

# National Leadership Consortium Bulletin

## Leading the Current Workforce

The National Leadership  
Consortium | on Developmental  
Disabilities



May 2022 • Issue 2



# National Leadership Consortium **Bulletin**

## About the Bulletin

The National Leadership Consortium Bulletin is a free, web-based publication dedicated to providing relevant, trustworthy, and thought-provoking information to leaders, practitioners, and people with disabilities and their families involved in the field of developmental disabilities support services. The Bulletin will serve as a bridge between scientific journals and day-to-day leadership, exploring timely research and policy issues in the leadership and disabilities fields with the aim of promoting organizational change and assisting leaders to support people with disabilities to experience inclusive, valuable, and meaningful lives.

## About the National Leadership Consortium

### Leadership, Values and Vision: Transforming Lives and Organizations

The National Leadership Consortium was founded in 2006 to develop current and future generations of disability sector leaders to have the knowledge, skills, and values needed to transform services and systems to be responsive to the needs, wants, and rights of people with disabilities. Our mission is to provide quality training, technical assistance, and support aimed at the development of values-based leadership in disability sector leaders. The National Leadership Consortium is focused on promoting the rights of people with disabilities to direct their services and lives and to fully belong in their chosen communities. One way the National Leadership Consortium works to meet this mission is through a nationally recognized, intensive leadership development program, the Leadership Institute. These in-person or virtual trainings focus on knowledge, skills, and supports leaders need to transform systems and organizations in the disability service sector.

## Contact Us

[www.nlcdd.org/bulletin](http://www.nlcdd.org/bulletin) • [bulletin@natleadership.org](mailto:bulletin@natleadership.org)

*All information provided or published by the National Leadership Consortium is for informational purposes only. Reference to any treatment, therapy, program, service, research or research entity, organization, or provider is not an endorsement by the National Leadership Consortium. The National Leadership Consortium assumes no responsibility for the use made of any information published or provided in the Bulletin. We recognize that language in this field is ever changing and has the unintended potential to be stigmatizing or ableist to some people who identify differently. The Bulletin follows recommended APA inclusive language guidelines.*

# Table of Contents

Introduction: Leading the Current Workforce . . . . . 4

The Future of Work: The Hybrid Workplace . . . . . 5

Changing Culture at Arkansas Support Network:  
Understanding, Leveraging, and Redistributing Power . . . . . 8

Evidence Informed Action: Leading a Multigenerational Workforce . . . . . 11

Building Trust When the System is Unjust:  
Challenge and Ideas for Nonprofit Leaders . . . . . 15

Policy Review: Leading During Times of Systemic Change. . . . . 18

9 Soft Skills Crucial for Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion . . . . . 21

Innovative Initiatives Q&A: The Collaborative for Citizen Directed Supports New Jersey,  
Mapping the Future: Sustaining A Vibrant DSP Workforce . . . . . 24

What We’re Reading, Viewing, and Listening To . . . . . 28

Upcoming Events and Announcements . . . . . 29

**Contributors:**

**Caitlin Bailey, PhD**, *Co-Director, National Leadership Consortium*

**Kristen Loomis**, *Co-Director, National Leadership Consortium*

**Syard Evans, PhD**, *CEO, Arkansas Support Network*

**Cory Gilden, PhD**, *Research and Evaluation Manager, National Leadership Consortium*

**Amanda J. Rich, PhD**, *Director of the Institute of Social Healing at York College of Pennsylvania*

**Steven Eidelman, MBS, MSW**, *Faculty Director, National Leadership Consortium*

**Jonathan Meagher-Zayas**, *Owner/Chief Equity Warrior, Consultant, and Coach,  
Jonathan’s Awesome Nonprofit Solutions*

**Marian Frattarola-Saulino, Jenn Brown, Anthony Vasquez, and Joe Wagner**,  
*The Collaborative for Citizen Directed Supports New Jersey*

**Editor:**

**Cory Gilden, PhD**,  
*Research and Evaluation Manager of the National Leadership Consortium*

*If you would like to contribute a reflection, strategy, position piece, or  
research to the Bulletin please contact us at [bulletin@natleadership.org](mailto:bulletin@natleadership.org).  
Even if you have not written for publication before, the team at  
the Bulletin would love to help you develop your ideas.*

## Why the Bulletin?

You may wonder why The National Leadership Consortium is creating the Bulletin. Well, throughout my career I have been fortunate to be in jobs where I had both access to a variety of information sources on policy and programs and time to review it. That information has not only educated me but has inspired and broadened my perspectives as a practicing professional. We know that for many leaders this is not the norm.

Most of the people who participate in a National Leadership Consortium training are extremely busy, both in their work and personal lives. Because of their time commitments, they aren't able to read publications that may assist them in their professional roles.

Additionally, journals in many fields are increasingly published by a shrinking pool of for-profit publishers and are behind a paywall, making them not terribly accessible to people without a subscription to the journal or those not at a university that allows access. You can't really measure the utility of an article without paying for it, so many practicing professionals don't regularly read journals, government monographs, or publications from universities, think tanks, and advocacy organizations.

With this new bulletin, we are hoping to provide information on current best practices and research that allow practitioners at all levels of an organization to easily access useful information that will contribute to their work. We aim to give practitioners information in a usable format that is linked to documents and resources that are in the public domain or that we have permission to release. We will also solicit and share articles from Leadership Institute alumni who are demonstrating real-world leading-edge practices, strategies, and accomplishments.

We hope to publish this bulletin three-to-four times a year and will have past issues readily available on our website.

We welcome your comments, critiques, feedback, and ideas that would turn this effort into something very useful in our joint efforts to include people with developmental disabilities in everyday life in their community.

***Thanks for reading,***

*Steven M. Eidelman*

**Steven M. Eidelman MBA, MSW**, is the Faculty Director and liaison between the National Leadership Consortium and the University of Delaware. Steven is also the H. Rodney Sharp Professor of Human Services Policy and Leadership at the University of Delaware. He is a past President of AAIDD, serves as Senior Advisor to the Chairman of Special Olympics International and serves as the Executive Director of The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation. Contact Steven at [sme@udel.edu](mailto:sme@udel.edu).





## Introduction: Leading the Current Workforce

In the last two years, the National Leadership Consortium has held fifteen Leadership Institutes, our flagship leadership development program for current and emerging leaders in the disabilities service sector. In each of those, the number one challenge identified by more than 300 participating leaders was the Direct Support Professional (DSP) shortage, marked by recruitment, retention, and engagement issues. The past few years have been a doozy for leaders in our field. Current events only amplify the looming challenges and need for innovation regarding the workforce.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed our workforce. People with disabilities, families, and professionals have experienced incredible trauma, hardship, and sometimes innovations and learning that will have lasting impacts on our organizations and services. The Innovation Spotlight from the Collaborative NJ highlights work that has been done to help people with disabilities and Direct Support Professionals overcome some of the challenges brought on by COVID-19. Kristen Loomis' article on leading hybrid organizations also offers a range of approaches to maintain flexible, remote models that may have been necessary during times of lockdown but continue to be preferred by many employees. The pandemic and current federal priorities also call attention to opportunities for workforce investment that we haven't experienced to date. Steve Eidelman's article provides detailed information on proposed and needed federal legislation.

Some of the issues facing our workforce are not new, but they have come to light in different ways over the last two years. For instance, DSPs have always experienced poverty due to low wages and compensation. Amanda Rich's research-informed action article connects organizational trust with the systemic poverty of DSPs; she shares solutions to build or rebuild trust within disability sector agencies. Efforts to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion remain critical for disability sector leaders. A field perspective from Syard Evans and a resource from Jonathan Meagher-Zayas provide actionable strategies that leaders can replicate in their agencies to shift power and increase efforts to promote equity. Finally, generational differences in organizations have been a hot topic for decades; today, we have an incredibly generationally diverse workforce. A research-informed action article by Cory Gilden and I considers some of the benefits and pitfalls of focusing on generations in our agencies.

