

Measuring Community Life Engagement with the CLE Fidelity Scale (CLEFS)

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INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released new rules calling for “full access of individuals receiving Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to the greater community, including opportunities to seek employment and work in competitive integrated settings, *engage in community life*, control personal resources, and receive services in the community, to the same degree of access as individuals not receiving Medicaid HCBS” (CMS, 2014, p. 249; emphasis added). Despite this clear statement of priorities, putting them into practice has been a slow and difficult process. As of this writing, many states are still not in full compliance with the rule (CMS, 2023). Even for those that are, the flexibility given to states in defining their HCBS criteria has resulted in vast inconsistencies in service delivery (Friedman, 2022). Local service providers face additional barriers to implementing the full vision of the settings rule, including the need for “complete rethinking of mission, vision, values, and practices” (Rogan and Rinne, 2011, p. 250), disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Association of Persons Supporting Employment First, 2020), and ongoing staffing challenges (Friedman, 2022; Hewitt et al., 2021).

ICI developed the four guideposts for community life engagement (CLE) and the CLE toolkit to provide a framework and examples of what high-quality day services and supports should look like. The most recent addition to the toolkit is the CLE Fidelity Scale (CLEFS), a statistically valid and reliable tool for service providers to assess how their current day services and supports align with the four guideposts. This brief will discuss the development of the CLEFS, how providers can use it along with the CLE toolkit to begin improving their day services, and directions for future research.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY LIFE ENGAGEMENT?

Community life engagement refers to how people access and participate in their communities outside of employment. CLE activities may include volunteer work; postsecondary, adult, or continuing education; accessing community facilities such as a local library, gym, or recreation center; participation in retirement or senior activities; and anything else people with and without disabilities do in their off-work time. For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), day services and supports should include those for CLE as part of a meaningful day.

The Institute for Community Inclusion has been conducting research to identify the elements of day services and supports that lead to high-quality CLE. Through expert interviews and case studies with providers, four guideposts in delivering high-quality CLE supports were identified.

[Learn more about the guideposts in this brief!](#)

THE CLE PROJECT LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Project Leadership Team included representatives from:

- The ICI project team
- The American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR), a trade association of disability service providers
- The Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), a national advocacy and education organization focused on advancing employment in the general workforce for people with disabilities
- The State Employment Leadership Network (SELN), a community of practice for state developmental disabilities agencies committed to improving competitive integrated employment outcomes

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CLEFS

The starting point for the CLEFS was a 54-item Guidepost Self-Assessment Tool included in the original version of the CLE toolkit. Through a four-step process, we refined that tool to the current 17-item CLEFS. The four steps were:

1. Item Generation

This first step involved further review and revision of the self-assessment tool. We reviewed the self-assessment tool with the project's leadership team and with a self-advocate review panel. We also added new items from a database of measures developed by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on HCBS Outcome Measurement, a project at the University of Minnesota. At the end of this step, we had a 126-item draft CLEFS.

2. Delphi Panel Review

The Delphi method is a way of gaining input from a group of experts through two or more rounds of surveys, responding to feedback and changes from the previous round in each subsequent round until the group reaches agreement. It is commonly used to establish the content validity of a new scale (i.e., is the scale measuring what it intends to measure). For our Delphi process, we recruited 25 experts in the field of CLE to independently review all 126 items of the CLEFS and rate each item on how essential it is to understanding a provider's fidelity to the four guideposts for CLE. Experts included providers whose case studies led to the creation of the four guideposts, family advocates, researchers, and staff and management from providers whose day services and supports had received commendations for community integration. After two rounds of surveying this panel, we had a 72-item draft CLEFS in which each item was almost unanimously agreed upon by the experts as being essential to understanding a provider's fidelity to the four guideposts.

3. Pilot Testing

The next step was to test the draft CLEFS with a sample of service providers. We recruited providers of day services to complete the CLEFS online. We received responses from 166 staff and management at 35 provider agencies nationwide.

