



How Progressive are Service Providers?

The Leadership Institute of the National Leadership Consortium centers around training disability field leaders in best practices in service delivery and organizational management and change toward more progressive services and supports. To gauge trends in the field, we asked participants on the training postsurvey, “How would you define the word 'progressive' to describe organizations that provide services and/or supports for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities?” and to rate the progressiveness of their organization on a scale from 1-10, with 1 meaning “Very Traditional” and 10 meaning “Very Progressive.”

The average rating of 875 participant responses from 2008 to 2023 was a 6.48 out of 10. While changes in perceptions of progressiveness of organizations between the past five years and the previous five years have been slight, the rating has moved in the right direction, increasing from an average of 6.23 from 2014-2018 to an average of 6.65 out of 10 from 2019-2023.

Below is a word cloud to illustrate the top 50 key words from responses about what progressive means to participants, after removing common words such as “progressive” and “people,” where the size of the word is related to how often it was used.

February 20, 2024

By: Cory Gilden,
Research and
Evaluation Manager

Questions? Comments? Contact Us!

For additional information about the National Leadership Consortium’s programs and research, visit www.natleadership.org.

To learn more about upcoming Leadership Institutes or workshops, email Nicole Jones at njones@natleadership.org

Contact Cory Gilden at cgilden@natleadership.org with questions related to our research.



The top ten words disability field leaders used to define “progressive” included “new,” “community,” “ideas,” “box” (as in “out of the box”), and “thinking.” Other key words used frequently were “innovative,” “choices,” “focused,” and “creative,” showing that leaders understand that the way forward will involve changes to new ways of doing things.

Definitions of progressive service providers given by past participants are filled with purpose and hope for the future. Here's a sampling of responses throughout the years that emphasize choice, control, community inclusion, natural supports, policy change, employment opportunities, and other positive outcomes to strive for in service delivery:

"Innovative, cutting edge, community based, and where the person with disability has total control over his or her life and is fully integrated with the rest of society as a person of value."
-2009 Leadership Institute Graduate

"Services and supports are designed to give control to the individual with disabilities. They are encouraged to be self-advocates and are provided with the information and support so they can direct their own lives and be successful." -2009 Leadership Institute Graduate

"Focus is on the person and their dreams and choices with growing natural connections and supports." -2010 Leadership Institute Graduate

"[Progressive organizations] challenge regulation/policy to give the people they are serving a life they desire." -2013 Leadership Institute Graduate

"Organizations that recognize that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are people that have goals. Progressive organizations listen to those they serve and are open to adapt the services they provide to meet the needs of the person they serve." -2014 Leadership Institute Graduate

"I believe this is an open exchange of ideas and resources. Progressive takes an individual approach to addressing needs and what will work for the individual rather than what will fit the majority of the group." -2014 Leadership Institute Graduate

"An individual approach, letting the individual lead their care and seeing them as the 'expert'; services have an emphasis on quality of life." -2015 Leadership Institute Graduate

"Supports that work with the person not for the person. Supports that are creative and outside the box in the approach. Supports that change with the person as needed." 2023 Leadership Institute Graduate

"Forward thinking and willingness to implement the hard changes for the betterment of the organization or people with IDD." -2023 Leadership Institute Graduate

If you are interested in training with like-minded seasoned and emerging leaders who are moving toward progressive services, visit our website to find upcoming Leadership Institutes at www.natleadership.org.