



University of Connecticut Health Center

April 2010

Connecticut's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant: "Connect-Ability"

2007-2009 Evaluation

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Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance and support of Connecticut's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Steering Committee and staff, and especially its project director, Dr. Amy Porter.

We also acknowledge the many contributions of additional members of the University of Connecticut Health Center study research team: Kathy Kellett, Irene Reed, and Martha Porter.

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I. Background: People with Disabilities and Employment

A. Introduction

Over the last thirty years, there has been a gradual policy shift towards the inclusion of people with disabilities in mainstream social institutions. The most well-known piece of legislation is the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which supports the full participation of people with disabilities in society. Slowly, people with disabilities are being perceived less as individuals with social and medical problems, and more as human beings with surmountable challenges that can be addressed with appropriate supports and programs.

Access to competitive employment is one activity to which people with disabilities have sought greater access. As for all individuals, better jobs and increased employment can lead to greater economic well-being, improved emotional and physical health, and greater self-sufficiency. Not only is employment tied to self-worth, self-esteem and financial independence, it is the foundation of a capitalistic society. For these reasons, people with disabilities, like most individuals, desire the opportunity to work.

The 2006 General Social Survey was the first to include disability questions and enable new insights into the attitudes and labor market experiences of employed and non-employed people with disabilities. The analysis found that among non-employed, working-age people with disabilities, 80 percent said they would like a paid job now or in the future, which is comparable to the 78 percent of nondisabled, working-age people who are now employed. The groups attached similar importance to job security, income, flexibility and chances for advancement, among other job characteristics. Most non-employed people with disabilities were not as optimistic as their nondisabled counterparts about their prospects for employment, however. Only 25 percent believed they were very likely to get a job compared to 51 percent of nondisabled people (Davis, Smith & Marsden, 2006).

Despite the potential benefits of employment and an apparent desire to work on the part of people with disabilities, the employment and earnings of people with disabilities, as a group, have remained low. People with disabilities are less likely to be employed than people without disabilities, and when employed, are likely to have less job experience than people without disabilities (Yelin and Katz, 1994). In addition, individuals with disabilities might be more likely to encounter employment discrimination than persons without disabilities (Louis Harris, 1987). For these and other reasons, the incomes of persons with disabilities tend to be lower than the incomes of those without physical or mental impairments (Acemoglu and Angrist, 1998). Even during times of economic expansion, people with disabilities remain at a disadvantage relative to the general population.

Because people with disabilities have disproportionately low incomes, many rely heavily on two major income support programs—Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Over the last two decades, the number of people with disabilities participating in these programs has been rising. During the period from 1990 to 2009, the number of workers with disabilities receiving monthly DI payments increased from 3.01 million to 7.81 million, and benefits paid to these individuals increased from \$1.77 billion

to \$8.32 billion monthly. During this same period, the number of persons receiving SSI payments rose from 4.81 million to 7.71 million, with state and federal benefits totaling \$1.44 billion to \$4.09 billion (U.S. Social Security Administration, 2010).

There are many factors associated with the high percentage of unemployment of individuals with disabilities. Policy makers and service providers have identified a number of major disincentives to employment in the Social Security disability programs including loss of health benefits, transportation and workplace accommodations, to name a few. Berkowitz and Dean (1996) explain that the SSDI program design “does not allow beneficiaries to return to work, even though policy makers continue to advocate return to work as a goal.” The unemployment figures become even more striking when geographic comparisons are made.

In Connecticut, despite the fact that the state has demonstrated a strong commitment to the employment of individuals with disabilities, there are many individuals with disabilities in the state who remain unemployed or minimally employed. The Social Security Administration’s 2007 statistics indicate the following:

- There are 48,813 Connecticut residents who are receiving SSI benefits due to a disability. Of those, 4,183 (8.6%) had earnings. Of the individuals with earnings, 1,410 (33.7%) were earning in excess of the substantial gainful activity amount (\$900 in 2007, \$1500 for individuals who are blind).
- The number of individuals receiving SSDI in 2007 in Connecticut was over 70,000, of which only 540 or 0.8% had their benefits withheld because of substantial work in one month and 464 or 0.5% of workers had their benefits terminated because of a successful return to work in the calendar year.

Even though Connecticut is considered a “wealthy” state, employment prospects for people with disabilities are not encouraging. The 2009 population unemployment rate in Connecticut was 8%, up from 5.4% in 2008. The national unemployment rate was 9.4%. These figures represent a far different economic outlook than was ever forecast. However, Connecticut ranks 2nd in the nation in wages for 2008 and the average weekly wage is \$1,033 which is \$213 above the nationwide figure of \$820 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).

At the time of the 2007-09 recession, Connecticut was already behind the nation in job creation. Connecticut's manufacturing sector lost over 72,000 jobs from March 1998 to March 2009. Before the economic downturn, the expectation for Connecticut was an increase in many areas of the insurance industry, high technological skilled advancement in engineering from manufacturing to specialties in medicine, aerospace and research, to name a few. There was a deep sense that communications, computer and mathematical areas would create significant numbers of jobs in this ten year period. Service jobs were also forecasted to rise in the area of tourism and recreation.

There is substantial national interest in identifying and implementing policies and programs that will facilitate the commencement of and/or return to employment for persons with disabilities. In 1998, a Presidential Executive Order created the National Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities. The Task Force was established to create a

coordinated and aggressive national policy to bring adults with disabilities into gainful employment at a rate that is as close as possible to that of the general population. In addition to the Task Force, a number of recent efforts and policies have been initiated to assist persons with disabilities to secure and retain employment. Many of these new policies and initiatives are modifications to existing programs and policies that have historically created disincentives for employment among people with disabilities. A myriad of programs and policies currently exist that reduce barriers to employment for people with disabilities. The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant program, the focal point of this report, is one important example.

B. Medicaid Infrastructure Grants

1. National Perspective

Section 203 of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 directed the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to establish the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) Program. Awarded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which is part of DHHS, the purpose of the MIG grants is to support the competitive employment of persons with disabilities by facilitating targeted improvements to the state's Medicaid program and/or developing a comprehensive infrastructure that coordinates disparate state service delivery systems.

In 1999, Congress authorized the MIG program for 11 years. It appropriated \$150 million in funding over the first 5 years of the program. Beginning in 2006 the funding amount was taken from the previous year and increased using the consumer price index. The 2010 funding amount is \$45.76 million. The statute requires participating states to offer personal assistance services through the state's Medicaid program sufficient to support individuals in employment. In addition, it is assumed that grantees participating in this program will use funding to first remove employment barriers for people with disabilities by creating systemic change throughout the Medicaid program, and later by removing employment barriers within state and local systems generally.

States are encouraged to develop employment systems through a progression of activities beginning with the development of core Medicaid components. The components include personal assistance services and a Medicaid Buy-In program that enable people with disabilities to participate in their communities through meaningful employment opportunities. States may then use program funds to enhance these supports by building other infrastructure needed to develop a comprehensive employment system. States are categorized as either Basic or Comprehensive depending on the availability of specific services within each state's Medicaid employment support systems.

Basic MIG States may use grants for building basic Medicaid employment supports for people with disabilities. Allowable activities include: implementation and development of Medicaid Buy-in programs; increasing the availability of personal assistance services through the Medicaid State plan or waiver programs; and assuring access to other health care supports that may support the employment objectives of people with disabilities.

Comprehensive Employment Systems states that have developed effective Medicaid services may use grants to build comprehensive approaches to removing employment barriers by forming linkages between Medicaid services and other non-Medicaid programs. Such infrastructure development should continue to support the goal of removing barriers to employment and create lasting improvements by expanding the capacity of the state to support individuals with disabilities who wish to work.

The ultimate goal of the MIGs is to develop a comprehensive employment system that:

- Maximizes employment for people with disabilities;
- Increases the state's labor force through the inclusion of people with disabilities; and
- Protects and enhances workers' healthcare, other benefits, and needed employment supports.

MIG programs continue to have active participation from states. During 2008, there were 40 MIGs nationwide (including three states with a no-cost extension from an earlier grant period). In addition, the total funding for MIG grants continued to increase from \$17 million in 2001 to \$40.2 million 2008 (Croake & Liu, 2009).

The need for comprehensive employment systems is crucial. In spite of the MIG program and other incentives contained elsewhere in the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, stakeholders continue to express concern over the limitations and complexities of the current employment system for people with disabilities.

2. Connecticut Perspective

Connecticut has made considerable strides in fostering employment for people with disabilities since it received its first Basic Medicaid Infrastructure Development grant in 2001, in the amount of \$625,000. Connecticut developed systems to coordinate and deliver health benefits or other supports through expansion of Personal Assistant Services (PAS) in a Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waiver in order to provide assistance to those who wish to work. It also expanded its Medicaid Buy-In program, making the state eligible to apply for comprehensive funding. In 2005, Connecticut applied for and received funding as a fully eligible Comprehensive Employment Systems state, beginning in 2006. Table I-1 details the MIG Grant amount to Connecticut by year.

Table I-1. MIG Grant Amounts to Connecticut by Year

Year	Funding Amount
2001	\$625,000
2002	\$500,000
2003	\$500,000
2004	No Cost Extension
2005	\$724,127
2006	\$1,511,013
2007	\$5,120,550
2008	\$5,529,515
2009	\$4,631,665

The Connecticut MIG Comprehensive infrastructure development effort is administered by the Connecticut Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). MIG funding enabled BRS to engage in a reorganization effort to support systems change designed to embed employment as a legitimate outcome in various state initiatives. BRS includes a Connect to Work Center that is responsible for administering, among other things, the MIG projects, Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) grants, Medicaid Buy-In programs, assistive technology, personal assistance services, independent living programs, and the Ticket to Work program.

