NATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONSORTIUM
ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

RESEARCH BRIEF

Community Living, Employment, and Engagement
Using data from the Organizational Priorities and Practices Inventory (OPPI)

Organizations play a pivotal role in shaping inclusive communities where people with disabilities can thrive. When organizations ensure that people with disabilities are integrated into their communities through meaningful employment and social engagement, they not only contribute to enhancing their quality of life but also to enriching the community itself. Inclusive practices lead to stronger, more cohesive communities, where diversity is celebrated, and everyone feels valued. This research brief provides field trends of organizational practices related to principles of *Community Living, Employment, and Engagement*. It discusses data from 820 professionals across disability service organizations nationwide using the OPPI.

Critical dimensions of *Community Living, Employment, and Engagement* on the OPPI are: *Community Engagement and Participation, Meaningful Employment, Community Supports, Community Inclusion, Person Led Service Delivery, Community Building, and Meaningful, Natural Supports*. Previous studies discuss the importance of these indicators in upholding the rights of people with disabilities to access and participate in their chosen communities. This report identifies areas for organizational improvement to enhance community inclusion and overall service quality for people with disabilities.

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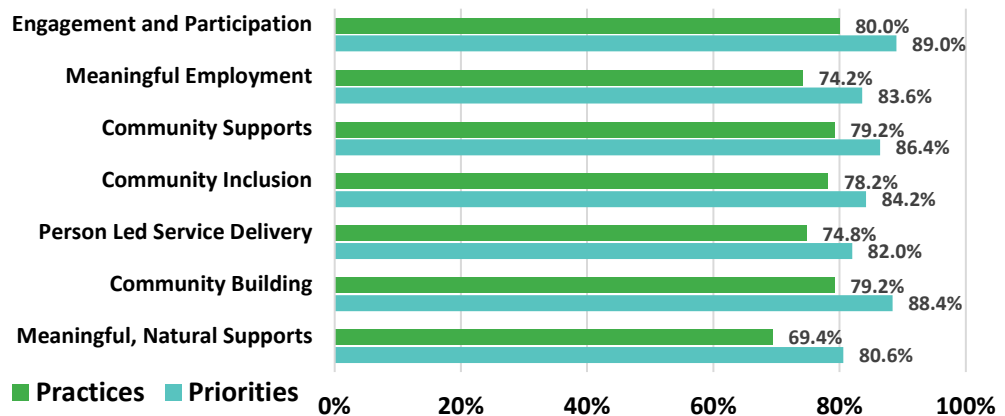mdmesa@natleadership.org

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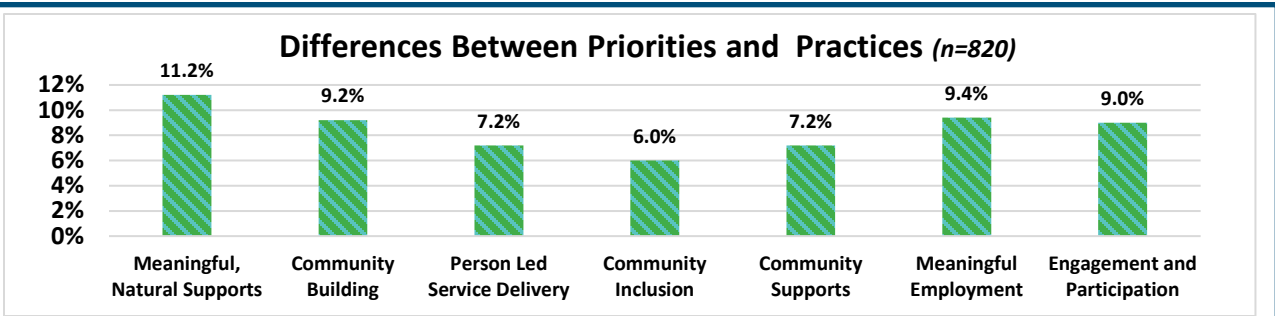
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Contact Cory Gilden at cgilden@natleadership.org with questions related to our research.