Ultimately, all of the topics highlighted in this issue require us to lead intentionally to meet the opportunities, demands, and challenges currently facing our workforce. The articles provide examples, research, evidence-based practices, practical recommendations, and resources that can help you better understand the current workforce and inform your responsive leadership approaches and strategies.

We are always eager to hear your feedback on the information shared in the National Leadership Consortium Bulletin. We welcome your thoughts, recommendations, and suggestions for future topics. Thanks for coming back for our second Issue!

*Caitlin Bailey*

**Caitlin Bailey** is the Co-Director of the National Leadership Consortium. She holds a Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Science. Caitlin is passionate about enhancing leaders' skills and evidence-based practices in our field. Contact Caitlin at [cbailey@natleadership.org](mailto:cbailey@natleadership.org).



# The Future of Work: The Hybrid Workplace

By Kristen Loomis

The recent and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may have been the tipping point for many organizations to move to remote work, but this is not a new idea. Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, about [23% of U.S. workers](#) participated in teleworking frequently. Remote work has many benefits for organizations and employees and, according to a recent [PEW Research study](#), “60% of workers with jobs that can be done from home say when the coronavirus outbreak is over, if they have the choice, they’d like to work from home all or most of the time.” With so many workers interested in continued remote work, a hybrid model seems to be inevitable for many teams and organizations. One thing is clear when considering the future of your organization’s work location: intentionality is key.

Organizations had to adapt quickly to the new threats and health concerns that came with COVID-19. For some organizations, that meant moving to a fully virtual workplace and for others, who could not operate remotely, it meant considering new ways of working. Now that the nation is out of the initial crisis stage, companies are considering what is next.

A [hybrid work model](#), where some work is done remotely and some is done in the office, has many potential benefits to organizations. Hybrid models offer more individual flexibility, [increased productivity](#) for some employees and small teams, more opportunities for inclusion and accommodation, and improved employee experiences. This flexibility can be critical for some employees given work-life or health constraints, offering a more inclusive experience. It presents many workers the opportunity to create a better [work-life balance and maintain personal wellbeing](#), something [61% of today’s workforce](#) cite as very important. For some organizations, a hybrid model also allows them to [expand their pool of qualified applicants](#) because geography is no longer a constraining factor. Despite the many benefits, leadership needs to be intentional about planning a hybrid model of work to overcome some potential drawbacks.

A hybrid model may lead employees to feel less connected to their co-workers, resulting in feelings of [social isolation](#). Building and maintaining trust and connection on teams can become difficult when some employees are working virtually, and some are on-site. This disconnect can lead to miscommunication. Employees working from home may also need new technology or access to information that is readily available in the office but needs to be set up remotely, which may have additional costs. Lastly, employees may have more distractions at home which can necessitate more self-discipline by each employee. Lack of physical separation between the home and office can contribute to feelings of burnout if not [supported adequately](#).

The good news for leaders is that hybrid models can be shaped to best fit each organization. The key to creating a successful hybrid model within your organization is intentionality. Leaders need to consider what outcomes they would like to [prioritize](#). Do you want to increase your ability to access talent beyond geographical constraints? Do you value productivity, both individually and within teams? Do you want to cut real estate costs? Once outcomes are prioritized, leaders can build a work model that best fits.

Just as intentionality is key in deciding on a work model, it is also critical when leading and managing hybrid teams and employees.

*Over 54% of workers in the U.S. would like this hybrid model to persist beyond the pandemic.*

*“Success in a hybrid work environment requires employers to move beyond viewing remote or hybrid environments as a temporary or short-term strategy and to treat it as an opportunity.”*

*George Penn, VP at Gartner*

Being intentional is critical not only for newly hybrid employees and teams but also for those who have always worked in the field, such as Direct Support Professionals. Here are some strategies that you as a leader can take to manage new or long-standing hybrid teams and employees.

## Build and Maintain a Positive Culture

It is inevitable that moving to a hybrid work model will cause [organizational culture to shift](#). If not done intentionally and fostered, different norms and expectations can begin to occur for remote employees and teams than those in the office. To prevent this, leaders in hybrid organizations need to focus on building and maintaining a culture that values all employees.



- 1 Maintain a focus on the shared organization mission and vision or a [shared goal](#). A focus on the bigger picture helps employees to feel connected to a common goal. Ensure each employee, regardless of where they are working, has equal opportunities to participate in activities related to these common goals. This helps maintain motivation and cohesion among teams and employees.
- 2 Focus on [building and maintaining trust](#). [Be responsive](#) to employee feedback and requests. Even if the request is not acted on, acknowledging and discussing their feedback helps the employee feel valued. Ensuring employees have the right tools to feel empowered and to do their jobs also helps build trust. This includes needed technology, access to information, and training and support. Be consistent in your support and expectations, especially across remote and in-office employees. And lastly, know your workforce individually and as teams by [creating positive relationships](#) with them. Support needs for each employee or team differ and knowing those differences helps you as a leader better support each.

## Create and Set Clear Expectations

Setting clear priorities and objectives can help your organization and team work together better. Everyone on your team focuses on what's most important and everyone knows what is expected of them. A shift from in-person to remote or from fully virtual to a hybrid model of work can be confusing for employees. Expectations, practices, and protocols will shift, and it is important to be [clear and upfront](#).

- 1 [Create and set expectations](#) with employee input. These expectations can include set check-in times, communication expectations, remote or in-office work schedules, etc. Having clear and co-produced expectations ensures that employees know how to act in the new work environment. You may decide that utilizing an online tool, such as [Asana](#) or [Monday](#), helps employees to meet those expectations and keep you updated on their work.
- 2 Be flexible but with boundaries. The hybrid model inherently needs to be flexible, but [lack of boundaries](#) can lead to confusion and employees incorrectly interpreting policies.
- 3 Focus on [outcomes](#). With a shifting workplace, the typical expectation of nine-to-five workdays is evolving as well. Employees, especially those working remotely, may be less likely to work during those hours, instead opting to do some of their work at night or early in the morning. By shifting the focus from specific activities or expected hours spent on them to outcomes, leaders can better manage hybrid teams and employees.



- 4 Use in-person time strategically. Social isolation is one of the biggest potential pitfalls of remote work, so consider the best use of in-person time. These opportunities should be used for engagement. "...Time spent bonding over a...non-work activity isn't wasted. Quite the opposite — employees thrive on socializing and learning more about each other. That supports a happier, more engaged, and more productive workforce..." [[Lindsey Pollak](#)]

## Emphasize Communication and Communicate Purposefully

Remote employees may feel isolated not only socially but also in the work they are doing. [As a leader](#), engage in frequent, transparent, and consistent communication with all employees to help employees to feel connected to the organization. This kind of communication is especially important in a hybrid workforce.

- 1 Consider how you are communicating. Email has been a consistent form of communication between leaders and their teams. As you shift to a hybrid model, you can model and set expectations for new ways of communicating. You can set different expectations for [use of email](#), or you can shift from email to an online tool such as [Slack](#) or [Teams](#). Leaders should also consider which communication tool best fits the team's culture and the employee's needs. Different employees may need different kinds and frequency of communication. Also, be sure to engage in two-way communication, such as listening and asking for feedback or support needs.
- 2 Be mindful of when you communicate. Risk of burnout is high in those who work remotely because there is less separation between home and office. As the leader, the time of day that you communicate with employees can help set the tone for others. Consider utilizing a delayed emailing feature to ensure messages are set only between certain hours or set aside certain blocks of time in your calendar for open dialogue between you and others. This also applies to meetings. With more employees working remotely, you may begin to have teams of employees in different time zones. It is important to be [mindful of those differences](#) when planning meetings.

In the disability service sector, many organizations already had a hybrid-model long before the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders were supporting teams of direct-support professionals, service coordinators, supports-brokers, etc. whose work was in the field. These strategies to best support hybrid work models can also better support those employees and teams. Whether your organization is still operating remotely, is back in the office fulltime, or is contemplating a hybrid model, one thing is for sure – the workplace of the future is changing, and leaders need to be prepared to change and adapt with it.

**Kristen Loomis** is the Co-Director of the National Leadership Consortium. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Human Services from the University of Delaware and is currently working towards her Master's in Business Administration with a concentration in Strategic Leadership. Contact Kristen at [kloomis@natleadership.org](mailto:kloomis@natleadership.org).