This report summarizes the planning process, goals, progress, and challenges of Connecticut's 2007-09 Comprehensive MIG Grant. A new grant for the 2010-11 period has been awarded, and many of the 2007-09 activities are continuing in the new grant period.

II. Development of the Connecticut MIG Strategic Plan

A major requirement of the Comprehensive MIG funding was the creation of a statewide strategic employment plan, driven by input from consumers, employers, advocacy groups and other stakeholders across the state. After receipt of the first comprehensive MIG grant in late November 2005, Connecticut embarked on its comprehensive strategic planning process and began the formation of a Steering Committee. Groundwork for the 2007-2009 Connecticut MIG initiative was laid during the 2006 planning year with intensive activity culminating in the submission and approval of a strategic plan. During that year, the primary MIG activities were (i) the formation of a strong, widely-representative Steering Committee to guide the effort, (ii) the implementation of a comprehensive needs assessment to inform the goals, and (iii) the development and finalization of a MIG strategic plan.

A. Formation of the MIG Steering Committee

Personal invitations to participate on the MIG Steering Committee were extended to key stakeholders in the state. State agency representatives, representatives of consumer groups, and individuals were identified for their demonstrated leadership and commitment to improved employment opportunities, and their ability to influence their respective organizations or agency leadership. The initial Steering Committee consisted of twenty-seven people. It contained a cross-section of individuals, some representing themselves and others representing state and local organizations, including the following:

- Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
- Department of Labor
- Department of Corrections
- Department of Developmental Services
- Department of Social Services
- Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
- Department of Economic and Community Development
- Department of Corrections
- Office of Policy and Management
- Public schools (including a school teacher and a Superintendent of public schools)
- Spinal Cord Injury Association
- Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Centers for Independent Living
- Association for Retarded Citizens
- Office of Workforce Competitiveness
- CT Legal Rights Project
- University of Connecticut
- Disability Advocacy Collaborative
- Board of Education and Services for the Blind

The Connecticut MIG has continued to be guided by the Steering Committee throughout the grant period, though some members have changed over time. However, membership has continued to include business leaders, people with disabilities, family members, agencies that provide employment services, and State departments. The Steering Committee continues to meet most months to discuss current issues with the project and to ensure that all activities are consistent with the strategic plan.

B. Needs Assessment

One of the first tasks of the Steering Committee was to guide the design, development and implementation of a comprehensive needs assessment to inform the statewide strategic plan. Steering Committee members determined at the outset that the strategic plan should be based on the needs and experiences of people with disabilities and employers in the State. In January 2006, the Connect to Work Center contracted with the University of Connecticut Health Center (UCHC) to design and conduct the needs assessment as a first step in the strategic planning process. With direct guidance from the Steering Committee, the UCHC research team developed a multi-pronged approach to contact people with disabilities, employers, and service providers throughout Connecticut to assess their experiences, attitudes, and observations about employment for persons with disabilities. The needs assessment involved thousands of people throughout Connecticut, representing a multitude of stakeholder groups. It included seven distinct research activities designed to gather information from multiple sources and stakeholders.

- An extensive search of relevant literature.
- Examination of Connecticut census and Department of Labor data.
- Development of partnerships with existing State councils, Workforce Investment Boards, and other entities.
- A survey of people with disabilities by telephone, in-person, and by mail that included both quantitative, forced-choice questions and qualitative, open-ended questions about their experiences, expectations and needs regarding work and personal assistance.
- Key informant interviews and focus groups with stakeholders. People with disabilities, family members, employers, and service providers participated in group discussions and one-on-one interviews that utilized a guiding set of open-ended questions addressing the key areas of concern.
- A mailed survey to members of four regional Chambers of Commerce to gather input from employers.
- Employment process mapping of four key State agencies to identify strengths, weaknesses, overlap, and opportunities for collaboration and streamlining in the existing State system.

The comprehensive needs assessment report was completed and disseminated in August of 2006. (See Robison, Gruman, Porter, Kellett & Reed, 2006.)

All of the information from the needs assessment was analyzed and prioritized. Those areas that had the highest priority were woven into Connecticut's Strategic Employment Plan, with

the SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) providing a framework for the plan. See Table II-1 for a summary of the SWOT analysis.

Table II-1. SWOT Analysis from 2006 Needs Assessment

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Person Centered Planning	Attitudes	Employer Readiness for Change	Attitudes/Low Expectations
Key staff	Transportation	Technology/Internet	Liability Concerns
Momentum: Systems Change	Complexity/Gaps in Benefits Programs	Business/Community Partnerships	Accommodation Concerns
Medicaid Buy-In	Transition Linkages	Job Growth/Economy	Lack of Engagement
Individual Work Support	Time-Limited Work Supports	Large Corporate Initiatives	Need for Training

C. The Birth of “Connect-Ability”

In addition to guiding the implementation of the needs assessment, the MIG Steering Committee hosted its first employment summit in June of 2006 to further inform the strategic plan by seeking extensive input from the employer community as well as providers, advocates and people with disabilities. The employment summit led participants through an interactive process to identify priority areas for the 2007-09 grant’s focus.

The ongoing strategic planning process incorporated findings from both the needs assessment and employment summit, and culminated in the submission of a strategic plan to CMS in September of 2006. The plan adopted five strategic priority areas:

- Technical assistance
- School to work transition
- Recruitment, employment and retention
- Stakeholder education
- Transportation

Each priority area was assigned a number of goals by the Steering Committee, each with an associated budget. The Steering Committee made clear from the beginning, however, its belief that Connecticut would not have a “final” plan. The plan was meant to be a living document, one that provides a framework for action but is not binding in nature. It is a high-level plan that allows for infrastructure change to improve the State’s employment system at the state, local and individual levels. To this end, the plan submitted to CMS was the guiding framework but continued to adapt over the grant period to meet current needs.

With the adoption of the strategic plan and its five priority areas, the Steering Committee also realized the need to “brand” the MIG effort for greater public awareness and buy-in from all stakeholders. The Steering Committee adopted the name “Connect-Ability” (C-A) to refer both

to the entire MIG grant initiative and to the statewide technical assistance center, which was designed to be the premier state resource center for employment information at the individual, programmatic and policy levels.

III. The Connect-Ability Strategic Priorities

In response to the findings of the needs assessment and feedback from the first employment summit in 2006, the strategic plan adopted key systems change goals in the five major priority areas noted previously. The Steering Committee created work groups for each priority area to design strategies, set objectives and govern activities in each area. Each work group was assigned a leader from the C-A staff, and additional work group members were recruited from interested Steering Committee members, subject matter experts from state agencies and other organizations, persons with disabilities and family members, and advocates.

Key initiatives were defined by each work group, and strategies and actions developed for each initiative following the adoption of the strategic plan. However, specific, measurable outcomes were not pre-defined for each priority area. Each work group maintained the flexibility to learn from its efforts, to drop initiatives that were not bearing fruit, and to take advantage of unexpected issues and opportunities, all in consultation with the Steering Committee.

The goals of each priority area evolved over the 3-year grant period in response to lessons learned from grant activities, changing economic conditions, and new opportunities. The sections below describe the (1) goals, (2) progress, and (3) remaining challenges of each of the five priority areas, with a separate section for additional major grant initiatives that do not fall neatly into one of the initial priority areas. In most cases, cooperation among workgroups was essential for the advancement of plan goals, but each is discussed under the most appropriate priority area.

The results reported in each section below derive from a number of sources including documentation, interviews and discussion, and personal observations of evaluation team members. Each workgroup produced meeting minutes, reports to the Steering Committee, and progress reports to CMS. In addition, members of the evaluation team were regular attendees at Steering Committee, work group and team meetings, and participated in discussions with staff, Steering Committee and work group members, and other grant partners.

A. Technical Assistance

1. Goal

A comprehensive information and resource center for businesses, job seekers with disabilities, and other stakeholders including service providers, advocacy organizations and state agencies.

Key initiatives from original strategic plan: Coordinate state level resources including systems; address gaps in state level policy including healthcare policy; support local level initiatives with technical assistance.

The overarching goal of the Connecticut's MIG strategic plan was to design and create a sustainable technical assistance (TA) center, a clearinghouse where people can receive in-depth information and guidance about employment issues and services and supports for people with disabilities. This assistance is envisioned to be available not only to employers, people with disabilities, and providers of employment services, but also to school systems, career counselors, and others who are interested in increasing the employment of people with disabilities. The TA center is designed to offer resources online, by telephone, and in print, with the ability to send teams of experts when needed.

2. Progress

Coordinate State Level Resources

In June of 2007, the state partnered with several state agencies, advocacy groups, and the CT Business Leadership Network to launch the TA center that is now called "Connect-Ability" (C-A). The TA center design is "virtual": not a physical center located in one place, but a network of people, agencies and resources that can be contacted through a variety of media to obtain information and request assistance. The center is not located in a single physical place and its functions are not carried out by a single agency. Rather, the TA center ideally involves networks of state and local organizations working together in a coordinated manner to provide stakeholders with integrated access points to all resources. From the job seeker's or employer's perspective, the TA center is designed to help them obtain the services and supports they need as if they were dealing with one organization. From a systems perspective, this strategy should help to break down barriers to employment for people with disabilities by giving TA center consumers comprehensive information and assistance when they need it from the appropriate sources.

