



**Understanding and Expanding
Seamless Transition Interagency
Team Membership
Your Step-by-Step Guide
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INDIANA INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY AND COMMUNITY
**CENTER ON COMMUNITY
LIVING AND CAREERS**

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Your Step-by-Step Guide

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The Center on Community Living and Careers (CCLC) is one of seven centers located at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, Indiana University, Bloomington. The mission of the Center on Community Living and Careers is to promote partnerships between schools and support organizations to bring about positive changes in the lives of individuals and families as they live, work, and participate in their communities.



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Understanding and Expanding Seamless Transition Interagency Team Membership

Introduction

This is the second guide in a four-part series on seamless transition, [Understanding and Expanding Interagency Team Membership](#). This guide shares key insights and practical strategies for interagency team building. The first guide, [Understanding and Implementing a Seamless Transition Program](#), established a foundational understanding of the key components and processes. The third guide, [A Seamless Transition Timeline: When to Engage Professionals and What to Expect from Their Services](#), offers a practical tool kit, providing a seamless transition checklist with student-led IEP alignment and a detailed transition timeline. The final guide concludes the series by examining the crucial role of family team membership as the hallmark of our evaluation. We will share key insights from the Indiana Seamless Transition Pilot throughout each guide in the series.

Indiana's Department of Education and Division of Disability and Rehabilitation Services hope to increase the number of individuals with disabilities in competitive and integrated employment from 23% to 38% by 2027. To further this mission, the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services partnered with [TransCen](#), a nationally renowned organization dedicated to inclusive education and employment, to pilot seamless transition programs across the state. The "[Improving Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Indiana](#)" seamless transition pilot began in the spring of 2023. Eight schools joined the pilot, representing diverse regions across Indiana. The pilot aimed to improve team capacity, engagement of employers and families, and employment outcomes for students with significant disabilities. Schools were tasked with developing interagency teams that included, at a minimum, the student, their family, and external partners like Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).

At each pilot site, the Center for Community Living and Careers at Indiana University's Indiana Institute on Disability and Community evaluated seamless transition activities along with the perceptions and experiences of family members and professionals. The research revealed areas of excellence and areas for improvement. In this guide, we provide a brief overview of seamless transition. Next, we identify core interagency members and potential collaborators to enhance student outcomes. Finally, we share what Indiana schools learned while developing and implementing their interagency teams.

Overview of Seamless Transition

TransCen (2023) defines seamless transition as a coordinated process with the culmination of special education services for all students with disabilities, including paid employment or a defined career path, where the first day of a student's adult life looks like the last day of their school-to-work program. To accomplish this, seamless transition prioritizes many important practices (Test, et al., 2009; Carter, et al., 2012; Luecking & Luecking, 2015).

- **Full inclusion in general education with a defined program of study.**
- **Diverse interagency team membership that includes school personnel, adult-serving agencies, and families.**
- **Open and active Pre-Employment Transition (Pre-ETS) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services.**
- **Benefits planning with the assistance of a navigator or liaison.**
- **Early onset of varied student-driven work-based learning experiences**
- **Independent living and self-advocacy skill development.**
- **Obtain and maintain Competitive, Integrated Employment (CIE).**
- **Graduation with an alternative or high school diploma.**

These are best practices that can be used to execute student goals through coordinated service delivery, early intervention, and technical assistance. Seamless transition models emphasize full community inclusion beginning at age 16 (in Indiana, this starts at age 14) and extends through high school graduation. Students are encouraged to develop work experience and build resumes during this time. Collaboration with external agencies is crucial for creating tailored curricula across service sectors. The end-goal is for students to leave high school employed and with community-living skills that promote and sustain independence (Certo & Luecking, 2011).

Several successful seamless transition models exist, including the Transition Service Integration Model, Transition to Independence Process, Career Transition Program (Luecking & Wittenburg, 2009), and the Maryland Seamless Transition Model (Luecking & Luecking, 2015). Effective interagency team members typically include roles that conduct early needs assessments, provide pre-employment training, involve Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors early on, and provide benefits counseling. In addition, a comprehensive understanding of work incentives is essential. Implementing a seamless transition program often requires reevaluating existing transition teams to see who else should be invited to the group.

What are Interagency Transition Teams and Why are They Important?

WHAT: An interagency transition team in special education is a diverse and collaborative group of stakeholders who work together to support students with disabilities' vision for a meaningful life after high school. Interagency teams prioritize employment and/or further education and training.

WHY: Successful interagency teams provide comprehensive support, improved coordination, and the sharing of knowledge and resources, leading to enhanced outcomes. A single agency cannot meet the needs of every student in transition, but when education professionals, adult service agencies, students and families manage transition programming together, students receive comprehensive services that may lead to better postsecondary outcomes.

Full transition collaboration is important for creating tailored curricula and supports across service providers, giving students the educational and employment preparation needed for a successful transition. When professionals work as a team, students are more likely to leave high school employed with community-living skills that promote and sustain independence.

Who is Included in Interagency Transition Teams?

