

Frontline Leadership Training Improves Service Quality & Engagement Across the IDD System

July 2026 Research Brief



Leadership development for frontline leaders essential for a healthy IDD system

The LEAD training for frontline leaders, designed to build DSPs' and frontline supervisors' leadership strengths and facilitated by the NLCDD, contributes to a stronger IDD service sector, strengthening the quality and sustainability of the disability field workforce across Delaware. Recent findings from an ongoing evaluation of the LEAD program show that participants of the LEAD program report providing better services and feeling more motivation and engagement in their work. Building on previous results that show how LEAD contributes to individual and organizational advancement (see [March and May 2026 Research Briefs](#)), these findings highlight how better services and increased engagement foster more coordinated and resilient services statewide.

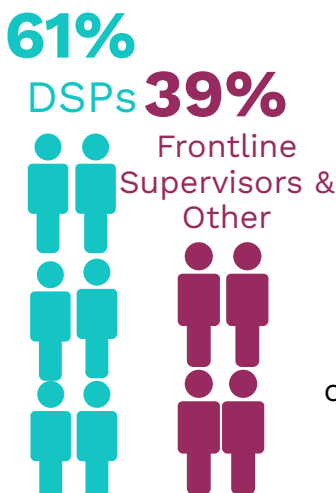
THE BIG TAKEAWAY

Building the leadership skills of frontline leaders improves the IDD service system

The LEAD training strengthens the IDD system by building statewide leadership capacity and fostering deeper commitment and engagement. Participating leaders gain more confidence in their leadership, a shared commitment to core values of human rights, and greater knowledge of best practices in services and supports for people with disabilities. They also leave more motivated and committed to their frontline leadership roles, helping to stabilize and reenergize the disability service workforce.

KEY FINDING

LEAD participants are mix of frontline employees:



LEAD evaluation data shows that when frontline leaders (including DSPs and Frontline Managers) develop key leadership skills, starting with their strengths, it creates **supportive supervision practices**, an evidence-based driver of workforce retention and service quality. Developing the frontline workforce helps people feel more confident, engaged, and connected to their work, which (as noted in the [March and May 2026 Research Briefs](#)) creates a more unified organizational culture and leads to better services for people with IDD. LEAD participants have been a mix of DSPs, supervisors, managers, and other frontline support specialists.

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Are you a data nerd?
Read about the methodology here:
<https://bit.ly/JULYRBDATA>

Learn more about the NLCDD:
www.natleadership.org
<https://linktr.ee/nlcdd>

WHY IT MATTERS FOR DISABILITY LEADERS



Workforce stability improves when frontline leaders across the system come together to learn, grow, and connect.

With 87 participants from 23 provider agencies across all three Delaware counties, the LEAD training is building a more connected and consistent workforce across organizations.



80%

strongly agree that they regularly apply skills learned from LEAD in their current role



80%

strongly agree that attending LEAD improved the quality of services they provide



17%

increase in motivation to do their work, continuing to increase another 2% after the training

*“We’re seeing people being more **motivated to try new things**. We’ve seen **reduction in our incident management**. Staff now have additional tools to use to help with deescalation or just come into a situation with that leadership mentality and help defuse the situation, whereas they might not have had the confidence to do so in the past. **The return on investment for us is really tenfold at this point.**” -An Executive Director of LEAD Participants*

WHY IT MATTERS FOR THE DISABILITY FIELD

System change happens when we develop and connect leaders at all levels of our field.

By bringing together participants from multiple agencies, roles, and counties, the program is building a network of frontline leaders who are confident in their skills, committed to quality supports, and engaged in their day-to-day work. **100% of LEAD graduates agree that the connections they made at the LEAD training have been or will be good resources for them in the future.** What’s more, coordinated leadership training serves as a unifying infrastructure for strengthening workforce development across the state’s disability service system. Over time, this contributes to system-level improvements by supporting more stable provider organizations and increasing the consistency of high-quality supports.

WHAT CAN DISABILITY LEADERS DO?

To build a stronger disability service sector, field leaders can move beyond internal workforce development and support DSPs and frontline leaders to grow and develop with colleagues within and outside of their organizations. This can look like

- ✓ **Creating and supporting frontline leaders to participate in shared leadership development initiatives across agencies** to build skills, knowledge, and values that center on promoting the human rights of people with disabilities across the field.
- ✓ **Encourage continuous networking opportunities with staff at all levels**, including conferences, trainings, and such as cross-organizational networks of practice where frontline and supervisory leaders can exchange approaches to workforce challenges.
- ✓ **Use training cohorts as a bridge for cross-agency learning**, helping translate individual program experiences into broader field-wide impact.

