Disability Employment Technical Assistance Center

Annual Summative Evaluation: September 2022

What is the Disability Employment Technical Assistance Center?

In September 2020, the Administration on Disabilities (AoD) within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), awarded The Lewin Group and TASH (Lewin/TASH) a five-year contract to support the establishment of the Disability Employment Technical Assistance Center (referred to as the "TA Center"). The TA Center provides evidence-based technical assistance (TA) to grantees in six AoD programs (refer to the section *Who Uses the TA Center?*). The TA Center offers tools, skills, and strategies for AoD grantees interested in promoting systems change to improve competitive, integrated employment (CIE) outcomes and economic advancement of individuals with disabilities.

Annual Evaluation

Annually, the TA Center conducts a summative evaluation to provide continuous feedback on TA efforts and measure progress toward outcomes. The TA Center evaluates the reach and effect of its activities by analyzing data on utilization of TA activities, satisfaction, intended or actual action taken as a result of the TA, and the impact of such action. This evaluation report covers the period of August 2021 – July 2022.

Project officers, AoD grantees, and self-advocates shared information with the TA Center about their greatest needs and areas of interest related to disability employment. Key themes include financial independence; technological innovations; cultural competency and diversity, equity, and inclusion; knowledge translation and diffusion; and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency. The TA Center addresses these needs through activities focused on systems change, innovation, and collaboration.

Systems Change	Innovation	Collaboration
Build the competencies of professionals at all levels of the AoD grantee network within AoD grantee entities through applied learning techniques, e-learning communities, skills-development TA, peer-to-peer mentoring, and resource development.	Build the AoD grantee network capacity to focus on CIE and economic advancement strategies through identification, development, scalability, and sustainability of evidence-based practices.	Leverage the unique strategic partnership development that leads to substantial improvements in CIE and economic advancement outcomes at individual and systems level.

A grantee representative work group actively engages in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the TA Center's activities. During this evaluation period, the work group met four times and provided ad hoc guidance, as needed, on written products, the learning management portal, and eLearning communities.

Grantee Representative Work Group Members and Affiliations

Federally Funded Centers for Independent Living
- Sarah Michaud, New Vistas
- Cyndy Milstead Anzek, Walton Options for Independent Living
- Chamane Barrow, Houston Center for Independent Living
- Melanie Hogan, Linking Employment Abilities and Potential
- Kevin Smith, Mental Health Peer Connection/West New York Independent Living
- Kathy Kay, League of Human Dignity
- Jessica Minor, Accessibility Center for Independent Living

State Councils on Developmental Disabilities
- Rachel London, Maryland Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Santa Perez, Nevada Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Kristen Larson, Nebraska Council on Developmental Disabilities

University Centers on Excellence in Developmental Disabilities in Education, Research, and Service
- Robin Jones, University of Illinois, Institute on Disability and Human Development

State Protection & Advocacy Systems
- Emily Munson, Disability Rights Indiana
- Shandra Monterastelli (Alternate), Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program

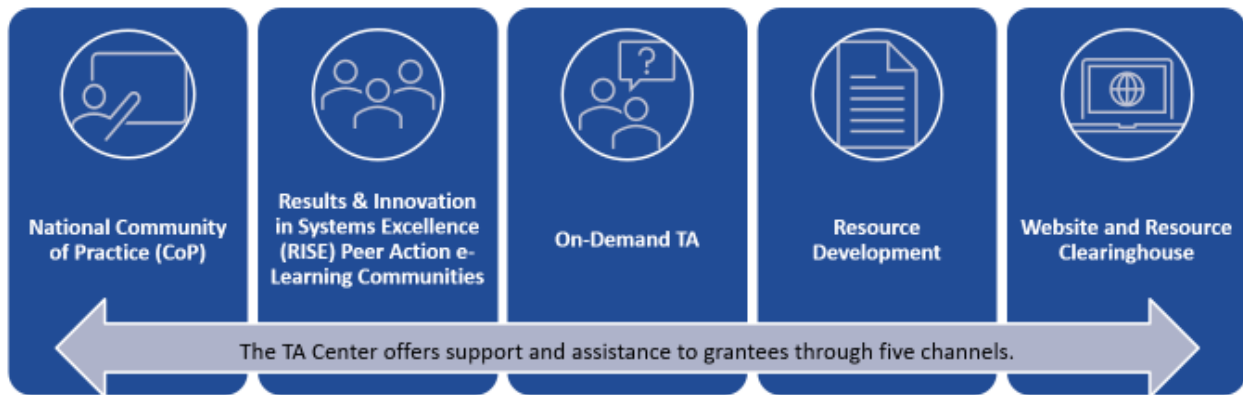**Traumatic Brain Injury State Partnership Programs**
- Eileen Kelly, Minnesota Department of Human Services