C-A has made some progress on a number of these fronts during the grant period, with the establishment of basic building blocks including a website, toll-free number, a resource locator, and a growing level of awareness and coordination among certain state agencies. Many enhancements will be required before the TA center is robust and self-sustaining. Areas of progress include:

- A state of the art interactive website, found at www.connect-ability.com, was launched in June of 2007. The website is organized around the MIG priority areas, and has received over 30,000 unique visitors in two and a half years.
- Access to information by telephone is enhanced by C-A's widely publicized toll-free number, also launched in June 2007, which has attracted over 1,000 calls since its inception. Calls are currently answered by C-A staff and entered into a data tracking system that has been continually refined and expanded to improve its usefulness. The amount and type of data tracked now includes demographic information, type of disability, how the caller heard about C-A, referrals made, the agencies the callers are currently working with, and request status.
- To help C-A staff respond to requests for information and link callers to resources in their local area, a resource locator was developed that identifies the location of program service providers for the caller's area. The locator displays a brief description of each

program/agency and a link to the agency's website. The program proved valuable to C-A staff and an internet version has been added to the C-A website. The web version combines all the features of the C-A resource locator with a mapping program that graphically displays all offices serving the entered location and provides driving directions to each selected office.

Coordination of state level resources to improve systems connecting businesses and job seekers with disabilities has been the most challenging issue in the creation of the TA center. Existing agencies and systems have historically operated in silos, with procedures geared toward the populations they were designed to serve, but without a wider, cross-disability focus. The C-A Steering Committee and work groups have begun to bring together multi-disciplinary teams that include representatives of the major state agencies that provide supports for people with disabilities, including the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and the Departments of Labor, Transportation, Education, Developmental Services, Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Board of Education and Services for the Blind. Each has designated rudimentary protocols for referring inquiries from the website or toll-free line to the appropriate resource.

C-A's partnerships with other state agencies have begun to change the culture at certain agencies, to provide more of an employment focus than they had previously. For example, DDS is now building employment supports into all waivers, and DDS clients must have an employment component for all clients age 16-55. Understanding and commitment among the agencies varies, however, and a sustainable system that continues cross-agency coordination is still under development.

Address Gaps in State Policy

C-A advocacy and partnership initiatives resulted in state policy changes to attach all waivers to the Medicaid buy-in program, remove the age barrier to allow individuals to remain on the Buy-in past age 65, and embed employment into the state's Long Term Care Plan.

Support local level initiatives

C-A's technical assistance team provided substantial assistance to nine local pilot initiatives funded by C-A. These local level initiatives, which addressed local solutions to transition, employment and transportation concerns, are described in section V of this report and in a separate evaluation report. (Hennessy, Shugrue, Gruman & Robison, 2010).

3. Challenges

Building connections and networking have been the most critical success factors in the progress to date. Although the basic pieces of a TA center have been put in place, the service experience for customers is still uneven, and many processes are incomplete or still in development. The pieces are not yet well-designed or sustainable. The challenge going forward will be to weave the pieces together into a more seamless service experience that will provide systems coordination among all state agencies and service providers and among needed supports such as assistive technology, vocational rehabilitation, independent living,

benefits counseling, etc. At the inception of the grant period, agencies were not yet ready for the enormous challenges of working in concert to create a seamless system of supports, and had no money during a time of tight budgets to streamline their processes. The major remaining challenge will be to coordinate state agencies to sustain the momentum when grant-funded staff are no longer in place. At the next level the TA center should be able not only to answer questions, but to create solutions.

B. School to Work Transition

1. Goal

To improve the transition process for young adults moving from school to post-secondary education or employment.

Key initiatives from original strategic plan: Curriculum based work opportunities; integration of assistive technology that can follow to work; understanding of benefits; opportunities for mentoring; ensure independent living needs are met.

The transition initiative seeks to smooth the way for young adults with disabilities from secondary education to employment or further training. The workgroup emphasizes practical solutions such as promoting the development of more internships and summer employment, encouraging students to assemble a portfolio of documents needed to pursue employment, and making tools available for identifying areas of interest and strength. This group also helped to make the youth area of the C-A website more attractive to its target population.

2. Progress

Curriculum-based Work Opportunities: School District Survey

A top priority of the transition work group was to collect baseline data not only on curriculum-based work opportunities but also on all types of transition, work experience, and community participation services currently available to students ages 16 to 21 who receive special education services. C-A therefore co-sponsored a school district survey with the State Department of Education (SDE) that was sent to all school districts in Connecticut in early 2008. School districts were given background information about C-A and advised that this information would be used to inform SDE about the range of services available in Connecticut districts to support transition-age students in reaching their post-school outcome goals, and to disseminate information and resources to school districts, parents and other interested parties.

A survey response rate of 100 percent of public school districts that operate secondary programs (n=126) was achieved, providing rich data about career, employment and academic services, transportation, transition personnel, and collaboration with other state agencies. (See Reed, Shugrue & Robison, 2009). The transition work group is using survey data to develop additional resources for school districts encompassing a number of secondary transition best

practices. The initial effort has focused on fact sheets concerning best practices in transportation and stipends.

A second C-A initiative geared toward increasing work-based opportunities for students is the expansion of a database of all Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) in the state, and its conversion from paper to online search-ability. Providing this information to all stakeholders (including schools, families, students and VR counselors), is intended to increase opportunities by allowing informed choice about CRPs.

Integration of Assistive Technology

The major C-A initiative concerning assistive technology (AT) was accomplished through its work with the Connecticut Tech Act Project (CTTAP), whose mission is to increase independence and improve the lives of individuals with disabilities through increased access to Assistive Technology for work, school and community living. By leveraging CTTAP's existing funding and projects, C-A worked with CTTAP to meet mutual goals. C-A and CTTAP staff members sat on each other's advisory boards to ensure that no work was duplicated. While CTTAP funded the programs, C-A helped in the design, implementation, and dissemination of information.

The major AT accomplishment was the Assistive Technology School Swap (ATSS), an online exchange for Connecticut school systems. Many schools purchase AT devices for students who then graduate or move out of the district. Many of these devices, including special keyboards or mice, software, laptops, communication devices and wheelchairs remain unused when a student leaves. The ATSS allows schools to post unused devices to be swapped with other schools or districts within the state. Students and districts benefit from such recycling and reuse in several ways. Schools may allow students to try more than one option without the burden of a large investment. Students may need to use one type of technology for school and another for work, and the school may be more willing to help provide that for a work experience

C-A also works with the CTTAP to operate a computer loan program out of Southern CT State University's Center for Adaptive Technology. The program helps students with disabilities get appropriate AT and adaptive software, and helps schools to maximize their funds. Any Connecticut school can borrow a laptop for a student with a disability for up to four months for the purpose of evaluations, to replace a student's computer while theirs is on order or away for repairs, or to allow a student to try a specific software program, before the school purchases it.

A broader technology exchange program not limited to schools or students is the Assistive Technology Exchange of New England, also supported by C-A personnel. The exchange is a free classified ad resource that allows anyone to find, buy, sell or give away AT equipment.

Understanding of Benefits

The transition work group increased the materials available on the C-A website for students and parents concerning benefits. In addition, ten percent of C-A funds support benefits

counseling for people with disabilities who wish to remain in or enter the workforce through Community Work incentives Coordinators (CWICs). The CWICs work with young adults and their families to help them understand the impact of work on their benefits. This is often a major issue for parents who don't want to let their children participate in a work experience while in school out of fear that it will negatively impact their benefits. The CWICs often attend transition fairs and other meetings with parents arranged through the schools. They also have some specific materials for young adults outlining work incentive such as the Student Earned Income Exclusion.

Opportunities for Mentoring: The Inclusive Mentoring Project

The original goal of the inclusive mentoring initiative was to pilot the inclusive mentoring concept by funding two pilot program sites at the level of \$15,000 each. The two programs were expected to support at least 10 youth with disabilities and an equal number of youth without disabilities. Funding would be used for recruiting and matching youth with appropriate mentors, as well as for training, technical assistance and materials. C-A hired Partners for Youth with Disabilities (PYD) to assist with generating an RFP and managing the mentoring initiative. An RFP was sent to a wide variety of potential grantees, but generated limited and disappointing responses. None of the RFP applicants met the RFP qualifications, and all were rejected.

In light of the failure of the RFP process to generate qualified applicants, the Transition work group modified its goal. C-A instead worked with PYD to assist with the revised goal of making existing community mentoring programs in Connecticut welcoming to, and inclusive of, youth with disabilities. C-A and PYD, along with the Governor's Prevention Partnership, held a series of two-part mentoring inclusion trainings during 2009 in different regions of the state. Sessions provided include training for participants on the benefits of inclusion, inclusive etiquette and language, and an inclusion checklist to apply to their own organizations. Follow-up sessions prepared participants to train mentors on how to support youth with disabilities and included an overview of the unique learning, behavioral and interpersonal challenges encountered by youth with disabilities, with tips on how to address them. During the grant period, six trainings were held in four regions of the state (Hartford, Bridgeport, Middletown and Willimantic), plus one webinar, encompassing 69 people from 45 different mentoring organizations.

Evaluations completed by participants following the training showed high scores (all indicated "agree" or "somewhat agree") that:

- Ideas were presented clearly; and
- Participants felt better prepared to:
 - Train mentors to work with youth with disabilities;
 - Respond to youth with specific disabilities; and
 - Create an accessible environment for youth with disabilities

The second step in the evaluation process, which includes follow-ups with participants to determine actual changes in the programs and increases in participating youth with disabilities, will occur during the 2010-11 grant period.

One notable additional success of the transition initiative's statewide collaboration has been to prompt the Governor's Prevention Partnership to include "disability" as part of the "diversity" initiative included in its mentoring training programs.