Community Living, Employment, and Engagement (*n*=820)

Indicator	Practices	Priorities
Engagement and Participation	80.0%	89.0%
Meaningful Employment	74.2%	83.6%
Community Supports	79.2%	86.4%
Community Inclusion	78.2%	84.2%
Person Led Service Delivery	74.8%	82.0%
Community Building	79.2%	88.4%
Meaningful, Natural Supports	69.4%	80.6%

- Priorities were rated statistically higher than Practices for all indicators
- Organizations mostly prioritize and implement practices related to fostering people with disabilities' engagement and participation in their communities since the *Engagement and Participation* indicator has the highest priorities and practices rates
- Organizations should prioritize supporting people to develop natural supports since it has the lowest priorities and practices rates

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Differences Between Priorities and Practices *(n=820)*

Bar chart showing percentage differences between priorities and practices:
- Meaningful, Natural Supports: 11.2%
- Community Building: 9.2%
- Person Led Service Delivery: 7.2%
- Community Inclusion: 6.0%
- Community Supports: 7.2%
- Meaningful Employment: 9.4%
- Engagement and Participation: 9.0%

- The average difference between priorities and practices is approximately 8.5% scale points.
- The differences between priorities and practices are statistically significant for all indicators.
- The smallest gap between priorities and practices in *Community Inclusion* is how organizations make sure people with disabilities do not have to earn access to inclusive, individualized, community supports, meaning that responding organizations feel they can better align their practices with their priorities in this area.
- On average, organizations loosely prioritize and implement practices ensuring that people with disabilities spend significant time with people who are not family members or paid to support them. The area of *Meaningful, Natural Supports* has the largest gap between priorities and practices.

Engagement and Participation: Organizations should support people to belong in their communities by supporting engagement and active participation. People with disabilities feel better supported and have more self-determination when they are included in their communities (Woodman et al., 2014).

Meaningful Employment: Competitive integrated employment benefits people with disabilities economically, physically, and psychologically (Taylor et al., 2022).
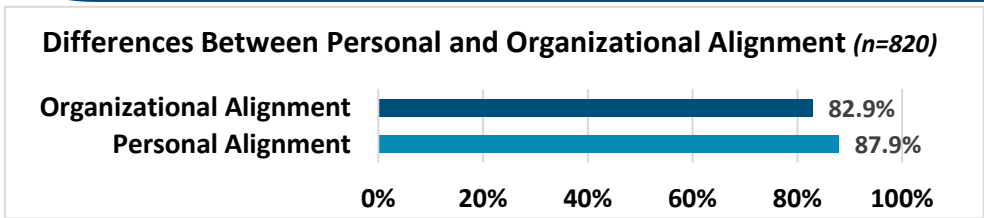
Community Supports: People with disabilities living in community setting participate more in community leisure activities, groups, and competitive employment than people living in segregated settings (Verdonschot et al., 2009).

Community Inclusion: People with all types and scopes of disabilities can be integrated into communities with intentional efforts including targeted training for staff, transition supports, and realigning agency goals (Thorn et al., 2008). Collaboration between school systems and adult services also aids transition to community living (Certo et al., 2009).

Person Led Service Delivery: Decisions about where people live or spend their days should not be made to fill openings or in any manner should fail to support people's choices. Engagement in meaningful activities has been correlated with greater life satisfaction (Goldberg et al., 2008).

Community Building: Social participation, social membership, and community connectedness have been shown to contribute to increased life satisfaction and a greater quality of life in people with disabilities (Levasseur et al., 2009; Yeung & Towers, 2013)

Meaningful, Natural Supports: Friendship has been shown to predict improved outcomes and quality of life including areas such as emotional well-being and mental health. It lowers stress and increases the sense of belonging (Friedman & Rizzolo, 2018).

Differences Between Personal and Organizational Alignment *(n=820)*

Horizontal bar chart:
- Organizational Alignment: 82.9%
- Personal Alignment: 87.9%

Personal alignment is rated higher than organizational alignment by a statistically significant difference of 5.0% scale points. This means that employees perceive a gap between their personal alignment with best practices related to *Community Inclusion* for people with disabilities and how their organizations implement such practices

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