Guide to Partner Mapping for State Employment Networks

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Introduction

Collaborative partnerships are essential for states seeking to develop more effective employment systems for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. ***Partner mapping*** is a process for identifying, listing, and developing engagement strategies for internal and external partnerships. Internal champions and external partnerships are developed to support and uplift specific initiatives and groups of people. Interagency partnership and collaboration is a critical element of building a high-performing employment system, meaning that top leadership through all levels in a system have clear and unambiguous commitment to strategic initiatives.[1] The partner mapping process can help in identifying new or previously unidentified opportunities for partnership; strengthening organizational linkages and relationships; and better understanding service availability and gaps within the larger community. This resource developed by Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) and the State Employment Leadership Network outlines seven key steps for the partner mapping process and includes a recommended planning template.

Partner Mapping

The process for identifying, listing, and developing engagement strategies for internal and external partnerships.

[1] Hall, A. C., Butterworth, J., Winsor, J., Gilmore, D., & Metzel, D. ((2007)). Pushing the employment agenda: Case study research of high performing states in integrated employment. Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 45: (3), 182–198.

Step 1: Clarify Purpose and Reach of Partner Mapping

Start by clearly defining the why for partner mapping. For example, is your state seeking to understand which organizations can support work in general, or is the focus on identifying partners to support a specific type of initiative? The answer to this can also impact whether your state seeks to identify statewide or regional partners, or partners who work in certain communities or with specific groups of people. Your state should clearly define the purpose of the partner mapping i.e., “We want to identify partners that should be engaged in the customized employment pilot project in this county over the next year” or “We want to identify partners across the state that can support employment initiatives for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities overall.” The statement describing the purpose should be shared when recruiting partner mapping workgroup participants.

Step 2: Identify Partner Mapping Workgroup Members

The most effective method for conducting partner mapping is to bring together a work group of approximately 5-10 people who have professional and lived experience within the state’s area of focus and knowledge of community partners and resources. Sometimes the best people to include in a partner mapping workgroup are not always executive leaders, but rather, people who work directly with communities and understand the technical details of certain processes and procedures.

Workgroup members can include staff from your own agency, other state agencies, advocacy organizations, community-based organizations, and service providers. You may also want to consider including members from organizations you are less familiar with who conduct community outreach. These members can help spur new partnership ideas that your state has not previously considered.

State systems can be very siloed with high staff turnover. Therefore, it’s also important to review where you may be unaware of potential partners within your own department or division. For example:

- Who is part of your Medicaid agency?
- Who manages your program data?
- Who are your tribal liaisons?
- Who is part of your quality assurance team?
- Who are your liaisons for different groups like service providers, case managers, individuals, and families?

When inviting partner mapping workgroup members, specify that the process will include an initial 90-minute meeting with up to one or two additional meetings. Based on the purpose of the partner mapping and the selected workgroup members, determine whether it would make most sense to host the partner mapping meeting(s) virtually or in-person. Consider ways to offer small incentives such as gift cards or mileage reimbursements to workgroup members participating on an unpaid basis.

Step 3: Assign Partner Mapping Roles

Prior to facilitating the first partner mapping meeting with the workgroup, you should internally identify which staff members will take on the following responsibilities:

1. Logistics support: scheduling the workgroup meetings, supporting accommodation requests, addressing workgroup member questions.
2. Facilitator: developing slides/content to lead the partner mapping process, facilitating the workgroup meetings.
3. Notetaker: listing out recommended partners, contacts, and general themes from the workgroup meetings; and sharing information after the meetings.

Staff members are encouraged to rotate roles throughout workgroup meetings to help share power and feel a sense of ownership.

Step 4: Conduct the Partner Mapping Process

Once your state is gathered with the partner mapping workgroup, again reiterate the purpose of why the workgroup was brought together and the intended outcome of the partner mapping process. Then, begin soliciting ideas from the workgroup around what partners to engage with.

Some questions to ask include:

- What organizations do we need to engage with?
- What populations do these organizations support?
- What type of work are these organizations responsible for? What initiatives are they currently working on that might align with our mission and values?
- Who is the best point of contact for these organizations to meet your purpose?
- What are the best ways to connect with these organizations?
- What support can we offer these organizations?
- What is our existing relationship with these organizations?

- What organizations do we have a difficult time reaching? What can we do to better include these organizations?
- What partnerships have we not yet considered? (For this question specifically, consider using frameworks such as Social Drivers of Health (SDOH) and Health-Related Social Needs (HRSN) to frame the question and explore the full array of programs and services that holistically support the people you are seeking to engage with including access to housing, food security, education, transportation, and utility needs).

The workgroup will either answer these questions sufficiently within the first partner mapping meeting or will need additional meetings to completely share their knowledge. Within a week of each workgroup meeting, the notetaker should share notes with the members and encourage feedback to ensure information is accurately being captured.

Step 5: Create the Partner Mapping List

Once the partner mapping workgroup has finished meeting, your state should create a final list of partners. An example structure is included below.

Organization Name	Region (Statewide, County, City)	Populations Supported	Work the Organization Does / Supportive Initiatives	Contact Person(s) – Phone, Email	Best Ways to Engage with the Organization (Virtual, In-Person, Existing Meetings)

Be sure to give workgroup members and contributors credit on the list. Once an initial draft of the partner mapping list has been created, states should share the list back with the partner mapping workgroup members for review and final edits to ensure it accurately reflects the information provided by the workgroup.

Step 6: Outline Partner Engagement Strategies

After finalizing the partner mapping list, your state should reflect on what the list means for your partner engagement strategies. For example:

- Are there certain potential partners that your state hasn't engaged with yet?
- Are there new strategies that were identified for engaging with hard-to-reach partners?

- Are there existing meetings or events where your state could engage with partners?
- Does the state need to consider creating new communication channels such as listservs, newsletters, or social media profiles to better engage partners?
- Do you understand the culture of the organization and how they would like to be approached?

Step 7: Understand Ongoing Partner Mapping Needs

Depending on the purpose of the partner mapping, it is possible that the finalized partner map may only be used for a finite amount of time to support a specific initiative or project. However, it is also possible that your state would like to maintain an ongoing general list of partner organizations they want to be sure of engaging with over time. In this case, your state should consider what the process would be for keeping the list up-to-date and who would be responsible for doing so.

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Template for Planning Partner Mapping

1. Lead organization:

2. Lead team members:

3. Purpose for conducting partner mapping:

4. Who we are trying to reach through our partners (key population):

5. Timeline for conducting partner mapping:

6. Who should be part of the partner mapping workgroup:

7. Where will we meet? (virtually, in-person?):

8. What meeting logistics do we need to be aware of? (scheduling meeting rooms, setting up calendar invites):

9. Who/when/how will we send out the initial partner mapping workgroup invites?:

10. What materials do we need to prepare for the meetings?:

11. What accommodations do we need to provide?:

12. What is the anticipated outcome for the final partner map? (will it be posted online or be used for internal reference):

State Employment Leadership Network

The SELN is a place for states to connect, collaborate, and create cross-community support regarding pressing employment-related issues at state and federal levels for individuals with developmental disabilities.

The SELN was launched in 2006 as a joint program of the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services and the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

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