# Changing Culture at Arkansas Support Network: Understanding, Leveraging, and Redistributing Power

*A Thought Piece from a Leader in the Field*

*By Syard Evans*

Arkansas Support Network (ASN) has always been a progressive, often even considered radical, disability service provider. Established in 1988 out of the love and determination of five moms who wanted more for their children than what the education and disability services systems offered them at the time, the soul of ASN is anchored in challenging existing ways of supporting people in hopes of finding better ones. The supports ASN provides have always been home and community-based and never structured in the more traditional, residential model of disability services despite operating in a state with a significant institutional bias, even in the home and community-based sector of services.

Through the years, ASN has been able to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to own their own homes, pursue meaningful careers, marry, parent children, and pursue other facets of their lives that many more traditional service providers might not consider possible. ASN is a diverse organization that has historically been effective in prioritizing and benefiting from diversity throughout the workforce and leadership in the midst of a relatively homogenous landscape and environment. Despite operating in seemingly progressive ways and supporting some people to live lives that make the agency and the spirit of our founders proud, the process of ASN's initial accreditation with the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL) in 2016 required the organization to move beyond simply being proud of the reputation we had obtained to investing in the work necessary to live up to our mission, vision, and values.



The self-assessment process ASN began as a part of initial accreditation has driven the organization to learn about, respect, and understand power within our agency and the systems in which we operate. We have learned that the best ideas and intentions cannot bring about cultural or systemic change. In order for real and meaningful change to occur, the existing power structures have to be addressed and modified. ASN has spent the past six years attempting to address power structures within our organization and beyond. This work is ongoing, and never ending, so we make no claims that we've arrived at some magical place of "wokeness" or enlightenment. Instead, we recognize the value and benefits of continuously focusing on understanding, leveraging, and redistributing power.

## Understanding Power

Power is the possession of control, authority, or influence over others. The IDD service industry has long been oriented toward a person-centered approach to services and supports, at least in theory, if not in practice. However, the concept "person-centered" is often reduced to a simplistic focus on choice and preference, and we seldom develop a rich and thorough

*The concept "person-centered" is often reduced to a simplistic focus on choice and preference, and we seldom develop a rich and thorough understanding of power as a centering component in people's lives.*

understanding of power as a centering component in people's lives. Choosing activities, decor, and what we eat are not the same as having control, authority, and influence in our lives. To truly empower people receiving disability support services, it is necessary to understand systemic oppression, intersectionality<sup>1</sup>, and to normalize the exploration and discussion of key systems of oppression that influence the lives of disabled people, including capitalism, patriarchy, ableism, white supremacy, and more. While disabled leaders in the disability justice movement have established a necessary framework for conceptualizing disability within our society, those of us leading disability service systems are often anchored in outdated regulatory models of thinking about support services that tend to confine and control instead of liberate and build community.

To begin the process of better understanding power and systems of power, ASN hired a consultant anchored in the anti-racism and liberation movement to develop a training curriculum and accountability structure to assist us in establishing a culture committed to exploration and discussion of systemic power and how the people we support are impacted by those systems. We've begun to use [Sins Invalid's "10 Principles of Disability Justice"](#) to frame considerations and discussions regarding power within the services we provide. The work of understanding power is on-going and requires a commitment to accountability and harm reduction that is unfamiliar to what many of us have been conditioned to expect in our "professional" roles; however, the value and benefits of these conversations to the culture of our organization and the quality of the supports we provide have been significant.



## Leveraging Power

It can be helpful to loosely conceptualize power in a similar way as energy according to the Law of Thermodynamics, which says energy can be changed from one form to another, but it cannot be created or destroyed. While this isn't entirely true about power because power can be both created and destroyed, it is generally extremely difficult to do either. Therefore, there's utility in thinking about converting/shifting/changing existing power when considering how to most effectively empower marginalized groups of people. This is an exciting and encouraging consideration for disability service providers. The traditional structures of funding, regulatory, and licensing systems bestow a significant amount of power on organizations and organizational leaders. This provides an important opportunity for us to identify ways in which we can work to build welcoming and inclusive communities for the people we support, fill platforms and seats of influence provided to us as an organization with marginalized and underrepresented members, and seize opportunities to leverage our agency's reputation to push back against oppressive systems. At ASN, we try to embrace the reality that there is power afforded to us that is not given to the people we support and look for ways to transfer that power from us to them.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Intersectionality](#) is a way of understanding how a person's different social and political identities can contribute to discrimination or privilege



## Redistributing Power

Our organization has also taken some initial steps to actively shift power within our organization away from the traditional power roles to the individuals we support and the folks who support them. We are proud of these steps but also recognize that they are only beginning steps in a long journey. A few of the changes we have made include:

- **New Organizational Structure:** ASN, like so many organizations, used to follow a traditional hierarchical structure to define the roles and responsibilities within our agency. Not only did the traditional “top-down” model of organizational structure misrepresent the value and importance of Direct Support Professionals within our organization, it completely left out the people we support. To better represent the power and influence distribution we desire within our support system, we redefined the structure of the agency based on department relationship maps. Each department centers individuals receiving services and positions agency personnel in various relationship levels around that center based on their connections to the folks being served. On paper, it’s a small visual change. In practice, when executed well, it’s an effective approach to shifting power away from paid professionals and to individuals receiving supports.
- **Ethics & Mission Integration Director:** As we continued to examine power within our organization, our concerns about lack of representation at the decision making level grew. In an attempt to execute the second of Sins Invalid’s “10 Principles of Disability Justice”: Leadership of the Most Impacted, ASN created a senior-level Ethics & Mission Integration Director (EMID) position and established a requirement that the position must be held by a person who receives support services from Direct Support Professionals. The position is responsible for auditing agency programs and operations, making direct recommendations to agency officers and directors, reporting directly to the agency’s board of directors, and serving as a decision maker on the organization’s senior leadership team.
- **Advisory Councils:** Recognizing that a single paid leadership position is only a start to shifting power to better represent the “Leadership of the Most Impacted” concept, we’ve coupled the EMID position with the establishment of two advisory councils, one consisting of people receiving services from ASN and the other consisting of Direct Support Professionals at the organization. Each council reports to the agency’s senior leadership team and provides direct feedback and recommendations regarding agency operations and decisions.

While the work of understanding, leveraging, and redistributing power has only just begun for ASN, we’re encouraged by the impact these efforts and conversations have had on the culture of the organization. We are hopeful that as the consequences of a global pandemic continue to weigh heavily on our entire industry this cultural shift will provide us the best opportunity to navigate through the challenges of today and truly build support systems that facilitate and celebrate community.

**Syard Evans** is the CEO of Arkansas Support Network. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Arkansas. Syard is passionate about innovating disability services and empowering people who utilize support services. Contact Syard at [sevens@supports.org](mailto:sevens@supports.org).





# Evidence Informed Action: Leading a Multigenerational Workforce

By Caitlin Bailey and  
Cory Gilden

*This article highlights research from Caitlin Bailey's dissertation, [Generational and Experiential Differences of Leaders in the Developmental Disabilities Services Sector](#), published in 2020. You can find the study here:*

[https://udspace.udel.edu/bitstream/handle/19716/28159/Bailey\\_udel\\_0060D\\_14049.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://udspace.udel.edu/bitstream/handle/19716/28159/Bailey_udel_0060D_14049.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

Generational differences in the workplace and what we should do about them have been a hot topic in organizational development research and training for a long time. Every few decades, an article describing younger generations as more selfish than those before them goes viral. In recent years the phrase “OK, Boomer” was repeated by Millennials and Gen Zers<sup>1</sup> on social media, general media, and even the [New Zealand Parliament](#) to insult older generations for their perceived outdated views of ... well anything, including technology, climate change, and workplace norms.