Ex Officio
- Abigail Helget, Minnesota Department of Human Services
- Patricia Henke (Alternate), Colorado Office of Employment First, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

What does the TA Center Offer?

| National Community of Practice (CoP) | Results & Innovation in Systems Excellence (RISE) Peer Action e-Learning Communities | On-Demand TA | Resource Development | Website and Resource Clearinghouse |

The TA Center offers support and assistance to grantees through five channels.

A **national CoP** provides high quality TA to grantees through webinars, office hours with subject matter experts, blogs, and podcasts.

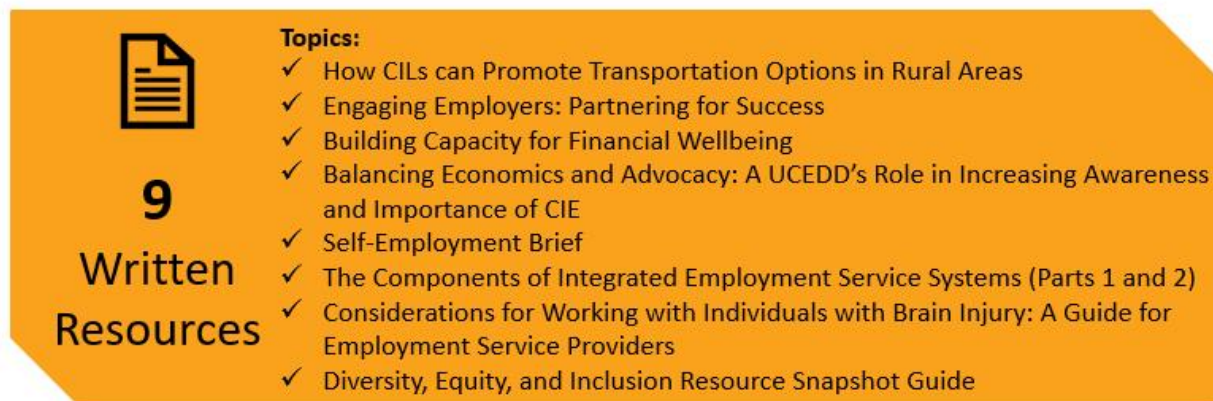| 12	372	97%
Webinars + Office Hours	Average Webinar Attendance	Average Webinar Satisfaction
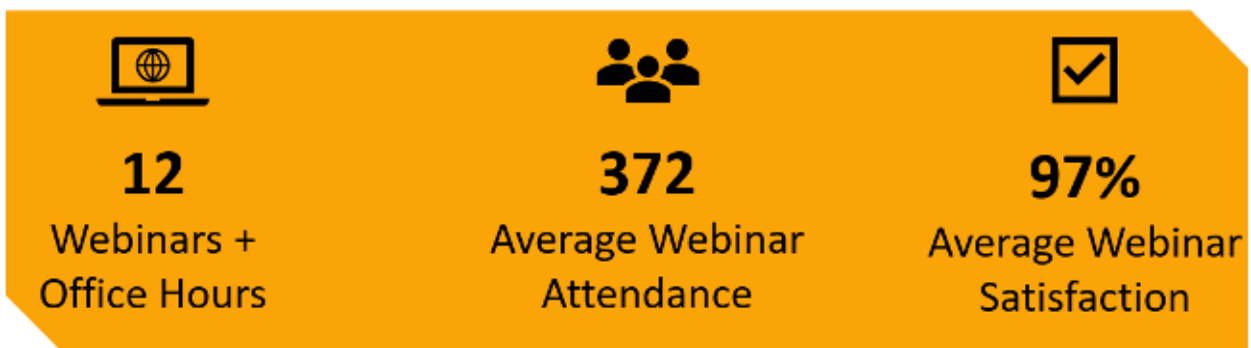
RISE eLearning Communities offer small, time-limited, outcome-oriented virtual working groups focused on achieving a specific milestone.