Independent Living Needs

The goal of the transition work group's independent living initiative is to provide comprehensive information for students and young adults in all aspects of independent living (IL), without which employment becomes difficult or impossible. The provision of IL information was field tested with 90 young adult consumers in three regions during summer workshops over a three-year period. The information that tested most strongly with these consumers was developed by the work group into eleven draft modules in areas such as housing, personal finance, emergency preparedness, transportation, and social activities. During the next grant period it is envisioned that the modules will be available as both a workbook and online. They will be available for self-study as well as through workshops provided by interested organizations serving young adults such as school districts, independent living centers, and the state Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

Disability Mentoring Day

The transition work group, in conjunction with the employment work group and the Connecticut Business Leadership Network, sponsored Connecticut's first Disability Mentoring Day in October of 2009. The day was organized so that people with disabilities who would like to experience the workplace are matched with a mentor at an employer work site. Through transition work group efforts, 10 schools, 50 businesses, and 175 student mentees participated.

Professional Development Training

In order to disseminate the many resources contained on the C-A website for parents, students and young adults, the transition work group provided training on how best to use the website in both regular education and special education classroom curricula, as well as other venues. The audience was primarily special education and mental health staff, as well as some counselors from various state agencies. Professional development training was conducted for 95 professionals in 4 Regional Education Service Centers and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, plus 15 students at a college transition fair.

"Voices of Parents and Students" Report

In order to inform its efforts more fully, the Transition Work Group proposed that one key element of the C-A research plan should be to gather the "voice of the consumer," by collecting data about the beliefs and experiences of students with disabilities and their parents concerning work and the transition process. The work group and researchers from UCHC developed and implemented a plan to gather information directly from students and parents on transition-related subjects including employment aspirations, attitudes about work, employment

related school experiences, and their desires and needs concerning school employment and transition programs. Thirty-two individual interviews and three focus groups were conducted with 20 parents and 42 students. (See Reed, Shugrue & Robison, 2010b). This data will be used to inform not only the continuing Connect-Ability transition efforts, but also education officials at the state and local levels, as well as students, parents and advocacy groups.

3. Challenges

Although much foundational work was completed in each of the five transition initiatives, progress has been uneven. Much baseline knowledge was gained about best practices in curriculum-based work opportunities, but spreading those practices to other districts has just begun. There are many flexible options for schools with respect to in-school AT, but it has not yet been linked effectively to post-school work opportunities. The failure of the initial mentoring initiative RFP to develop any qualified candidates to develop a mentoring program caused a reassessment and pointed the effort in a promising new direction with existing programs, but slowed measurable progress during the grant period. Wide and effective dissemination of comprehensive IL information also remains a challenge.

In addition to its statewide initiatives, the transition work group had extensive involvement with the local pilot initiatives that addressed school to work transition. See section V below and Hennessy, et al, (2010). Another challenge for the group will be to incorporate the learning of the pilot projects, where applicable, into regional and statewide planning.

C. Recruitment, Employment, and Retention

1. Goal

To increase the recruitment, employment and retention of individuals with disabilities into Connecticut businesses.

Key initiatives from original strategic plan: Central information system for employers; outreach campaign to address insurance and liability concerns; innovative strategies for workplace accommodations.

2. Progress

Central Information System for Employers

The central information system initiative involved significant discussion at the Steering Committee and across state agencies about the feasibility of either job matching or job posting through the C-A website or other mechanism. No consensus emerged about either the feasibility or desirability of such an initiative, and it is still under discussion at all levels, with other options being considered.

However, in response to employer input that it is difficult to find qualified employees with disabilities, the employer work group, in conjunction with the Departments of Labor and Mental Health and Substance Abuse, began a pilot program called “employer designation,” that allows employers to advertise their job postings directly to job seekers with disabilities on Job Central. Through the designation, an employer may embed a code in their job postings indicating that they are “recovery friendly,” “disability friendly,” or both. Five employers have signed on to the pilot, which is still under development and has not yet been advertised to job seekers with disabilities.

Outreach to Address Insurance and Liability Concerns

Employer concerns about insurance and liability, expressed during the needs assessment, were addressed by information provided at the first employment summit and later through the C-A website.

Strategies for Workplace Accommodations

Similarly, advice for employers about workplace accommodations has been incorporated into each employment summit and into the C-A website. In particular, materials developed by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) have been used for educating employers about accommodation issues.

Connecticut Business Leadership Network Partnership

An additional key initiative of the C-A employment work group is its partnership with the Connecticut Business Leadership Network (CTBLN), a coalition of Connecticut employers working to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Prior to developing its partnership with C-A, the CTBLN had limited reach, operating with no outside funding or paid, dedicated staff. It organized networking and educational events entirely through volunteer labor with some assistance from the CT Department of Labor.

During August 2008, C-A signed a one-year contract with CTBLN to expand and enhance its activities in support of the goal of strengthening employer commitment to hiring and recruiting people with disabilities. The contract provided funding and technical assistance to CTBLN, providing for start-up costs including a paid executive director and a marketing and communications budget. The Steering Committee envisioned that the CTBLN would become financially self-sufficient by year four with revenues sufficient to cover operating costs. CTBLN was charged with expanding its network and providing peer-to-peer services and materials for employers to successfully recruit, hire and retain qualified individuals with disabilities by:

- Expanding its board and general membership
- Producing marketing materials describing CTBLN and its services
- Convening quarterly meetings that include networking, training and education
- Conducting additional presentations and workshops for employers
- Developing products and services for employers
- Conducting yearly career fair/employment conferences

- Developing a sustainable fee for service revenue structure, including products and services, corporate sponsorships, fundraisers and grant funding

During the period from August 2008 to December 2009, CTBLN expanded its membership from approximately 20 businesses to 68 businesses with 139 individual members. It produced significant marketing materials, and conducted trainings, workshops, and outreach to businesses in the areas of disability sensitivity and awareness, diversity, inclusion, and ADA training,

In addition, CTBLN conducted a job fair/employment conference in May 2009 that attracted 30 businesses (including state agencies and non-profits) and over 300 job seekers with disabilities. It collaborated with C-A to coordinate a significant portion of the first Disability Mentoring Day in October of 2009 (recruiting 14 employers and 60 mentees), and collaborated with the Hartford Business Journal to host a diversity conference that attracted over 100 businesses.

CTBLN has made limited progress to date on its goal of developing a sustainable revenue structure, which will be a priority during the new grant period.

Top employer awards

Another key initiative of the C-A employment priority was to recognize the efforts of “top employers” at the yearly employment summits. Prior to 2009, awards were based on anecdotal knowledge of a limited number of employers and their practices concerning the hiring and recruiting of people with disabilities. In 2009, C-A expanded its outreach through a partnership with Diversity Inc, which conducted a statewide employer survey using its established methodology to help determine the most diverse companies in Connecticut from a disability perspective. This recognition is expected to continue into future years.

Toolkits

Responding to employer and job seeker requests, in meetings with C-A or through the toll-free hotline, the employer work group produced three “toolkits” designed to be available through the C-A website or print format. These include:

- *Employer toolkit.* With assistance from five large employers, C-A drafted and piloted an online learning toolkit designed to help employers build a more inclusive organization. Resources include modules with best practices on interviewing, recruiting and hiring. The five employers that evaluated the toolkit were large organizations with sophisticated HR functions. Their feedback indicated that the information was too elementary for their needs, but may be useful for smaller and mid-size companies who do not have diversity training components already in place. The larger employers indicated a need for deeper, more sophisticated information. The toolkit is available on the C-A website while employer feedback is being used to design a second module addressing the concerns.
- *Job seeker toolkit.* A similar project to meet the needs of job seekers was undertaken, covering topics of interest to job seekers with disabilities such as interviewing,

transportation, benefits, and on the job supports. Although the initial goal was to produce an online toolkit, unlike employers, many job seekers do not have online access. Therefore, the “Roadmap for Job Seekers” toolkit was designed as a printed kit, to be mailed upon request.

- *Model employer packet.* Key elements of becoming a model employer of people with disabilities were collected into a single toolkit for distribution to interested employers.

3. Challenges

The widespread economic dislocation and increasing unemployment during the 2007-09 period has made efforts to gain employer engagement more difficult. It will be important to continue efforts to realize CTBLN’s potential to become a sustainable forum for business-to-business discussion and action around the hiring, recruitment and retention of individuals with disabilities. In addition, as the state’s largest employer, state government itself faces challenges in becoming a model employer of people with disabilities.

D. Stakeholder Education

1. Goal

To increase expectations for people with disabilities in achieving career potential.

Key initiatives from original strategic plan: Outreach campaign to increase expectations, including video, printed materials, media.

2. Progress

The stakeholder education initiative has the broadest mandate because it targets not only people with disabilities themselves, but family members, educators, medical providers, employers, and others who may not be aware of the capabilities of individuals with disabilities or the supports that may be available. It identifies or develops materials to challenge the still-too-prevalent attitude that people with disabilities cannot or should not be working. The two major initiatives of the stakeholder education priority are the overall branding campaign and the annual employment summits.

Outreach Campaign: Branding as “Connect-Ability”

Connecticut branded its MIG efforts as “Connect-Ability,” creating a common name and common vision for connecting job seekers with disabilities with businesses and with needed supports and services. The branding is designed to drive business to the C-A technical assistance center, which in turn is set up as a “one-stop-shop” to fulfill the brand promise of making connections among interested parties.

In addition to the C-A website, the centerpiece of C-A’s branding effort is a comprehensive marketing and media campaign that includes television, radio, and print advertising with the

tag line: "See the ability. See how we can work together." There is a call to action in all media for interested parties to contact the TA center through the C-A website or toll-free number. The success of the TA center can be attributed in large part to the marketing campaign. Experience shows that both call volume to the toll-free line and website hits increase dramatically when radio or TV ads are run. The stakeholder education work group also created and disseminated numerous brochures, newsletters, employer information and job seeker materials to interested audiences.