Today, agencies employ up to four generations in their workforce, creating a wide range of generational experiences in many of our organizations. There are a few factors that have led to this generational diversity. First, in the last decade, many [Baby Boomers delayed retirement](#) due to longer lifespans, long lasting implications of economic downturns and crises (including the 2008 and 2020 recessions), and for personal reasons, such as continued commitment to the causes that brought them to their work in the first place. And second, we're at a time in history when a younger generation (Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012) is starting to enter the workforce. Currently there are about [67 million people who belong to this generation](#); they will soon make up [a quarter of the global workforce](#).



## What Does the Research Say?

The attention paid to generations in the workplace makes sense; perceived differences can significantly influence how people from multiple generations work together. For instance, researchers have found that generational stereotyping and discrimination are all too common. [One study](#) found that 2/3 of workers ages 45 and over had experienced or seen generation-related discrimination; another study found that 30% of participating Millennials had the same experience. That same study also found that 60% of people had themselves participated in stereotyping people based on a person's generational identity.

There is also compelling research showing there may be meaningful differences in the way that generations think. For instance, according to [a study from The Leadership Center for Inclusion at Deloitte University in 2018](#), younger generations (Gen Z and Millennials) tend to think about diversity in the workplace differently than Gen Xers and Baby Boomers. Other studies found that [Millennials tend to](#)

[place more value on personal alignment with the mission and culture](#) of their employer than loyalty to any particular company. Conversely, [Baby Boomers tend to place value on loyalty to one's organization](#), meaning they may be less likely to quit their jobs when they are dissatisfied, stressed, or burnt out.

The verdict is still out on whether generations behave differently in the workplace. Some studies have found that people may [feel very different than others from older or younger generations](#), but [professional and leadership behaviors and practices don't vary as much as we expect them to](#). Critics of generational hype also note that [most people only look at differences between generations at a specific point in time](#). This means that we're actually looking at differences in age and calling it differences in generations. They critique research that has found that younger generations tend to be more self-involved, individualistic, and less respectful than the generations that came before them, speculating that self-involvement may instead be a trait of adolescents and young adults who are just beginning to take on the responsibilities that come with adulthood and professional roles.

We know very little about how different generations work in the disability service sector, in part because there has not been enough research conducted on professionals and leaders in this field. [A study by the National Leadership Consortium](#) exploring how different generations perceive their own leadership behaviors and styles investigated the perspectives from 440 Leadership Institute alumni including Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. To avoid the issue of only exploring age-related differences, the study analyzed differences in self-reported leadership behaviors by generational identity (50% represented Generation X, 26% Baby Boomers, and 24% Millennials) and the time in which leaders entered the field based on major milestones in the field (18% began before the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, 27% between that legislation and the Olmstead Decision in 1999, and 55% after 1999).

Results of the study reflected the mixed results found in previous studies. There were no significant differences in how people rated their leadership behaviors based on when they started working in the disabilities service sector. There were, however, significant differences between generations related to how they rated their personal leadership behaviors (defined by personal actions that benefit other leaders, their team, and their organizations), with Millennials rating themselves significantly lower than Baby Boomers and leaders from Generation X.

*Before we blame younger generations for current workforce retention issues, it's important to note that a large proportion (estimated 55%) of people leading the Great Resignation are Baby Boomers who have decided to retire instead of navigate increasingly difficult work conditions brought on by the pandemic. What's more, positive work culture and alignment of mission and practice are good for employees, and good for organizations, period. Some experts think that, in the long run, it might be a good thing for younger generations to demand that companies update their longstanding traditions and practices because it will lead to better working environments for everyone.*

## What Does it Mean for Our Field?

Research about generational differences can prompt some important thinking and discussions in disability support organizations. For instance, if Millennials rate their personal leadership behaviors lower than older generations, it may be worth exploring whether they have less experience or opportunities to lead, whether they lack confidence in their own leadership skills, or if there are other contributing factors that make them feel that they demonstrate important leadership behaviors less often.

While more research is needed to understand generational differences in behavior at work, it's clear that, regardless of what studies find, many people *feel* that generational differences influence our organizations. But these feelings can be misleading and harmful, resulting in [prejudice or discrimination in the workplace](#).

It is important to think about how different generations can be supported to thrive in organizations in the ever-changing disability service sector, as the leaders of today may need fundamentally different skills than their predecessors. For example, legislation, trends, and what we know as best practice continue to shift from congregate and center-based services to individualized and community-based supports that are directed by people with disabilities and focus on inclusion and belonging. Current leaders require knowledge and skills that enable organizations to transform, enable DSPs to serve people in their chosen communities, and effectively shift leadership and decision making to people with disabilities.

Further, the makeup of the current workforce, represented by a large group of established field leaders who are reaching or surpassing retirement age, and an unprecedented shortage of Direct Support Professionals encourages us to pay attention to the unique perspectives of different generations. Leaders need to be able to recruit and compel a younger generation to enter and remain in the field while gaining the leadership skills and experience necessary to succeed a wave of Baby Boomers who are retiring at warp speed.

## What Does it Mean for Me?

Exploring generational differences continues to be an alarum practice in research, HR, and training; however recent research encourages us to think carefully about the strategies and tactics that will benefit our organizations most, for example:

- Leaders should dig a little deeper to find the root cause of differences between employees instead of assuming differences are due to generation gaps. Differences such as professional role and experience, access to and knowledge about technology, historical knowledge of the organization or field, cultural traditions and values, or individual biases and prejudices could influence employee behavior, making [a strategy aimed at leveling or leveraging these differences more effective than a generational approach](#).
- [Utilize the experience and knowledge of different generations](#) to advance the organization. For example, younger generations may be more tech savvy while older generations may have historical knowledge of the organization or field, both of which could come together to better inform decisions and initiatives of the organization.
- [Integrate multiple generations in work groups](#) whenever possible to eliminate an “us versus them” dynamic and reap the benefits of diverse backgrounds, knowledge, and working styles.





- [Invest in the talent, career, and leadership development and skills of everyone](#) at the organization, no matter their age so employees realize their growth potential and stay longer, which decreases turnover and its related costs.
- [Create opportunities for frequent one-on-one engagement between employees of different generations](#) to build personal relationships that can help foster understanding and bridge gaps between different perspectives.
- [Challenge harmful negative stereotypes](#); working based on false assumptions can silo workers and set up an unwelcoming environment.

Uniting the diverse workforce of the disabilities field allows leaders to utilize the strengths of a multi-generational staff to advance their organizations and contributes to the ultimate goal of better outcomes for people with disabilities.

**Caitlin Bailey** is the Co-Director of the National Leadership Consortium. She holds a Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Science. Caitlin is passionate about enhancing leaders' skills and evidence-based practices in our field. Contact Caitlin at [cbailey@natleadership.org](mailto:cbailey@natleadership.org).



**Cory Gilden** is the Research and Evaluation Manager of the National Leadership Consortium. Cory holds a Ph.D. in Urban Affairs and Public Policy and works with local and national organizations conducting research and advocating for people with disabilities and their families. Contact Cory at [cgilden@natleadership.org](mailto:cgilden@natleadership.org).





# Building Trust when the System is Unjust: Challenges and Ideas for Nonprofit Leaders

by Amanda J. Rich

*“We follow leaders who fight for us. We make sacrifices for leaders who service us.”*

*-Adam Grant*

Under the best circumstances, establishing trust within organizations and teams can be hard. And yet, it is one of the most important aspects of effective leadership. Trust is the emotional glue that binds people together. It is the belief that someone will act predictably, fairly, and ethically, especially in relationships where one is vulnerable to the actions of another. Building trust within organizations is one of the most powerful ways leaders can improve organizational outcomes. But how do you establish trust when you work in a system where much of your workforce is undervalued, under-supported, and underpaid?

## What Does the Research Say? The Importance of Trust

Staff’s trust in supervisors and their organizations has a significant impact on organizational health and effectiveness. Trust is closely related to employee intentions to leave their job or stay (See [Determinants of Turnover Intention of Social Workers: Effects of Emotional Labor and Organizational Trust](#)). A [study reported in the Harvard Business Review](#) found that companies with high levels of trust have employees that report 74% less stress, 106% more energy while at work, 50% higher productivity, 13% fewer sick days, 76% more engagement, and 40% less burnout than organizations with low levels of trust. They also noted that though more than 50% of leaders report that trust is a barrier to their organization’s growth and effectiveness, most have not taken steps to address the issue.