| 5	100%	96%
RISE Communities	Average RISE Engagement	Average RISE Satisfaction

On-Demand TA takes the form of online on-demand content, modularized curricula, virtual dialogues with a peer-to-peer mentoring network, and other modes of virtual TA and training.

60+
Subject Matter Experts Engaged

CA
TN
WV

3 States
Intensive TA Provided

Resource development encompasses written resources (e.g., fact sheets, briefs) on a variety of topics related to competitive, integrated employment.

9
Written Resources

Topics:
✓ How CILs can Promote Transportation Options in Rural Areas
✓ Engaging Employers: Partnering for Success
✓ Building Capacity for Financial Wellbeing
✓ Balancing Economics and Advocacy: A UCEDD's Role in Increasing Awareness and Importance of CIE
✓ Self-Employment Brief
✓ The Components of Integrated Employment Service Systems (Parts 1 and 2)
✓ Considerations for Working with Individuals with Brain Injury: A Guide for Employment Service Providers
✓ Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resource Snapshot Guide

A **website and clearinghouse** offer TA resources and products, including a learning management system with a growing library of course content.

522
External Resources Posted

19,145
Unique Website Users

38,427
Website Page Views
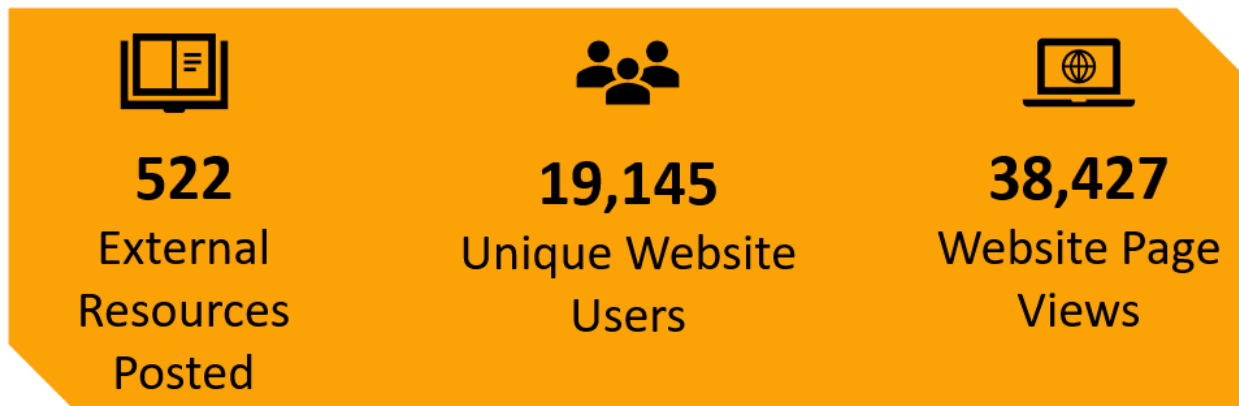
Who uses the TA Center?

Federally Funded Centers for Independent Living (CIL)	Nonresidential, private non-profit agencies led by individuals with disabilities that provide services to support people to live independently

Focus areas for TA:

- ✓ LMS courses target knowledge building opportunities on developing employment programs, using assistive technology, and engaging employers

- ✓ RISE communities focus on helping CILs accomplish specific milestones directly connected to employment such as enhancing programming post-Covid-19, prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion, and achieving economic self-sufficiency in employment

- ✓ Targeted TA resources promote transportation options in rural areas, improving CIL engagement with workforce system, and engaging with employers

"In our short partnership together, we have seen changes in how the TA Center approaches their materials and trainings to better adapt to the needs of those in the Independent Living field. A few CIL partners that have worked on trainings and materials for the TA Center have enjoyed their experience and look forward to making a wider scale impact with their work with the TA Center.