C-A's advertising and public relations firm, Mintz & Hoke, won Advocacy Advertising and Multimedia Presentation Bell Ringer Awards in 2008 and 2009 for its C-A video, television, and website development work. C-A also received the National Rehabilitation Association Excellence in Media Award in 2008.

C-A has also taken a leadership role in the national MIG branding effort and media campaign known as "Think Beyond the Label"(TBTL), a partnership of 30 states with Medicaid Infrastructure Grants coming together to build a uniform national infrastructure and approach that connects businesses to qualified candidates with disabilities. TBTL's goal is to change attitudes about hiring people with disabilities and raise awareness that hiring people with disabilities makes good business sense. C-A has provided both funding and staff support to the creation of TBTL, which debuted in late 2009.

Employment Summits

The 2006 needs assessment surveyed businesses to identify barriers to employing people with disabilities and found a variety of concerns, from liability to accommodation to lack of skilled applicants to fears about reliability. In response to these concerns, one of the initiatives under the stakeholder education priority is to host annual Employment Summits bringing business leaders together with stakeholders such as job seekers with disabilities, state agency managers and school superintendents, as a forum to both solicit and share information. The Employment Summits provide an opportunity to ask stakeholders for continued input and allow C-A to share information about recent accomplishments and respond directly to requests from employers for information and training. The governor and the commissioners of the C-A partner agencies have often attended the summits.

The summits are also used as a platform for awarding businesses for strong leadership in hiring people with disabilities through the "Top Employer" awards described in section C above. In addition, the summits have identified and previewed materials designed to help businesses considering hiring people with disabilities, such as an online program walking through sensitivities and accommodations.

The total number of participants in the Summit has increased from 170 to 450 over three years, and the level of employer involvement has grown as well. As a result of the 2008 summit, the Hartford Business Journal (HBJ), Hartford's source for developing business strategies, and the Metro Hartford Alliance, the capitol area's Chamber of Commerce and the region's economic development leader, both aligned forces with C-A. Both organizations are

using their membership lists to collaboratively inform employers on the business case for workforce development.

The Employment Summits also provide critical supports for C-A projects. They provide one accountability measure from year to year that the project is creating tools and advancing goals that the participants deem important. In addition, the summits help C-A stay connected to leaders in the state who set the direction for the year to come.

3. Challenges

The C-A branding efforts have proved that significant traffic can be driven to the T-A center during periods of concentrated media activity. The challenge will be to sustain the progress of the branding effort with less expensive alternatives, or find funding to sustain widespread media coverage.

E. Transportation

1. Goal

To increase access to transportation for individuals with disabilities.

Key initiatives from original strategic plan: Improve access to transportation through innovative initiatives including a person-centered voucher system; coordination with Department of Transportation strategic planning process.

2. Progress

The transportation priority was designed to tackle the mammoth problem of inadequate transportation resources throughout Connecticut for people with disabilities. The work group first identified existing resources by bringing together the best information currently available to the C-A website and to other print sources, and sought to fill in the identified gaps in service.

Person-centered Voucher System

One major C-A transportation objective is to promote the development of innovative transportation initiatives, including a person-centered voucher system. After considerable analysis and planning efforts, the transportation work group determined that the formation of a state-wide voucher system presented significant barriers, and that the best way to approach the voucher project was to pilot various options through local level initiatives. Therefore, as part of the overall C-A local pilot initiative, transportation was included as a required element for each pilot. (See section V and Hennessy, et al., (2010) for a more detailed description of the local pilot initiative.) As noted in the local pilot report, voucher programs are difficult to establish and maintain even at the local level without significant structural change and monetary resources.

Coordination with Department of Transportation and Other Resources

The transportation work group partnered extensively, not only with the state Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) but also with the states' transit districts, ADA paratransit and other transportation providers, and advocates to address the transportation needs of people with disabilities. Through these working relationships, C-A was able to leverage its resources to increase awareness and provide tools. These include:

- Conducted four transportation state-wide workshops with 250 attendees
- Developed an issue brief and fact sheets concerning accessible taxis
- Developed and printed "Getting On Board Guides" and a resource directory in the two regions of the state where they did not exist
- Collaborated with transit districts to promote the use of mobility managers
- Partnered with ConnDOT and the Kennedy Center to standardize all ADA state-wide, paratransit applications
- Developed a web-based trip planner and transportation calculator

The transportation initiative worked to support the local pilots, through which the state gained its first wheelchair accessible taxi as well as two mobility managers, using federal New Freedom Initiative funding. A mobility manager, also called a transportation coordinator, is a one-stop transportation resource that fields calls and facilitates access to transportation services by coordinating multiple transportation modes and managing eligibility requirements.

3. Challenges

The transportation initiative's biggest success came through its dissemination of information on existing resources, and its ability through its collaborations to place transportation as a priority on other groups' agendas. Nevertheless, transportation remains one of the most intractable barriers to employment for people with disabilities. The local pilots had limited success in this arena, and their struggles pointed to the need for much more extensive systems change and funding to develop truly innovative solutions.

F. Other Key Connect-Ability Initiatives

In addition to the five priority areas, a number of additional important and related initiatives were tackled as part of C-A during the 2007-09 grant period, often in cooperation with other grants and funding sources. These include the expansion of the state's benefits counseling program, the launch of a data interoperability initiative, the state response to federal stimulus funding, cooperation with other regional and national initiatives and technical assistance exchanges, and additional evaluation projects.

1. Expansion of Benefits Counseling Program

The 2006 needs assessment survey indicated that the complexity of benefits programs was a major employment barrier for people with disabilities. The Connecticut MIG grant allocated 10% of its operating budget toward the direct service of benefits counseling, which has allowed the state to expand and improve its existing benefits counseling services. The project has increased the availability of services throughout the state, and provided funding to ensure training, staff development and quality assurance. The benefits counseling program has become a key component of the TA Center, and a source of information for job seekers with disabilities.

The project is a partnership with joint funding through the MIG grant, the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) grant, and the state's Vocational Rehabilitation program. The project has seven benefits counselors providing work incentives planning and support, including two Spanish speaking counselors. These seven individuals completed 2,477 benefits counseling sessions between February 2006 and December 2009.

In a recent 2009 consumer satisfaction survey of benefits counseling consumers, preliminary data indicates that 68 percent agreed or strongly agreed that benefits counseling helped them to start working, increase their hours, or increase their earnings. In addition, 69 percent said that it was somewhat likely or very likely that they would start working or increase their hours or earnings within the next 12 months. (Full survey data available from the authors.)

2. Data Interoperability

C-A funding, in conjunction with funds from the state's Mental Health Systems Transformation Grant, has enabled the state to pilot a data interoperability initiative to implement a data system that will improve the ability of state human service agencies to share data on a case management and policy level. The primary goal is to make available individual consumer data and content to improve case management, cost effectiveness, and quality of services. A small pilot to share data on employment outcomes among three agencies was completed and data presented to a group of interested state commissioners. The commissioners agreed to expand the pilot with additional agencies, and the expanded project is now in the early stages of designing a structure and methods for collecting, storing, and sharing cross-agency data.

3. State Response to Federal Stimulus Funding

As part of the federal response to the economic slowdown, Connecticut received significant stimulus funds for employment initiatives through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). BRS received \$2.8 million in ARRA funds. In addition to publicizing the funding and its benefits to employers, C-A worked with the Board of Education and Services for the Blind on stimulus planning, and with BRS in its creation of the new Division of Employment Services (DES) in October of 2009. DES is a new BRS initiative designed to more effectively respond to the employment needs of consumers and businesses in Connecticut including:

- Pre-screened applicants
- On-the-job training (OJT)/internships (one to six months duration)
- Risk free trial (working period of two to four weeks duration)

Business calls to the C-A toll-free line are directed to DES. With a full-time director and six regional employees, in its first three months DES received twenty-one employer calls and made over seven hundred contacts to employers, including cold calls, employer meetings, job leads and Chambers of Commerce meetings. All calls are being entered into the C-A data tracker. In three months DES also completed 18 OJTs and 4 placements. It has seen a fifty percent completion of OJTs resulting in full time employment. It is considering a partnership with community colleges for industry-specific training based on the DOL employment job growth areas. DES plans to provide more efficient job lead sharing through a job lead website targeted for use by April 2010.

4. Technical Assistance Partnerships and other National Exchanges

C-A is an active participant in one national and one regional technical assistance organization: the National Consortium for Health Systems Development (NCHSD) and the Northeast Partnership (NEP). The state pays membership dues to NCHSD, and participates in NEP meetings as a partner state. Members of the C-A team and Evaluation Team have made numerous national and regional presentations on various C-A projects and evaluation activities.

5. Evaluation Initiatives

The UCHC evaluation team provides feedback to Connect-Ability about the effectiveness of its activities. Additional evaluation activities not directly related to the five priority areas included:

- *“Pathways to Success” project.* The evaluation team began a qualitative study employing a longitudinal series of in-depth, in-person interviews that chronicle the experiences of people with disabilities in their journeys, over time, to find and maintain meaningful, competitive employment. The study began in early 2008 and has continued with interviews at six-month intervals. Themes that have emerged in the study include employment-related issues such as finding a job, problems on the job due to disability, experiences with external sources providing help, barriers encountered, and the importance of personal and family attitudes. Results for the first two years of the study provide insight into the employment barriers, challenges, and successes of study members. (See Reed, Shugrue & Robison, 2010a. The first year report may also be found at: www.hcbs.org/moreInfo.php/doc/2737.)
- *Infrastructure change reporting.* One key aspect of the C-A evaluation is to capture and document all infrastructure changes relevant to the employment of people with disabilities, whether directly or indirectly related to C-A. Infrastructure change is broadly defined and can include changes to government agency policies and practices, changes to employer practices, development of new programs, and information dissemination, among others. Given the broad definition of infrastructure change, it is often hard to capture the import of these changes on job seekers with disabilities. The evaluation

team chose a series of quarterly key informant interviews as the primary methodology for the infrastructure change evaluation. These interviews are designed to access a broad cross-section of the community and to hear the perceptions of people representing many different agencies and organizations. Twenty-three people with knowledge of some aspect of the employment infrastructure for people with disabilities in Connecticut were identified as key informants during the years 2007-08. Eight additional key informants were added in 2009, plus a one-time interview with the leaders of the local pilot initiatives. (See Kellest, Robison, Shugrue & Gruman, 2009.) Additional yearly infrastructure change reports and a three-year executive summary are available from the authors.