## What Does it Mean for Our Field: Trust, Pay, and Frontline Staff

The relationship between pay and trust is complicated. Some studies have found that below-market pay in mission-driven organizations does not lead to lower quality of performance (See [For Organizations with a Social Mission, Low Pay Does Not Equal Low Performance](#)). However, [another study](#) found that when employees feel less connected to their organizations, they likely receive lower compensation, fewer benefits, and less training and report less trust for their organizations. For workers who are unable to meet their families’ basic needs on their salary, pay may impact their intention to stay with or leave their current job, their job performance, and the overall health of the organization. An article in

the [CPA Practice Advisor](#) discussed the relationship between pay and job performance for organizations with a social mission. They estimated that the average family in the United States needs a minimum annual salary of \$75,000 to meet their basic needs and live comfortably.

The [average annual salary of a direct support professional](#) in 2020 was \$20,200. The median wage was \$13.56 an hour. Nearly half of the direct support professional workforce relied on public assistance programs including Medicaid, nutritional support, or cash assistance to meet their family's basic needs. [The President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities](#) reported in 2017 that only 1 in 10 direct support professionals are offered health insurance through their employer and that the average DSP makes below the Federal poverty threshold for a family of four. Many DSPs work multiple jobs to account for their salary shortfalls.

A [2020 article in the Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#) reported that low wages and lack of health insurance and paid time off were significant predictors of higher organizational turnover rates. The study also found that states with lower rates of Medicaid spending had higher overall DSP turnover. It is likely that the state Medicaid reimbursement rates impact salary and benefits offerings. Salary is not the deciding factor in establishing trust with employees but recognizing the role compensation plays in the organization's ability to achieve its mission, and the role it plays in shaping worker's quality of life is important.

The consequences of the turnover driven by a system that underpays and undervalues its frontline staff are dire and well documented. Direct support professionals and other front-line staff work important, meaningful, difficult, and complicated jobs that for many do not provide for a basic standard of living. They work for a support system that does not support them.

*It is estimated that the average family in the U.S. needs a minimum annual salary of \$75,000 to meet their basic needs and live comfortably. The average annual salary of a DSP is \$20,200.*

## What Does it Mean for Me? Leadership and Trust Building

Although salary rates, benefit offerings and state Medicaid reimbursement rates may be beyond the direct control of any one leader within an organization, in order to build trust leaders must understand, recognize, and respond to the lived experience of those they lead and the role their organization plays in shaping employee's quality of life.

Paul Zak in the [Harvard Business Review](#), suggests several strategies to approach management in ways that promote trust. They include:

- Publicly recognizing and celebrating achievements and excellence
- Ensuring staff and teams have the resources and support they need to succeed in challenging tasks
- Helping employees craft their work experience in ways that fit their interest and skills



- Facilitating employees' development and growth as whole people
- Allowing employees flexibility and giving chances for creativity in how they achieve their work tasks
- Practicing transparency in budgets, decisions, processes in which decisions are made and sharing information broadly
- Showing vulnerability and practicing honesty, especially when leaders are facing challenges without clear or easy solutions
- Making intentional efforts to build positive relationships

Additionally, [research published in MIT Sloan Management Review](#) found that, employees are increasingly demanding that their employers engage in topics related to social activism. Trust requires that employees see leaders stand up for those they lead and work to model their stated values. This may involve:

- Supporting work groups by providing time and funding for staff to express their concerns and generate ideas for how to improve their work conditions
- Adopting the recommendations from the [National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals](#) such as supporting credentialing and training that could lead to wage increases
- Providing information to stakeholders on the role of Medicaid funding and how to advocate at the State level for change
- Creating career ladders that facilitate growth opportunities for employees
- Targeted fundraising to increase wages and improve benefits
- Ensuring information on formal and informal assistance programs (including information on public benefits, food assistance programs and mutual aid groups) is available to staff

**Amanda J. Rich** is an associate professor of Human Services at York College of Pennsylvania, the owner of Open Road Inclusive Community Consulting, the director of the Institute of Social Healing at York College of Pennsylvania, and the managing editor of the National Leadership Consortium Bulletin. Amanda holds a Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Sciences and is interested in the health and wellbeing of the human service workforce, trauma-informed and healing centered practices and disability justice. Contact Amanda at [openroadicc@gmail.com](mailto:openroadicc@gmail.com).





# Policy Review: Leading During Times of Systemic Change

By Steven Eidelman

You cannot miss the news — the pandemic has brought staffing issues for caregiving to the surface. Professionals in the disabilities field have been apprised of this issue for a long time. In 2001 the Urban Institute published [“Who Will Care for US?”](#) which called attention to the workforce crisis in long-term care, mostly focused on issues for frail elders. The challenges we face are not new but now elected officials and the general public are more aware of and disturbed by them.

Programs that support people with disabilities close almost daily, and diminished program offerings and hours leave families struggling to care for their family member(s) with a disability without help or hope. The pandemic has now highlighted this workforce crisis for the broader public, pointing out that we have a critical staffing shortage in the service system that is the largest single workforce in the country.



The dire situation of the workforce and possible remedies have been extensively described in notable publications over the years. Over two decades ago, John F. Kennedy, Jr., who was chair of what is now The President’s Committee on People with Intellectual Disability, spoke about a program he started CCNY, “Reaching Up,” designed to nurture, educate, and sustain the workforce, with a focus on DSP’s. In 2017 the same committee published the [“Report to the President 2017: America’s Direct Support Workforce](#)

[Crisis: Effects on People with Intellectual Disabilities, Families, Communities and the U.S. Economy.”](#) The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a bulletin in August 2016, “Strengthening and Stabilizing Medicaid Home Care Workforce,” again highlighting the issues we continue to face. In 2017, [“Promising Recruitment and Retention Strategies,”](#) prepared by Valerie Bradley and supported by the U.S. Department Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Community Living (ACL), focused on strategies and policies that support DSPs in the context of organizations that employ them. [AARP](#), working with others, also has a series of publications offering information and guidance for caregivers, focusing on caregiving for elders. [The Institute on Community Integration at The University of Minnesota](#) provides a well-rounded summary of the workforce issues. While this attention to the issue is useful, more is needed.

We know a great deal, yet we have no long-term solutions that are sustainable and sufficient. Money usually tops the list of reasons for this crisis, followed by lack of respect, poor supervision, and inadequate training for staff. We know that offering both currently employed DSPs and those who are being recruited increased pay will help. However, although higher wages might forestall disaster, they are not sufficient for creating lower turnover and better longevity. For example, Amazon (and to a different degree, fast food and retail agencies) pays higher wages (starting at \$18 per hour for the lowest-paid workers). Yet Amazon has a reported [turnover rate of 150%](#). These days if workers do not like their job, they can leave because there are fewer workers than there are jobs that need workers. However, high turnover rates is not an employment model suitable for support of people with disabilities.

In addition to being disruptive and costly for organizations, high turnover directly impacts the health and well-being of the people supported. A [recent study](#) published in the journal *Inclusion* found that independent of support needs, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who experience high turnover of direct support staff had more instances of abuse and neglect, more injuries, and more



emergency room visits than people who experienced lower staff turnover. Continuity of staff supporting people with disabilities is important. To avoid turnover, agencies need more progressive management and leadership in addition to higher wages. We need to give more than lip service to the importance of training, competent supervision, and progressive management and supportive legislation.

## Current Related Legislation

According to the [National Association on Councils on Developmental Disabilities \(NACDD\)](#), The American Rescue Plan Act and the House-passed Build Back Better Act introduced innovative ways to address the critical needs of people with disabilities for long-term support, which provide access to community living. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided flexible state funding to aid in economic recovery from the pandemic and temporarily increased federal funding to support Medicaid-funded Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). The Build Back Better Act (BBBA), as passed by the House in November 2021, would provide an additional \$150 billion in new federal funds for Medicaid HCBS, including a permanent increase in the federal matching rate.