- Training and TA Director, Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL)

State Councils on Developmental Disabilities (Council)	Self-governing organizations that identify the most pressing needs of people with I/DD in their state or territory

Focus areas for TA:

- ✓ Direct TA focuses on state policies pertaining to employment/ Employment First

- ✓ TA resources support provider transformation, employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities in managed long-term services and supports (MLTSS), collaborations with other partners in the developmental disabilities (DD) network for systems change

University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities in Education, Research, and Service (UCEDD)	**University affiliated programs that provide continuing education, research, information dissemination, and community services**

Focus areas for TA:

- ✓ Resources focus on methods of advocacy and promotion of competitive integrated employment by UCEDDs
- ✓ Direct TA supports development of a CIE competency training program within UCEDDs

State Protection & Advocacy Systems (P&A)	**Organizations providing legal support to traditionally unserved or underserved populations including persons with disabilities in navigating the legal system**

Focus areas for TA:

- ✓ TA resources focus on promoting effective integrated employment systems, advancing CIE through legal advocacy systems, and ending segregated workshops

Traumatic Brain Injury State Partnership Programs (TBI Grantee)	**Programs to expand and improve state and local capability for increased access to comprehensive and coordinated services for people with TBI**

Focus areas for TA:

- ✓ Resources include a guide for employment service providers on how to work with individuals with brain injury and guidance for individuals with brain injury who seek employment

Case Study: TBI Grantees

In April 2022, the TA Center hosted a webinar focused on improving employment outcomes for individuals with brain injuries. One individual shared how he achieved success with support from his employer, noting "Today I am better off than when I came in [to seek employment services]… I am so grateful that today I found myself almost up." The TA Center also launched a podcast with the National Association of State Head Injury Administrators (NASHIA); they interviewed an employer *and* a person with a brain injury – key ingredients to ensuring people with brain injuries can attain and retain employment after injury.

Community Collaborations for Employment (CCE), a Project of National Significance (PNS)	**Grants supporting broad coalitions of community stakeholders to optimize CIE opportunities for youth with developmental disabilities and their families**

Focus areas for TA:

- ✓ Prospective TA includes direct TA requests related to landscape assessments and RISE community for cultural competency

How is the TA Center Advancing CIE?

AoD identified the following short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for the TA Center.

Short-Term Outcomes

- Build capacity and willingness to adopt new strategies
- Form partnerships with employers and community partners
- Build knowledge and skills to implement evidence-based strategies
- Use data, research, and proven practices to spur innovation

Intermediate-Term Outcomes

- Build capacity to strengthen leadership, revenue, and collaborations
- Actively collaborate with local and state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies
- Promote public policy reforms and systems change efforts to advice CIE
- Demonstrate a return on investment in state activities related to employment

Long-Term Outcomes

- Lead change efforts in community to ensure CIE opportunities
- Increase the number of people with disabilities starting and keeping jobs
- Sustain partnerships that innovate and expand CIE initiatives

Grantees demonstrated progress toward outcomes in the following areas during this evaluation cycle.

Increased knowledge and capacity to implement evidence-based practices. The TA Center uses a multi-faceted approach to build knowledge and skill among grantees. On average, more than 1,500 people visit the TA Center's website each month, which is home to over 500 linked resources. Nearly 4,500 participants attended webinars during the year on topics such as collaboration, financial literacy, workforce incentives, and DEI.

"I was very excited to learn about all the … resources and ways to become a specialist."

-CoP Participant

92% Proportion of webinars for which participants reported an **increase in knowledge**

Commitment to implement new strategies to advance CIE. After engaging with the TA Center, nearly all grantees expressed intention to act on what they learned. The TA Center helps translate knowledge into action by providing practical strategies from peers and subject matter experts, tailored TA opportunities, and multiple TA efforts (e.g., written resources, blogs, podcasts, webinars, RISE communities) that amplify a single topic of interest.

"We are set to enroll the highest number of students for pre-employment transition services and implementing a platform so students and teachers will have more access to them."