4. Statistical Analysis

We conducted two kinds of statistical analysis using the pilot data. First, we examined internal consistency; that is, whether the responses of individual staff at each provider aligned with each other. This analysis showed that responses did align across staff members.

Second, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis, which is a method of determining how items group together and which items might be duplicative of each other. The purpose of this process is to estimate what distinct concepts are being measured and reduce the scale to a smaller number of essential items. Through a process of reviewing both the statistical output and the content of each question, we were able to narrow the CLEFS to 18 questions.

We expected the CLEFS questions to be aligned with the four guideposts. The 18-item CLEFS ended up grouping onto a slightly different set of four components (see Table 1).

The result of this research is an 18-item scale that has strong content validity and internal consistency and can begin to be used by providers to examine their current day services and supports.

USING THE CLEFS

The CLEFS in its current 18-item iteration, in combination with the CLE toolkit, can offer providers a valid and reliable assessment of the quality of their services along with strategies to align those services with the four guideposts of CLE. This provides a clear standard of service quality and a path for consistent delivery that states currently lack. We expect the CLEFS to be completed quickly by provider staff and management, with the results pointing toward strategies in the CLE toolkit that can be immediately implemented. In this regard, we expect the CLEFS to be easily adoptable by all service providers regardless of their available staffing capacity and resources.

The 18 CLEFS items are grouped into four components: organizational values, person-centered supports, community connections, and continuous quality improvement. Staff and management familiar with the day

services and supports offered by the provider rate how much they agree that each item on the CLEFS applies to their organization, on a scale from 1 to 5. Scores for each component are then totaled. If you score highly on a particular component, your organization is most likely providing services and supports that align with the corresponding CLE guidepost(s). If your score falls in the low or medium range, you are directed to the corresponding CLE guidepost(s) in the CLE toolkit, where you can find examples about how other providers were able to improve their services in that area.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To make sure the CLEFS continues to be the highest-quality tool available for evaluating day services and supports, further testing is necessary. Possible next steps include assessment of construct validity (i.e., when compared to similar measures, how accurate is the CLEFS) test-retest reliability (i.e., do participants score the same when the CLEFS is administered twice over a short span of time), and confirmatory factor analysis with a new set of service provider respondents (i.e., do the same four components still hold up).

[View the CLEFS²](#)

Table 1: Sample CLEFS Items

CLEFS Component	CLE Guidepost(s)	Sample CLEFS items
Organizational values	4: Ensure that supports are outcome-oriented and regularly monitored	<p><i>“My organization makes sure all working-age individuals have opportunities to explore employment.”</i></p> <p><i>“My organization ensures families are aware of the organization’s emphasis on individualized, person-centered, community-based supports.”</i></p>
Person-centered supports	1: Individualize supports for each person	<p><i>“My organization engages the individual throughout the person centered planning process.”</i></p> <p><i>“My organization is aware of and responsive to individuals’ cultural background (think of race, ethnicity, religion, language, age, sexual orientation, etc.)”</i></p>
Community connections	<p>2: Promote community membership and contribution</p> <p>3: Use human and social capital to decrease dependence on paid supports</p>	<p><i>“My organization emphasizes building networks of support from family, friends and community.”</i></p> <p><i>“My organization trains staff on how to minimize their presence in order to encourage natural interactions.”</i></p>
Continuous quality improvement	4: Ensure that supports are outcome-oriented and regularly monitored	<p><i>“My organization regularly reviews data and feedback collected and uses them to improve supports at the individual level.”</i></p> <p><i>“My organization collects feedback from individuals on whether they are supported to achieve the goals they set for themselves.”</i></p>

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LINKS

¹Learn more about the guideposts in this brief.

<https://www.thinkwork.org/high-quality-community-life-engagement-supports-four-guideposts-success>

²View the CLEFS

https://www.communityinclusion.org/files/cle-toolkit/guideposts_assessment.pdf

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Explore Community Life Engagement is ICI's hub for activities that enhance systems and services that support meaningful engagement of people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in their communities.

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www.communityinclusion.org/cle