- *MPR cost-benefit analysis.* The evaluation team contracted with Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) to conduct an analysis, with 2006 data, of the net benefits of increasing employment of people with disabilities in Connecticut. The MPR study, which had substantial data limitations, did provide some evidence that the state's VR program has a positive cost/benefit ratio over several years. (See Gimm, et al, 2008.)
- *Benefits counseling report.* The purpose of this report was to provide information about the relationship between benefits counseling, vocational rehabilitation, employment and earnings of people with disabilities. The outcomes from this report demonstrate (1) that these programs have a positive impact, at least in the short term, and (2) that it might be possible to steer individuals to interventions that would be most beneficial for them. (See Gruman, et al., 2010)

IV. Steering Committee/Work Group/Staff Survey

At the conclusion of the three-year grant period, the evaluation team conducted an anonymous online survey of all C-A Steering Committee, work group, and staff members to determine their views on the major achievements of C-A and the barriers that hindered its effectiveness. They were also asked what lessons they had learned about C-A, what they would recommend doing differently, and how the C-A staff and evaluation team could be more effective. The survey produced a 40 percent response rate, with only 19 of 48 responding. The complete survey is attached as Appendix A.

A. Major Achievements of Connect-Ability

The first question asked respondents to list the top three major achievements of C-A from their perspective. By far the most common response, cited by 74 percent (14 of 19), relates to the importance of the marketing and branding efforts of C-A. Respondents noted the value of the brand campaign in increasing public awareness, raising expectations of people with disabilities, breaking down stigma and reducing stereotypes. One respondent noted:

[The] public awareness campaign is changing attitudes toward the ability of people being able to work. The outreach to many people with disabilities through the marketing has led to many people contacting Connect-Ability to learn about options and resources, much of the information encouraging them to work.

Thirty two percent (n=6) noted that the development of relationships and partnerships among state agencies, including enhanced communication among them, was a major achievement. The third most commonly cited achievement (26%, n=5) was the increase in employer engagement, including the revitalization of the BLN. Other achievements mentioned by at least two respondents are included in Table IV-1.

Table IV-1. Major Achievements of Connect-Ability

Major Achievements	Respondents (N=19)
• Public awareness/branding campaign	14
• Enhanced relationships among state agencies	6
• Increased employer engagement	5
• Employer summits	3
• Transportation initiatives	3
• Local pilot initiatives	2
• Connections with community providers	2

• Provision of toolkits	2
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B. Barriers or Challenges that Hindered Effectiveness

The survey also asked respondents to list three important challenges that limited the effectiveness of Connect-Ability. The top challenge cited was the economy, mentioned by 53 percent (n=10). Another major barrier was the state’s bureaucratic systems, including its contracting rules, mentioned by a third (n=6). One respondent noted that the contracting rules:

...delayed the issuance of local level pilot RFPs for a number of months, required a change in website host that delayed website development, [and] delayed organizing [the employment] summit for some months.

Lack of employer engagement and state agency territoriality were listed by a third (n=6) and a quarter (n=5), respectively. Other barriers noted by at least two respondents are listed in Table IV-2.

Table IV-2. Most Important Barriers and Challenges

Barriers and Challenges	Respondents (N=19)
• Economic conditions/record unemployment	10
• Bureaucratic systems/state contracting rules	6
• Lack of employer engagement	6
• State agency territoriality/turf protection; lack of involvement or buyin	5
• Staff spread too thin/goals too ambitious for existing staff	4
• Transportation challenges	4
• Limited consumer involvement	2
• Changing structures and attitudes takes time	2

C. Recommendations for Doing Things Differently

The third survey question asked respondents what they would recommend doing differently. Answers fell into two broad categories. Over half of the 17 respondents to this question (n=9) made recommendations focused on state government. About a third (n=6) suggested additional focus on employers. These suggestions are summarized in Table IV-3.

Table IV-3. Recommend Doing Differently

Recommend Doing Differently	Respondents (N=17)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on state government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Actively promote state as model employer ○ Focus on agency infrastructure and collaboration ○ Diversity awareness and training for state employees ○ Work with Economic Development Commission and Workforce Investment Boards 	9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on employers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthen BLN education and support ○ Peer-to-peer employer training ○ Aggressive promotion of model employer principles in the private sector ○ Add more businesses to C-A steering committee ○ Target more ads to employers 	6

D. Lessons Learned

Respondents were asked to share the most important lesson learned through their work with C-A. The most common response from the 17 individuals who answered this question (29%, n=5), concerned the *importance of networking and partnerships* with a wide variety of interested parties to the success in meeting overall C-A goals. No other response was mentioned by more than one person.

E. Suggestions for Connect-Ability Staff and Evaluation Team

The final two questions asked for suggestions for how the Connect-Ability staff and the evaluation team, respectively, could be more effective. Four respondents said “no” or “nothing” to the question concerning the C-A staff. Only one other response to the question concerning the C-A staff was given by more than one person. About a third of the seventeen respondents (n=6) suggested that *better communication with state agencies and among each other* would enhance the effectiveness of the C-A staff.

Eleven of the 15 respondents to the question concerning the evaluation team said “no” or “nothing.” The other four respondents each had one suggestion:

- Provide pictures and stories, not just narrative write-ups
- Provide the Steering Committee with more education on impacts/outcomes
- Evaluate “front line” workers who are assisting people with disabilities in various programs
- Provide a copy of prior responses to the infrastructure change interviews prior to new interviews.

V. Process Evaluation: Local Level Pilots

One of the key initiatives identified at the inception of the grant period was the design of local level initiatives to pilot promising programs at the local level. This section provides an overview and evaluation of the management process of the C-A Local Level Pilot (LLP) initiative. Data for this section come from (i) interviews with the C-A staff lead liaison, (ii) interviews with the nine LLP project coordinators, and (iii) an anonymous on-line survey about the success of the LLP initiative completed by the C-A staff and Steering Committee. A separate stand-alone report evaluating the LLP activities and outcomes, *Connecticut's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant: Local Level Pilot Initiative Evaluation*, is also available. (Hennessy et al., 2010.)

A. Pilot Initiative Timeline

The C-A Steering Committee proposed conducting a Local Level Pilot initiative in mid 2006. During 2007 the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was prepared and community responses were received. DSS provided the recommended top ten proposals list in January 2008 and contracts were completed by mid-June 2008. The ten organizations were invited to complete a needs assessment and strategic plan. The submitted strategic plans were evaluated in December 2008 and nine were selected to continue into the implementation phase. Revisions were suggested to the LLPs by the C-A staff and evaluation team in a summary document of identified barriers, outcomes and measures from each LLP's plan. Finalized plans were accepted mid-May 2009. Pilots started work on activities between January 2009 and May 2009. The C-A LLP liaisons met with the LLPs and attended LLP committee meetings supporting the strategic plan development and implementation of the grant activities throughout the project period. The grant period ended December 31, 2009.

B. Evaluation Results

Table V-1 summarizes the management challenges identified by C-A staff, Steering Committee and LLP project coordinators.

Table V-1. Summary of Management Challenges

	Management Challenges Identified
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more staff support required than anticipated • majority of administrative support spent on strategic plan development
Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • minutes lacked details on progress toward LLP strategic plans, issue resolution, and what or how technical assistance provided
RFQ Process & Contract Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inability to influence the process of the RFQ review or contract execution through DSS • RFQ did not clearly indicate what was allowable for grant expenditures and what was not allowable as direct services • lack of time available for the project due to delays with the contract execution

Strategic Plan Support and Review Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • process was cumbersome, confusing, lacked content experts • some concerns about changes in scope or focus of their plans
Payment Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paid according to time milestones and not outcome-based
Feedback Communications & Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • content and completeness of the quarterly reports varied across the LLPs, with no feedback given to the LLPs • calls were too frequent since more time was needed to report on progress, calls lacked substantive feedback, and were not a primary communication method (important information sent by email) • too many details in reports to Steering Committees

1. Staff Assignments

The C-A team noted that the need for staff support to manage the initiative was greater than originally expected. Staff was assigned with one member primarily dedicated to support the activities for the LLP initiative as of January 2007. Additional staff members were involved as needed to provide technical assistance. The strategic plan development accounted for the majority of administrative support time. An additional staff member was assigned a part-time role of LLP liaison in early 2009. The two liaisons had a role description that included regular calls to the LLP project coordinators to provide access to resources, resolve issues, communicate any grant-related information to the LLPs, communicate problems and concerns back to the C-A staff and Technical Assistance workgroup.

2. Meetings and Committees

The liaisons aimed to conduct weekly calls with each LLP; however this time frame was not always feasible. The Liaison Team met monthly in 2009 except during the summer. Participating members included: the two LLP liaisons, a staff member who provided technical assistance and marketing support, a Steering Committee member who provided transition support, the C-A staff project coordinator, and an Evaluation Team member. Minutes for both the calls and team meetings documented the occurrence of the meeting and general topics discussed and were made available to the staff and head of the department. However, the minutes lacked details on progress toward meeting LLP strategic plans, did not specify how previously identified issues were resolved, and did not specify what or how technical assistance was provided.