-RISE Participant

Commitment to **implement one or more key learnings** to advance CIE:

95% Webinar Participants   **96%** RISE Participants

Case Study: CIL

A CIL took part in the Building Back Better (B3): Reinventing our Approach to Competitive, Integrated Employment RISE eLearning Community. Before the RISE, their goals were open ended. The RISE sessions gave the CIL tools and structure to define their goals. They developed specific action steps toward their goal of a long-term funding stream for integrated employment for people with disabilities. They worked with a local Autism society to secure funding for a spring 2022 session of their Autism Hiring Program.

Case Study: University of Kentucky Human Development Institute

Members of the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute, Kentucky's UCEDD, took part in the Financial Inclusion Matters RISE eLearning Community. As a result, they developed the following goals and commitments:

✓ Meet with Executive Director of Kentucky Financial Empowerment Commission (KFEC) to discuss collaboration to expand into needed areas of financial literacy

✓ With support of KFEC, produce a series of financial literacy fact sheets on topics such as Earned Income Tax Credit and Social Security's Work Incentives Planning and Assistance program

✓ Support expansion of financial literacy training for students with individualized education programs (IEPs) and 504 plans in Kentucky school districts

"Before this class, I didn't really know what sort of goals I needed to have… We had goals toward serving underserved areas but didn't have specific action plans. I have now created specific goals wrapped around how to serve underserved areas/populations and promoting greater inclusion."

-RISE Participant

Collaboration with partners. During this evaluation cycle, the TA Center focused on building knowledge and capacity for developing partnerships. For example, the Center offered TA on employer engagement through a written product, webinar, office hours, and RISE community. This approach supported grantees to acquire knowledge and leverage it to develop their own strategies for engagement. Additionally, the TA Center collaborated with other TA Centers and federal agencies to advance CIE.

"This RISE community helped to foster great discussions with our team to brainstorms ways to move forward and help us to identify the specific barriers."

-RISE Participant

"[Participation in the RISE eLearning Community] has already led to some collaborative relationships that did not previously exist and formalized a vehicle for advocates to become more involved."

-RISE Recipient

Commitment to share learning with colleagues. Nearly all grantees participating in CoP webinars and RISE communities committed to share something they learned with their colleagues. RISE sessions also provided a structured forum for teams to discuss challenges and identify strategies for implementation.

Commitment to **share information learned with colleagues**:

96% Webinar Participants   **96%** RISE Participants

Public policy reform and systems change. The TA Center supports AoD grantees to enhance their policies and systems to advance CIE. In particular, the Center provided support to grantees to enact Employment First legislation and phase out use of 14(c) certificates and sub-minimum wage. By linking grantees and subject matter experts, the TA Center facilitated intensive strategy sessions to support grantees in addressing these significant policy issues.

"It was apparent … that we would need outside counsel from experts in the world of supported, customized employment supports for people with disabilities. You have provided that important support as we begin to 'right the ship' and work to help many more people with severe levels of disability to achieve the goal of competitive employment in a truly integrated workforce."

-Direct TA Recipient

"I believe the success of this initiative is highly dependent on the expertise and guidance you and your colleagues will provide going forward."

-Direct TA Recipient

Case Study: P&A Agency

Members of a P&A agency took part in the B3 RISE eLearning Community. Prior to participating, their goals were undefined. RISE helped them focus and make progress toward their goals. As a result, the P&A agency provided suggestions to their state Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities on how they can spend funds received through the American Rescue Plan Act to expand CIE.

Conclusion and Next Steps

In partnership with over 60 subject matter experts and guidance from a grantee workgroup, the TA Center offered supported AoD to grantees to advance CIE through written products, a website and learning management system, webinars, RISE eLearning communities, blog posts, podcasts, conference presentations, and direct TA. Grantee outcomes during this period include:

✓ Increased knowledge and capacity to implement evidence-based practices;

✓ Commitment to implement new strategies to advance CIE;

✓ Collaboration with partners;

✓ Commitment to share learning with colleagues; and

✓ Public policy reform and systems change.

The TA Center will continue its momentum into the 2022-2023 year by expanding the reach of RISE eLearning communities and increasing its in-person presence at conference and events. Up-to-date information on all of the TA Center's activities are available on its website.