## The American Rescue Plan Act

The Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) provide \$195.3 billion to support government programs that respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency and its negative economic impacts. Several states have taken the opportunity to use these funds to implement systems change efforts to benefit workers with disabilities. For more on how states are using the funds, see [“The American Rescue Plan Act: State Recovery Plans Outline Intent to Support Workers with Disabilities,”](#) National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) (Feb 23, 2022), and the National Council on State Government’s [ARPA State Fiscal Recovery Fund Allocations](#).

## The Better Care Better Jobs Act

The Better Care Better Jobs Act a historic investment in the care economy that was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives, is summarized in a [five-page document](#) that was published in June of 2021 and is unlikely to be enacted in its current form. In the legislation, there are multiple disability workforce and HCBS provisions. The Better Care Better Jobs Act includes some data that illustrates the problems faced by this workforce: “The President’s proposed investment also prioritizes wage and benefit increases for the workers who provide these services. Nationwide, home care workers—a majority of whom are women and people of color—earn a median wage of **\$12 per hour**. Roughly **18 percent** of these workers live in poverty, and many receive **few or no benefits**. This low compensation, paired with the difficulty of the work, results in exceptionally high turnover rates among direct care workers, often estimated **between 40 and 60 percent**.”

## The Build Back Better Act

The Build Back Better Act (BBBA), H.R. 5376, adopted by the House of Representatives on November 19, 2021, with the support of President Biden, includes a broad package of health, social, climate change, and revenue provisions. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the total package includes \$1.7 trillion in spending. The CBO projects that three of the health provisions would reduce the number of uninsured by 3.4 million people. The House version has yet to be adopted by the Senate and is likely to be whittled down or divided into smaller components to have a chance of passing. There are several HCBS provisions in BBBA:

- The Build Back Better Act would provide \$20 million for HHS and ACL to establish a national technical assistance center for supporting the direct care workforce and family caregivers. As stated above, this could be a big splash but will not, by itself, make the situation better. Initiatives like this mostly go to private consulting companies or large universities. This may not result in substantial changes to managing and supporting the DSP workforce nationwide.
- The Build Back Better Act would also provide \$40 million for the HHS Secretary to award to states, nonprofits, educational institutions, and other entities to address the behavioral health needs of unpaid caregivers of older individuals and older relative caregivers. This section addresses one component of the solution to the DSP workforce shortage and highlights how much support family caregivers provide for their loved ones in the absence of government funds to help address the issues.

As of this writing, the future of the Biden Administration's Build Back Better initiative is unknown. However, a version of the [legislation](#), passed by the House of Representatives, included \$100,000,000 to focus on workforce issues over ten years. (See [Recruitment, Education and Training, Retention, and Career Advancement for Direct Care Workforce p. 22.](#))

In all of this legislation, language focuses on DSPs, organizations that hire them, people who depend on them, and services that cannot operate without them. In the section noted above, the emphasis is not solely on compensation; the legislation also offers three-year grants to address workforce issues. A good start, but insufficient to solve the problems.

The workforce issues in the disability field are finally getting public attention. It remains up to organizations and advocates to push forward and implement effective, innovative, and sustainable solutions and support policies that value, nurture, and support this workforce. John F. Kennedy, Jr. often spoke about quality resting at the intersection of a DSP and a person with disabilities. It was true when he said it and is true today.

*To learn more about the Build Back Better Act and its potential impact, read the "[Potential Costs and Impact of the Health Provisions in the Build Back Better Act](#)" developed by the Kaiser Family Foundation.*

*Learn more about legislation that may impact your organization at [The Arc's Action Center](#).*

**Steven Eidelman**, MBA, MSW, is the Faculty Director and liaison between the National Leadership Consortium and the University of Delaware. Steven is also the H. Rodney Sharp Professor of Human Services Policy and Leadership at the University of Delaware. He is a past President of AAIDD and serves as Senior Advisor to the Chairman of Special Olympics International. Steven also serves as the Executive Director of The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation.



# 9 Soft Skills Crucial for Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

*A Perspective from the Field*

*By Jonathan Meagher-Zayas*

Since the [racial reckoning](#) in June 2020, organizations across the globe have been saying the words: “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is important to us.” However, saying the words does not mean they are moving forward and advancing these areas in the organizations. Sustainable and tangible changes take years to occur, but this should motivate everyone to start their journey as soon as possible. Reflecting on successful DEI strategies, it is crucial for everyone involved to have strong communications skills to be able to listen, communicate, and engage with others to identify diversity issues, build inclusive cultures, and advance equitable practices. Here are nine soft skills crucial for everyone to develop to advance DEI at their organization:

- ❶ **Apologizing:** Let’s get right to the point; everyone has done something wrong. Whether intentional or not, we must all acknowledge that we committed acts that were complicit in racism and oppression. All human beings are guilty of this. Therefore, it is crucial that everyone learns to apologize in meaningful and reflective ways. Nicole Cardoza of [Anti-Racism Daily](#) recommends that everyone invest in self-reflection to consider how the mistake impacted yourself and the people around you. Self-reflection always helps identify what experiences are yours to own based on your identities. It’s also crucial to actually say the words “I am sorry” without any ifs, ands, or buts. It’s important to mean it. Lastly, part of apologizing is acknowledging the impact it made, regardless of your intention, and committing to changing your behavior. Apologizing is the first step to self-accountability.
- ❷ **Active Listening:** Unfortunately, many individuals, especially in the US, tend to listen to reply instead of listening to understand. When we do not acknowledge where the other person is coming from, people can feel unheard. It can hinder inclusion. Listen to what someone is saying, ask for clarification if needed, repeat what someone says, and confirm you heard them. It goes a long way.
- ❸ **Empathy:** Empathy is different than sympathy. Sympathy is feeling sorry for someone else, while empathy puts yourself in their shoes. There is a difference between saying “I am so sorry for you” and “I am sorry that happened to you, and I am listening to understand where you are coming from.” We each have our own unique perspectives, and we cannot assume how other people feel or what they are thinking. Focusing on their perspectives can help you understand their thinking and actions and ultimately could help lead to a productive conversation and positive solution.





**4 Courageous Conversations:** This skill has been marketed in several ways: crucial conversations, difficult conversations, or important conversations. The ability to have a conversation about a topic that one or more of the parties involved is uncomfortable is a necessary skill set for DEI. I like to call it a courageous conversation because it involves making yourself vulnerable and putting yourself in a position you may not have been before. This skill takes time to develop, but I usually think of seven principles to focus on during these conversations: speaking from your heart and how you feel, looking for connections, making it safe for everyone involved, sharing your story and only your story, stating your goals and hopes for outcomes, exploring each other's perspectives, and lastly, moving the conversation to action. This is not an easy skill to pick up right away, but it will become easier over time.

**5 Emotional Intelligence:** Everyone has emotions. Despite people trying to remove them from the workplace, they are still there, and we must acknowledge them. When engaging in DEI, emotions are going to come up, and it is important to understand how to navigate your own emotions as well as the emotions of others. Strengthening your emotional intelligence can help assess a situation and help understand if it is the appropriate time to engage in DEI work. For example, a coworker might say something that upsets you. It is important to address it, but it is also important to acknowledge the emotional toll it took. You can reflect on questions such as "Am I ready to have this conversation?" "Do I need to take some time to reflect on what I want to say?" or "Should someone else be having this conversation with this person?" Each situation is unique and therefore takes a unique approach to address. Self-reflect on your feelings and emotions and what works best for you. Then, try to learn how the people around you think, feel, and communicate to understand how they navigate these issues and try to match their needs.



**6 Persuasion:** Part of DEI work is influencing and persuading others about your point. It is the nature of the work, and it leads to individuals who have influential communications skills to shine. Sometimes, you will need to persuade someone else to engage in a conversation, consider a different perspective, or try something new. To do this, you can reflect on the previous skills and what is the best way to persuade that individual. Think about what motivates someone to change and how your words can inspire that motivation. For example, many individuals in nonprofit organizations do not want to engage in DEI work because it does not seem to connect to their missions. Still, if you consider the mission from a DEI lens, you can think about the ways DEI will benefit their organizations and motivate them to start the work.

