people of working age.

ICI's National Survey of State IDD Agencies has been collecting state level data on employment and day services distribution and funding since the early 90s. The data show that states have made significant efforts to reduce facility-based work, while seeing moderate growth in integrated employment outcomes. These trends speak to the larger national context of change based on state and federal policies that seek to increase employment and community integration. However, the biggest trend is the growth in the non-work category of services (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Growth in Non-Work Services from 1990–2022



Source: ICI National Survey of State DD Agencies. www.StateData.info

The State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) has been watching this trend. SELN engaged in a 3-part workgroup series in early 2025 called Feature or Flaw? The Impact and Future of Non-Work Growth. This brief will share key themes resulting from this workgroup and offer considerations for state systems as they continue to examine and evolve their non-work service categories.

The SELN 2025 Non-Work Services Workgroup Series

The SELN, in collaboration with project staff from ICI and participating states, facilitated a 3-part workgroup series during early 2025 to examine the growing presence of non-work services. The purpose of the series was twofold:

1. to provide tools to states to examine non-work services through an examination of their service definitions, goals, and expectations as they relate to the CLE guideposts, and
2. to help states identify steps to ensure that non-work supports complement and encourage momentum toward employment outcomes.

This series builds on ICI's Explore Community Life Engagement (CLE) initiative and leverages it's CLE Toolkit to ground discussions in evidence-based practices and a shared framework.

A total of 15 states joined the discussions held between January and March of 2025, including California, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Washington.

What we Learned

Each session offered a combination of topical presentations by ICI and SELN staff and a guiding question for participants. The following section offers a summary of content presented to the workgroup. In Table 1, we share the guiding question offered in the workgroup and a synopsis of key themes generated from participants in response to the questions. Then, we offer a set of considerations for state systems based on our collective learnings.

Table 1: Guiding Questions & Key Themes from Each Workgroup Session

Session #1: Exploring the Growth of Non-Work	
Topical presentation: An overview of ICI's CLE Toolkit and its main objective: to create a more holistic approach to employment and community life engagement through policy, research, training, technical assistance, and resources **Guiding question:** How does your state define non-work? What are the different categories of non-work services called?	**Key Themes:** Both the names for non-work services and their definitions varied greatly across the group. Some definitions were exclusively community-based and individualized, some were community-based but not individualized, some were entirely facility-based, and others were in transition. This assortment of definitions creates differing expectations across states for how services are to be delivered and what outcomes are expected. Participants used terms such as "confusing," "a grey area," or "vague" when trying to describe definitions and knowing when to use which one. Several states explained that their service definitions were either under development or needing further development. Oftentimes, with this constant evolution and change, they end up defining the service category by what it is not.
Session #2: Defining Expectations and Monitoring Quality	
Topical presentation: ICI's definition of CLE and the four guideposts **Guiding question:** To what extent do your current non-work service definitions align or not align to the four CLE guideposts? How do you currently track your outcomes and measure success?	**Key Themes:** Participants described variation in terms of the alignment between non-work services and the CLE guideposts. Although states were monitoring their services in a range of ways, they acknowledge how subjective it can be. They fell short in authentically engaging people with disabilities in evaluating their non-work services. Even for states with more rigorous monitoring, states are monitoring different things, so it's impossible to compare and contrast with one another.
Session #3: Capacity Building and What's Next	
Topical presentation: • Strategies to build capacity and quality • Communicating expectations and policy • Identifying next steps at state level **Guiding question:** What is your state doing to build capacity in non-work?	**Key Themes:** Participants described current efforts like robust training bootcamps, training contracts, and offering technical assistance to providers Future goals included cross-walking expectations between work and non-work services, piloting best practice panels, revising funding structures, and building more flexibility into definitions.

What is Next for State Systems

It might be useful for state IDD agencies to think about the following questions as they continue to critically examine their non-work services and identify steps to ensure that non-work supports complement and support momentum toward employment.

- How might your state ensure that CLE is not a substitute for employment, but a complimentary part of a holistic approach to service delivery and momentum toward work?
- How can you ensure non-work service definitions allow for flexible, individualized approaches that easily wrap around employment services?
- How will you promote funding approaches that incentivize meaningful participation over attendance and the ability to fade supports when appropriate?
- How does your state invest in ongoing provider and case management capacity-building initiatives?
- How do you identify and track outcome measures for non-work services that ensure quality and movement toward work for people not yet employed?
- How can you foster cross-system collaboration to ensure supports are well-sequenced and not siloed?

Conclusion

States that participated in the 3-part workgroup clearly expressed an interest in, and commitment to, evolving and improving their non-work services. They are wrestling with new and emerging service definitions and figuring out how monitor their progress and commit to capacity-building. It is essential for states to recognize the importance of this non-work service category in the lives of individuals with IDD.

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.

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