3. RFQ Review and Contract

A management challenge was the inability to influence the process of the RFQ review or contract execution through DSS. The Department of Administrative Services published the RFQ, and then DSS received and scored the proposals according to predetermined criteria and sent a summary report with the top ten recommended proposals to the C-A staff in

January 2008. Survey responses noted that the RFQ took a lot of time, that the RFQ may not have been clearly written, and that the review process was useful but could have been improved if fewer proposals were accepted.

The majority of the LLPs considered the information provided in the RFQ to be useful information. However, several LLPs commented that the RFQ did not clearly indicate what was allowable for grant expenditures and what was not allowable as direct services. Other concerns included: the very short time period to complete a lengthy proposal, and the unusual request to write a plan without distinguishing the difference between the submitted proposal plan and the strategic plan.

Execution of the contracts took five months and was completed in May 2008. Both the Steering Committee/staff survey and the LLP interview responses reported lack of time available for the project due to the extended contracting process. This issue resulted in delays to hire staff and to begin the strategic planning activities.

4. Strategic Plan Review Process

The strategic plan review process lasted five months. A Strategic Plan Review Team was established by the lead liaison to review the submitted plans according to their strengths and weaknesses during a meeting on December 29, 2008. The team membership included two staff, who were not directly involved in supporting the LLPs to prepare the plans, and two C-A Steering Committee members. The nine selected LLPs were contacted in February to confirm their continuation in the project, and contacted again in early March with proposed revisions to the plans. In-person visits to the LLPs were conducted by a team of four C-A staff between March 24 and April 9, 2009 to review the modified strategic plan barriers, outcomes and measures document. Finalized plans were accepted by late May 2009.

Overall, the LLP project directors did not consider the strategic plan review process as especially useful. The process was described as cumbersome, lacking content expertise and confusing with mixed messages from the multiple people involved.

In general the LLPs were satisfied with the revised Barriers-Outcomes-Measures document drafted by the C-A staff and evaluation team, and some LLPs commented that this document was more focused and easier to use as a guide than the longer strategic plan. However, a few LLPs reported that the revised document cut out originally submitted goals, revised goals were less vigorous, and for two LLPs the changed goals caused unexpected competition between the LLPs.

5. Payment Schedule and Procedures

Another challenge was the grant payments which were paid according to time milestones and not outcome-based. Since organizations needed to commit staff to their projects it would likely have been difficult to attract any organizations with an outcomes-based payment but an alternative could have been to restructure the amount of payments with a bonus for accomplishing goals. The LLP contracted grant was for a total of \$200,000 with 12.5 percent allocated in two payments to conduct the needs assessment and prepare a strategic plan; and, 87.5 percent allocated in four payments during the implementation phase.

6. Feedback Processes to LLPs

The C-A staff provided technical assistance to the LLPs in response to questions and to support the preparation of the strategic plan. The majority of the LLPs (8 out of 9) described the technical support from the C-A staff as somewhat or very helpful during the strategic planning period and the implementation phase.

Feedback was also provided via scheduled calls with the C-A liaisons. The LLPs overall were satisfied with the calls as a feedback method with the majority of LLPs indicating that their project activities were always discussed on the calls, and that requests for technical assistance and grant expectations were always or sometimes discussed. Some LLPs considered calls to be too frequent since more time was needed to report on progress or any changes. In their view, the calls lacked substantive feedback and were not a primary communication method; important grant-related information was more often communicated via email from the liaisons. The LLPs reported concerns that C-A staff communications sometimes lacked clarity, especially regarding how the grant funds could be used and requirements around marketing materials. These questions were resolved with multiple contacts to the C-A liaisons or other staff.

The LLPs commented that much of their communication with the C-A liaison occurred informally by phone or email in a timely manner whenever an issue or question was identified. The LLPs asked questions and received answers promptly without waiting for the quarterly report or scheduled liaison calls.

7. Reporting and Feedback to C-A staff and Steering Committee

The formal method of feedback from the LLPs to the C-A staff was via quarterly web-based reporting with a total of six quarterly on-line reports. All the LLPs completed at least one of the initial two reports, with some LLPs providing the same information in both reports. All the LLPs completed the implementation phase reports with some LLPs providing only sustainability information in the final report but not updating the other fields. The content and completeness of the quarterly reports varied across the pilots and no formal feedback was provided to the LLPs from the C-A staff.

The majority (5 of 9) reported that the quarterly report was very useful for reporting the status of the LLP project, including activities undertaken and issues experienced. Generally the website was considered easy to use but common concerns were technical difficulties with the lack of text formatting and temporary loss of data.

The lead liaison prepared a report for the Steering Committee meetings outlining the liaison actions, status of the LLP activities and issues. The lead liaison provided copies of the fifth and sixth quarterly reports to the Steering Committee in lieu of a summary report. Of the 13 Steering Committee and staff responses, seven indicated that they received “some” feedback about the LLPs, but most would have preferred more feedback. Respondents reported that the LLP sharing event and presentations to the Steering Committee were informative. They suggested that it would have been better to assign a couple of LLPs to different Steering Committee members since there were too many LLPs to keep track of the information well,

and they would have preferred more concise structured feedback to the committee members about LLP activities and accomplishments.

8. Training

A training session was provided in July 2008 including information on the process of strategic plan development and program evaluation. No other formal group presentations were made. Additional information was provided directly to individual LLPs or via general group emails.

9. Resources

The C-A staff was available to all LLPs in addition to having one of the liaisons assigned to specifically support each LLP. Other resources included the C-A website, but only one LLP indicated always using the website and found it to be very useful. Of the remaining, four indicated sometimes using the website while five reported it to be somewhat useful. LLPs noted that the C-A liaisons provided considerable information about available resources, although some LLPs remarked that the information would have been more helpful if presented during the development of the plan rather than later during implementation when issues occurred. LLPs also commented that it would have been helpful if more marketing of the LLP initiative had been supported by C-A, such as promoting the LLPs on the C-A website.

The majority of the LLPs were satisfied overall with the consistency of the C-A staff expectations of the LLP activities with two reporting the staff to be very consistent and four reporting the staff to be somewhat consistent. However, three described the staff as not consistent. Concerns about consistency with grant expectations reflected lack of clarity in the RFQ about what were allowable expenditures and activities.

C. Suggestions for Improvement

The LLP initiative had many structural components in place, including Liaison Team meetings and minutes, LLP weekly calls and minutes, and the quarterly reports. However, these formal feedback mechanisms lacked follow-up from the staff to the LLPs which could have improved the overall process and possibly streamlined communications to exclude the weekly calls.

The website is an easily accessible resource for many organizations, but the team should continue to strive to improve the content and evaluate its usefulness as a resource to support infrastructure change. The majority of the LLPs described the C-A staff as a very useful resource, suggesting that networking with knowledgeable parties is an important process to support infrastructure change.

The LLP initiative did not always have concise and clear messaging of expectations between the C-A staff and the LLPs. Ensuring that a common objective is established among participants and continuous clear communications are key processes to supporting infrastructure change among differing organizations. As described in the LLP evaluation report, open and frequent communications among gatekeepers and stakeholders was an important feature for success.

As reported in the LLP evaluation, a common concern was the timing of the project. Ensuring adequate timing for planning, implementing and evaluating the success of such an initiative is critical.

D. C-A Staff and Steering Committee Response to LLP Results

The C-A Steering Committee and staff described multiple goals for the LLP initiative:

- Involve local businesses and organizations to create sustainable initiatives for priority area
- Promote local level collaboration
- Allow local communities to use innovative strategies
- Reduce barriers to employment goals at local level
- Increase capacity of local communities
- Develop local level promising practices
- Create bottom-up change and create specific recommendations from best practices for statewide infrastructure change
- Create new programs to improve access to jobs based on local needs
- Change infrastructure to increase employment

The C-A Steering Committee and staff indicated that the LLP initiative created a good start to identifying and implementing innovative new programs or resources and noted that new collaborations or networks were realized. The Steering Committee and staff recognized the limitations of the short time available to fully implement infrastructure change. Some responses indicated that the projects had weak sustainability plans, ended just as the projects were ramping up, only marginally met goals, replicated already established work in some cases and could not complete infrastructure change in the short time available. On the other hand, they noted that a lot was done in a short time, the pilots built important networks, demonstrated a need for the type of services provided, and created new resources and tools.

E. LLP Initiative Successes

Overall the management of the LLP initiatives was able to manage multiple diverse organizations, oversee the implementation of several new initiatives and support creation of many significant long-lasting networks. Several initiatives were identified by the Steering Committee and staff that could be implemented in the state with more time and support for sustainability. Some responders noted that the most important results were getting local organizations thinking about regional issues together, networking and raising awareness, for example, working with the Chambers of Commerce.

Table V-2 shows the LLP initiatives identified by the Steering Committee and staff as most important, by priority area.

Table V-2. Most Important LLP initiatives

LLP Initiatives	
Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spanish curriculum for parent transition training • Transition assessment toolkits • Checklists • Transition program evaluation manual
Recruiting-Hiring-Promoting Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AT information kits • Youth summer employment programs • Employer resources and job-seeker resources and toolkits
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible taxi grant • Transportation training sessions • Expanded transportation options

VI. Barriers and Challenges in the 2010-11 Grant Period

Although C-A has been systematically addressing barriers since its inception, a number of challenges remain for the 2010-11 grant period. Table VI-1 provides an overview of the remaining challenges, along with plans to address them.