**7 Giving Feedback:** Unfortunately, this is another skill that I think, in general, many people seem to struggle with at their workplace. Unless trust and safe spaces are built, giving feedback can be a hard thing to do. When you give feedback about a DEI topic, it can be a little harder. I truly think giving feedback honestly and constructively can be helpful. **To do this, it is important to avoid giving feedback** in a way that might trick the person or make them feel better **without addressing the issue**. Do consider their feelings, but feedback should focus on the facts of the situation and why they made you feel that way. The [STAR method](#) is my favorite way to give feedback. In this way, you talk about the situation, the task that was supposed to happen, the action that was [taken](#), and the result. For example, "When we were in the meeting, and we were asked to talk about our opinions on the campaign, you said this term that I believe is offensive and it made me uncomfortable." -It provides a framework that gives context and focuses on the results of the action. You can even add another A\_R at the end **of your feedback** to indicate a preferred action and result, such as



“Next time, can you use this term that is a little more inclusive. I think it would make me feel more included in the group.”

- ⑧ **Receiving feedback:** I intentionally broke this skill away from giving feedback because it is a skill that needs to be developed as well. We must learn how to listen to feedback, reflect on it, and consider how to grow and change. This is a combination of active listening, apologizing, and reflecting. When receiving feedback related to DEI issues, do not get defensive. Being defensive is a symptom of [white supremacy culture](#) and stops productive conversations. You are welcome to disagree with people, but when people of [privilege](#) get defensive, it reinstates the status quo. Consider acknowledging the statements, apologizing if you believe you did harm, and then focusing on how to grow and change. Remember, just because you did not intend something to be harmful does not mean the impact is not harmful. Receiving feedback at any stage of your DEI journey is crucial.
- ⑨ **Vulnerability:** The last soft skill I think crucial to DEI is the ability to be vulnerable. There are several layers related to vulnerability to consider. First, we are often told not to be vulnerable because it is a sign of weakness, but as we know and explore, being vulnerable is a strength. Second, when we are vulnerable, we are open to the greatest change. DEI is about change, and putting ourselves in new and potentially uncomfortable situations helps us grow and develop ourselves. Lastly, vulnerability leads to authenticity. When we are our authentic selves, we tend to thrive and shine. We must consider creating spaces to allow for vulnerability and authenticity, which will help individuals grow and change in DEI conversations.

Anyone looking to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion at their organization is going to need strong soft skills. Communication is crucial for individuals to engage in tough topics, solve problems, and implement change strategies. These nine skills should be able to get anyone started and prepared to advance their DEI journey.

**Jonathan Meagher-Zayas** is the Owner/Chief Equity Warrior, Coach, and Consultant of Jonathan's Awesome Nonprofit Solutions. Jonathan holds a Bachelors degree in Religion, Linguistics and Gender Studies from the University of Rochester and a Master of Social Work and Master of Public Administration from University at Albany. He is also a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE). Jonathan is an experienced nonprofit strategist dedicated to addressing equity issue, building capacity, motivating new impact leaders and getting stuff done. Jonathan can be contacted at [Jonathan.nonprofitsolutions@gmail.com](mailto:Jonathan.nonprofitsolutions@gmail.com).



# Innovative Initiatives Q&A: The Collaborative for Citizen Directed Supports New Jersey

## Mapping the Future: Sustaining a Vibrant DSP Workforce

*By Marian Frattarola-Saulino, Jenn Brown,  
Anthony Vasquez, and Joe Wagner*

*The Collaborative NJ share a recent and innovative initiative, the [Interactive Map](#), a tool to create a sustainable solution to the Direct Support Professional workforce crisis. By linking people looking for work with people needing support based on geographical location, shared interests, and other aspects of personal and professional dynamics, the Interactive Map allows for a connection that is more likely to have longevity and to result in outcomes that are favorable to both parties. The Collaborative NJ received the Administration for Community Living's [Blazing New Trails for Community Based Direct Support Professionals Prize Challenge](#) for this tool.*

### Can you describe the organization?

The Collaborative for Citizen Directed Supports New Jersey (Collaborative NJ) started in 2016 to gather support coordination agencies that prioritized their role in assisting people to exercise their inherent right to self-determination, not in making referrals to disability service organizations. It has since evolved into a statewide organization comprised of stakeholders who hold the right for everyone to exercise autonomy and control over their own lives as the priority for themselves, their family members, and for the people with whom they work. Made up of self advocates, family members, supports brokerage agencies, support coordination agencies, and others, this collaborative of like-minded people brainstorm, problem solve, connect with, and ultimately work to make the service system work for the people using it.

### The organization recently received a Workforce Innovation Grant from the Administration for Community Living. Can you describe the goals of the project?

When the pandemic forced congregate services to close or downsize, people and their families searched for the support they needed, including respite and assistance to stay employed and healthy. At the same time, Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and Self Directed Employees<sup>1</sup> (SDEs) were experiencing underemployment or becoming unemployed at extremely high rates. The Collaborative set out to build an interactive map to connect available DSPs & SDEs<sup>2</sup> with people who needed their services. After being awarded a Community Innovations Grant by the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Collaborative was able to contract with a person using services in the role of Self Advocate Advisor. The Self Advocate Advisor shares his personal insight and experience to inform the tool and help people best use the Interactive Map.

---

<sup>2</sup> Self Directed Employees (SDE) are DSPs who are hired directly by people using self direction in New Jersey (in PA the job title is Support Service Professional or SSP). The SDE is hired directly by the person with a disability or their surrogate if they are the Employer of Record or by the Agency with Choice Fiscal Intermediary if the person or their surrogate has chosen to be a Managing Employer rather than the Employer of Record.

The Collaborative was also able to contract with a Map Facilitator who keeps information up to date, monitors and responds to inquiries, and guides prospective agencies on how to join the Collaborative and use the Interactive Map. The Map Facilitator also leads the outreach and education of the community on the Interactive Map and promotes it on social media to grow its capacity to be a resource for people using services and staff. The grant also enabled the Collaborative to develop educational and outreach content so that New Jersey stakeholders could learn about the Interactive Map and use it.

With the foundation of the [Interactive Map](#) solidly in place, we secured funding through the Administration for Community Living's *Blazing New Trails for Community Based Direct Support Professionals Prize Challenge*. While there are similar mapping tools on the market to search for service providers, such as My Support and Joshin, they were costly and did not offer much customization and accessibility. The goal of our project was to create an innovative, sustainable solution to the Direct Support Professional workforce crisis. By linking people looking for work with people needing support based on common factors, the Interactive Map allows for a connection that is more likely to have longevity and result in favorable outcomes for both parties. The Collaborative continues to build on this as a work-in-progress that now includes the ability to search an area for available DSP/SDEs and the ability for people and families in need of services to post their request for support, offering them control through the process.

## How is the project innovative?

Assisting people to find staff has been more difficult throughout and post-pandemic. The Interactive Map offers an alternative to resources like Monster and Indeed. The person themselves and the potential employee are in control of the search and initial connection. It allows people to connect based on location, availability, shared interests, preferences, skill sets, and aspirations.

The genius of this project is its simplicity, sustainability, and replicability. There is no fancy software to purchase. Once set up, it requires minimum effort to keep updated. The cost is fixed for agencies and free to people with disabilities. Additionally, the Interactive Map can be shared with educational providers and ancillary support professionals and open opportunities for work that they did not previously consider. It allows DSPs to look for positions that align with their values, which could lead to more longevity and workforce stability. The Interactive Map is a tool that enables more autonomy and control for DSPs and people using services and can serve as a learning forum, providing education and training to DSPs.

In order to drive business growth, stay relevant in changing times, and differentiate from the competition, business leaders must be able to think creatively and embrace innovation to create breakthrough value for their customers. In the post-COVID-19 era, there will be a greater need to increase innovations like the Interactive Map and move away from the comfort of operating 'business as usual.'

## How did you come to the idea for this project?

Amidst crisis is opportunity. The Collaborative's response to this issue during the global pandemic was to respond efficiently and differently to the urgent shortages while also considering the tragedy, loss, overwhelmed health care resources, and the absolute devastation to families and communities. We saw it and sought to do something, not replicate old ideas because it was obvious those were not working. A simple idea that was built on an existing resource, Google Maps, and infused with the principles of the self-determination movement: freedom, authority, support, responsibility, and the confirmation of the importance of self advocacy on the part of the person seeking supports, and those looking to provide it.



As the world emerges from the global pandemic brought on by the COVID-19 virus, many are looking to reimagine and reinvent their personal and professional lives. To meet the urgency that COVID-19 presented the HCBS system, the [Interactive Map](#) takes existing technology and provides an alternative response.

## If this project reaches its goals, what will the impact be on the lives of people with disabilities?

We hope this innovation will help to bring about:

- Self-determination, realized for those using HCBS
- A more self-determined workforce
- Quicker ways to find the staff people want; they are in control
- Less wait time than with more traditional recruitment tools
- Cost-effective solutions; the Interactive Map has little to no cost to the end-users
- Accessibility and support that are built into the platform
- Easy ways for people to find local support and employment

Once brought to scale, this could revolutionize the way people with disabilities are supported in their own homes and communities and could offer more practical and effective means for professionals to be attracted to this field, retain their interest and commitment, as well as enhance their learning and personal and professional development.

*For a more in-depth Q&A about the Interactive Map, please visit: [https://www.natleadership.org/bulletin/Innovative\\_Initiatives\\_Q&A\\_Mapping\\_the\\_Future.pdf](https://www.natleadership.org/bulletin/Innovative_Initiatives_Q&A_Mapping_the_Future.pdf)*





**Marian Frattarola-Saulino** is the Co-Founder and CEO of Values Into Action New Jersey and a founding member and the current Board Chair of the Collaborative. Marian is also a co-founder and serves as the Board Co-Chair of the Alliance for Citizen Directed Supports, a membership organization that is focused on developing, building and enhancing sustainable self-directed systems across the US and globally. She is committed to helping build coalitions where people themselves decide the expertise they need, to build the lives they want. Marian can be contacted at [marians@viapa.org](mailto:marians@viapa.org)



**Jenn Brown** is the Founder and CEO of the Eiros Group. She is a proud alumna of The Pennsylvania State University. Jenn founded Eiros Group with the mission of bringing people into the center of planning so that they can create lives where the focus is one their hopes and dreams. Jen is an active volunteer member of the Collaborative. Jenn can be contacted at [jennb@eios-group.com](mailto:jennb@eios-group.com)



**Anthony Vazquez** is the Collaborative's Self Advocate Advisor as a subcontractor. He currently studies information technology and cyber security at Mercer County Community College in New Jersey. Anthony has been a self-advocate since he graduated high school in 2007 and currently provides support to other self-advocates. Anthony can be contacted at [anthonyvazquez68@yahoo.com](mailto:anthonyvazquez68@yahoo.com)



**Joe Wagner** serves as the Collaborative's Interactive Map Facilitator as a subcontractor. He is a Support Broker, an Ambassador with Charting the Life Course, a Self Directed Employee, and principal of AutoMotion Consulting and Training LLC. Joe can be contacted at [automotionconsultandtraining@gmail.com](mailto:automotionconsultandtraining@gmail.com)



# What are We Reading, Watching, and Listening to Related to Leading the Current and Changing Workforce?

## **Title: The Way We Work TED Talk Series**

**Sponsor: TED & DropBox**

*The Way We Work* is an original video series where leaders and thinkers offer practical wisdom and insight into how we can adapt and thrive amid changing workplace conventions. Each short video offers concrete, actionable steps to be taken regarding the given topics. Viewers can find topics relevant to them and their interests. As the workplace changes, these topics, such as “3 Rules for Better Work-Life Balance” or “5 Ways to Create Stronger Connections”, can keep leaders informed and challenged to continue to evolve and adapt.

**Link:** [The Way We Work | TED Series](#)

## **Title: The Happiness Lab**

**Author: Dr. Laurie Santos**

Yale professor Dr. Laurie Santos shares scientific research on joy, happiness, and connection in this compelling podcast series. Several episodes discuss how to foster meaningful connection in the context of a changing workplace.

**Link:** <https://www.happinesslab.fm/>

## **Title: The Four Pivots: Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves**

**Author: Dr. Shawn Ginwright**

This beautifully written book describes how the myths we hold about social change and ourselves are often what prevents real transformation. Work related to the social good must involve personal and systemic healing. The book has practical ideas for leaders to ensure their work related to social change is effective and sustainable.

**Link:** <https://www.amazon.com/Four-Pivots-Reimagining-Justice-Ourselves/dp/1623175429>

## **Title: Toxic Culture is Driving the Great Resignation**

**Authors: Donald Snull, Charles Snull, & Ben Zweig**

In a series of articles published in the MIT Sloan Management Review, Snull and colleagues discuss how problematic workplace culture, even more so than salary, is driving the Great Resignation. Using statistical data the authors describe the nature of toxic workplace culture, the extent to which it influences turnover and what leaders can do to create healthier and more inclusive workplaces.

**Link:** <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/toxic-culture-is-driving-the-great-resignation/>

## **Title: Redesigning Wellness**

**Host: Jen Arnold (2016-2021)**

This podcast features experts in various fields discussing issues relevant to worksite wellness. Approaches to wellness and how to engage employees in wellness programs are shared, as well as episodes centered on specific topics related to wellness, such as diversity and inclusion, job loss during the pandemic, and stepping out of your comfort zone.

**Link:** [redesigningwellness.com](https://redesigningwellness.com) or search for “Redesigning Wellness” in your favorite podcast app

# Upcoming Events and Announcements

## Summer Leadership Institute

A select group of future leaders convene with a renowned faculty of national experts on progressive supports for people with disabilities during our intensive in-person or virtual Leadership Institutes. Participants explore leadership in organizations that provide, advocate for, or fund community-based services and supports for people with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their families.

### Leadership Institutes emphasize:

- Managing and sustaining values-based transformational change;
- Determining organizational and professional direction;
- Experimentation and risk-taking;
- Assessing and honing leadership skills; and
- Building a life-long professional network to sustain career growth.

The focus of the Leadership Institute is on supporting participants to determine and set organizational direction to move their organization to a high-performance model and build a lifetime network of peers and leaders to sustain career growth. Check out our upcoming institutes and training sessions below.

## Upcoming Training Sessions:

### Summer 2022 Leadership Institute

**July 17-22, 2022 in-person**

Location: Swarthmore, PA

Open to All Disability Sector Leaders

To learn more or apply, click [here](#).

### Midwest Leadership Institute

**August 21-26, 2022 in-person**

Location: Lincoln, Nebraska

Open to all Disability Sector Leaders from the Midwest

If you would like to be notified when we open applications for this Institute, please add your name to the list [here](#).

### National Leadership Consortium Pre-CQL Conference Session:

**Building Leadership Networks and Skills: An Opportunity for Leaders to Connect and Grow**

**October 11, 2022**

Location: Las Vegas Nevada, before the 2022 CQL Conference

Cost: \$200 per attendee

Leaders who are attending the full CQL conference in-person are invited to join us for a workshop

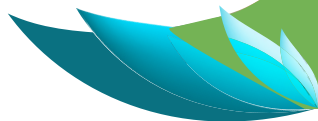
To sign up, click [here](#).

## National Leadership Consortium Workshops

In addition to our Leadership Institutes, the National Leadership Consortium offers virtual workshop sessions throughout the year. Topics of these sessions include:

- Leadership Bootcamp
- Leading Great Teams
- Avoiding Burnout in Yourself and Others
- Trauma-Informed and Healing Center Approaches
- Promoting a Culture of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Your Organization
- Succession Planning with Intention
- Leveraging Your Leadership Strengths

If you would like to learn more about these workshops, please add your name and email to our Workshop List [here](#).



### Contact Us

[www.nlcdd.org/bulletin](http://www.nlcdd.org/bulletin) • [bulletin@natleadership.org](mailto:bulletin@natleadership.org)

*If you have any trouble accessing the referenced material,  
please email Amanda J. Rich at [openroadicc@gmail.com](mailto:openroadicc@gmail.com).*