Table VI-1. Connecticut Challenges and Plans to Address Challenges

Connecticut's Challenges	Plans to Address Challenges
Lack of interagency collaboration/ communication	
<p>The system continues to lack a coordinated workforce system for individuals with disabilities. To create an accessible system, individuals with disabilities, service providers, state agencies, employers and other stakeholders need to agree on system principles and outcome measures. True collaboration will require a move beyond silos toward a system without programmatic walls.</p>	<p>Ongoing development of an in-state resource and technical assistance center to provide information to key stakeholders is a critical component of Connecticut's plan. This single point of entry minimizes the fragmentation, and provides opportunity for a closed-loop feedback system to address barriers as they are identified.</p>
Lack of System-wide Data	
<p>While there are many pockets of excellence, there is no clear measure of success and no consistent data set. This makes it difficult to identify and replicate what works in the system, and move beyond pilots to real systems change. It also makes it difficult to obtain global cost impact data, which increases the likelihood of resistance due to budget concerns.</p>	<p>C-A is working with the Office of Workforce Competitiveness and the Mental Health Transformation Grant to identify a statewide data interoperability plan to address this lack of consistency. The state has Commissioner level support for this initiative.</p>
Inconsistent communication and lack of information	
<p>The current infrastructure lacks a coordinated approach to communication and the dissemination of information. There are many successful efforts to share information, and best practices need to be identified and shared throughout the system.</p>	<p>This issue will be addressed both through a public information campaign and the strengthening of the state agencies' capacity to deliver employment-related technical assistance.</p>
Job Seeker Issues	
<p>The needs assessment documented issues in transportation, personal assistance, workplace accommodations, assistance in finding jobs, lack of jobs, concerns about benefits.</p>	<p>The MIG Strategic Plan tackles each of these barriers, and provides assistance on each area through C-A.</p>

Employer Issues

The needs assessment documented issues in the following areas: accommodations, need for skilled employees, financial and productivity concerns, liability issues, customer reactions, transportation.

The MIG Strategic Plan also tackles these barriers, providing assistance through Connect-Ability, and through the MIG-supported Business Leadership Network.

VII. Summary, Lessons Learned and Recommendations

A. Summary

The major accomplishments of Connect-Ability over the 2007-2009 grant period included:

- *Creation of a potentially sustainable technical assistance center providing support to job seekers, employers, providers and state agencies.* The “virtual” nature of the technical assistance center, combining a brand campaign with fulfillment through website, toll-free number, email, toolkits, and state agency partners, has evolved substantially over three years, responding to customer feedback and needs. Additional focus on expansion and service usage along with sustainability is planned in the new grant period.
- *The launch of a strong multi-media marketing campaign that established robust brand recognition for Connect-Ability and drew job seekers and employers to the technical assistance center.* The campaign generated strong name recognition, giving C-A staff and partners an entrée into state agencies and employer circles. It also generated numerous calls to the C-A technical assistance center, at first primarily from job seekers, but evolving over the three years to increase its responsiveness to businesses and their needs.
- *Establishment of strong partnerships and collaboration among state agencies responsible for employment initiatives for people with disabilities.* At the beginning of the grant period, state agencies had limited experience working together on client employment issues, and did not fully appreciate the goals of the MIG initiative. By working together on the C-A Steering Committee and workgroups, agency representatives increased their understanding of the employment processes and gaps of their own and other agencies. The buy-in process was slow, and some agencies developed their understanding and readiness faster than others. Some did not immediately embrace MIG-funded agency-level initiatives in the early years. The substantial progress made over the grant period has led to significant commitments in the form of MOAs with several state agencies that form the centerpiece of C-A efforts under the new grant.
- *Increasing awareness of and commitment to the hiring of people with disabilities among employers.* Employer outreach was multi-pronged, with significant progress in reaching employers through annual employment summits and expansion of the capabilities of the Connecticut Business Leadership Network through MIG funding. Both efforts created forums for dialogue and some progress in awareness and attitudinal change.
- *Meaningful changes in state policy.* C-A sponsorship was a key contributor to efforts to (i) attach all Medicaid waivers to the Medicaid Buy-in, (ii) remove the age barrier to

allow individuals to remain on the Buy-in past age 65, and (iii) embed employment into the state's Long Term Care Plan.

- *Significant expansion of the state's benefits counseling capacity to serve people with disabilities across the state and across agency lines.* MIG funding enabled significant expansion in the numbers of benefits counselors available to reach the statewide population of people with disabilities who can benefit from the service. Counselors are now able to coordinate counseling services across agency lines.
- *Increased awareness of local efforts that may be expanded regionally or statewide.* Local pilot initiatives enhanced learning about what initiatives can work at the local level, with possible expansion regionally or statewide. Learnings about barriers and unsuccessful local initiatives also enhanced future planning.
- *Launch of a multi-agency data interoperability initiative.* C-A funding enabled several state agencies to begin an initiative to share cross-agency consumer data to improve case management, cost effectiveness and quality of services related to employment outcomes.

B. Lessons Learned

- *The ability to demonstrate significant outcomes over short time periods in a systems change grant is hindered by the complexity of the initiatives, the silos in which state agencies currently operate and the long-term nature of the outcomes.* Funders and program managers are understandably anxious to demonstrate the effectiveness of their efforts through demonstrable outcomes. Systems change such as that funded through the Medicaid Infrastructure Grants, however, often occurs more slowly over time. Establishing relationships, building trust, changing attitudes and expectations about the role of work for people with disabilities, and strengthening the pathways to employment at every level are foundational building blocks built incrementally over time.
- *The complexity of measuring and communicating the meaning of infrastructure change is made more difficult by lack of common definitions, lack of centralized systems that can share information, and mismatch between system change goals and individual outcomes.* Infrastructure change is a difficult concept to communicate to partners accustomed to measuring success through individual level outcomes such as employment figures. Systems outcomes such as infrastructure change cannot be measured with individual level measurements. CMS's near-exclusive focus on Medicaid Buy-In numbers once the program was established, and the lack of a common research agenda to measure other infrastructure change, hampered the communication of program results.

- *In order to reach their full potential, local pilot programs require substantial time, guidance and resources.* C-A's choice to fund nine local pilot initiatives for a one-year period presented some challenges to C-A staff in providing appropriate time, direction and technical assistance. The short time frame made it difficult for pilots to show results, measure their impact, and make their efforts sustainable.
- *State agency representatives' understanding of and commitment to MIG initiatives evolves over time and in the context of shrinking resources given the current economic conditions.* In working with state agencies to change employment infrastructure and process, it is crucial to identify and work with "champions" within each agency who can work internally to change attitudes and achieve buy-in. The process can be slow, and requires patience and multiple meetings and presentations at different levels of the agency to make progress, embracing a top-down bottom-up approach.
- *Branded outreach through media campaigns is a critical component of generating both awareness and contacts with the TA center.* Attitudinal change takes time, and the "top of mind" awareness of C-A and its capabilities benefits greatly from reinforcement through media outreach. Contacts with the C-A technical assistance center peak dramatically during periods when TV, radio and print advertising is fielded.
- *The partnerships among VR agencies, Medicaid agencies and academic institutions are crucial steppingstones to a coordinated statewide approach.* This also helps to ensure unbiased and impartial reporting of results.
- *Employers are slow to respond to outreach efforts.* Systems changes that incorporate substantial numbers of employers are slow to implement, often due to persistent negative attitudes about employment of people with disabilities. Peer-to-peer assistance and sustainability of the BLN are longer-term goals. As with state agencies, employer efforts are enhanced by the presence of internal "champions" who can spread commitment levels throughout the organizations. Commitment at lower levels of the organization must spread to more senior levels before significant progress can take place.

C. Recommendations: National Level

- Systems change grants should incorporate flexibility for funding hybrid efforts combining direct service and infrastructure change goals.
- Systems change grants should specify a common research agenda to measure the parameters of infrastructure change goals.

- Systems change grants should recognize more explicitly the interaction between work and public benefits. Federal agencies should develop cross-systems models to provide for benefits counseling to enhance employment initiatives.

D. Recommendations: State Level

- States that use pilot initiatives to test programs or concepts should limit them to manageable numbers, fund them well, consider staff resources and capacity for technical assistance, and allow sufficient time for measurable and sustainable efforts.
- State infrastructure initiatives should be supported by staff who have a good grounding in existing supports for people with disabilities.
- In order to maintain awareness and generate meaningful inflow of requests for assistance from job seekers and employers, seek alternate sources of funding to continue a meaningful brand campaign.
- Work closely with the CT BLN to find sustainable funding sources and to develop its operations into a true peer-to-peer assistance center.
- Ensure that all grant activities are targeted to barriers identified in a data-driven, comprehensive needs assessment that can be tracked and measured, and that they are manageable in light of funding and staffing. Resist pressures to increase scope to encompass more than can be reasonably accomplished and retrospectively measured.
- Increase the time and effort devoted to researching benefits counseling outcomes, including what models are best and who has the most successful results.

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Appendix A

Connect-Ability Evaluation

Staff/Steering Committee/Work Group Survey

The questions below address Connect-Ability, Connecticut's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant. Your answers to these questions will remain completely confidential. That is, any information used in reports will not contain names or other identifying information. Only the evaluation team at the University of Connecticut Health Center will see your responses.

1. What have been the major achievements of Connect-Ability? Please list the top three achievements, from your perspective.
2. What barriers or challenges limited or hindered the effectiveness of Connect-Ability? Please list the three most important challenges, from your perspective.
3. What would you recommend doing differently? Please list three recommendations.
4. What was the most important lesson learned, through your work with Connect-Ability?
5. Do you have any suggestions for how the Connect-Ability staff could be more effective?
6. Do you have any suggestions for how the UConn Evaluation team could be more effective?

Thank you for your time and feedback!