Transition teams traditionally include students, parents or guardians, special education teachers, and building administrators. For more comprehensive support, teams may also benefit from the expertise of professionals in physical and occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, nursing, and behavioral management. Interagency teams can bring in additional employment professionals, like Pre-ETS and VR counselors. Benefits counselors assist student job seekers with understanding the impact of earned income on government programs, including work incentives. If a student has a Medicaid Waiver, the case manager ensures adult services are planned and in place at the time of graduation. Developing an effective and efficient interagency team requires reevaluating roles and expectations, as well as identifying any service gaps that may impact postsecondary outcomes.

Interagency Team Members and Their Roles

Strong interagency teamwork can lead to positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (Certo, et al., 2008). Transition planning for Indiana students who receive special education begins no later than age 14. The success of transition planning and services hinges on several factors. These include student and family participation, a wide range of transition assessments that invoke meaningful work experiences, and effective interagency collaboration (Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Wehman et al., 2015). Schools and adult-serving agencies such as VR, Medicaid Waiver case management, and other developmental disability service providers often work separately when preparing students with disabilities for employment and community living. Consequently, students' transitions from high school to adulthood may be

piecemealed and patchworked with few established connections to employment and post-school supports (Luecking & Luecking, 2015). Alternatively, robust interagency team membership may offset negative post-school outcomes (Certo, et al., 2008).

All team members focus on collaboratively assisting the student to obtain and maintain competitive integrated employment (CIE). The roles or responsibilities of each member are not exhaustive. As other tasks arise, team members will need to work together to delegate responsibilities for those tasks while remaining a cohesive unit. The interagency team's roles are as follows:

Student: Actively participate in work assessments and Discovery activities which provide accurate information for optimal employment.

Family Members/Guardian: Participate in interviews with the student and interagency team members. During the interview, they create a Positive Personal Profile (PPP). This transition assessment identifies the student's strengths, challenges, and employment goals. Family members' knowledge and voice are key to quality transition planning and programming.

Transition Coordinators: Act as the point person for the interagency team, host transition activities for families, assist students with transition assessments or job applications, meet with employers, and collaborate with VR staff or other community agencies. Transition coordinators work with building and district administration to ensure funding to support students' transportation, work experiences, and coursework needs to meet their goals.

Special Education Teacher: Administers transition assessments, like the PPP. They also teach job-skills courses, tailor employment goals to the student, and collaborate with other core and recommended team members.

Paraprofessionals or Instructional Assistants: Support teachers in the student's classroom. They provide instructional and behavioral supports to students under the supervision and direction of teachers.

Building/District Administrator: Coordinates the seamless transition program. They help to create the team and communicate with each team member. They provide the support needed for teachers and transition coordinators to implement each element of the seamless transition process.

Ancillary Service Providers: Some examples may be behavior therapists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, mental health professionals, guidance counselors, or direct support staff.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Provider: Assist with job exploration, workplace learning, workplace readiness training, and self-advocacy skill-building.

Work Experience Specialists: If your child would benefit from more employment support, consider adding a work experience specialist (sometimes known as a ‘job coach’). These are professionals who provide valuable resources for students' employment goals. They build strong relationships with local businesses and provide career exploration opportunities that bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world experiences. They may also provide personalized student support on the job to help students develop skills, navigate challenges, and achieve professional successes. Sometimes the school employs these individuals. Other times, they are third parties employed by a local agency that would need to be sought out.

Medicaid Waiver Case Manager: The case manager ensures the waiver services evolve with the student’s age, development, and achievements, along with the family’s needs. Case managers keep the student’s person-centered plan up to date, document interests, goals, and needs, and offer choices or “pick lists” of service providers that can best assist with the goals at hand.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Staff: Support students’ transition from school-based work experiences to a competitive integrated job offer. They also provide ongoing job support and connect students and families to education after high school and other adult-serving agencies.

Fluid interagency team membership is critical for successful seamless transition planning. While recognizing budgetary constraints, schools and districts should prioritize investing in transition-specific positions to optimize student outcomes. By prioritizing these positions on the team, schools can create a robust support system that equips students with the skills and experiences needed to thrive after graduation.

Indiana Schools Implement Interagency Teams

Leading interagency teams can be challenging due to the diverse professional backgrounds and priorities of team members. Throughout the pilot, each team refined a collaborative process to support their students effectively. One team with the least initial cohesion created team-building meetings following the principles of seamless transition. In their own words, “It has opened the line of communication... Before, we didn't prioritize coming together as a team but the collaboration and communication since the training has improved. We are contacting students, and sharing communication about students, and Pre-ETS and VR are more involved.” During the seamless transition pilot, the interagency team also saw improvements in team

communication, discernment and development of professional roles, and transition assessments paired with family insight.

Seamless Transition Interagency Teams Across the Country

The [National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative](#) (NTACT:C) offers several national resources to broaden perspectives on the types and benefits of interagency collaboration to improve transition programs.

Two examples include:

[Way2Work Maryland](#) fosters interagency collaboration at the school district level. Eight interagency teams manage transition programming to guarantee that students receive comprehensive, individualized services. This approach bridges service gaps and encourages shared responsibility among stakeholders. The program employs the "MOST" acronym to direct services: Motivation to Succeed, Openness and Mutual Respect, Support for Team Goals, and Trust in Each Other. Transition staff members lead monthly team meetings.

The [Vermont Core Transition Teams and Workforce Collaboration Model](#) is made up of 12 interagency teams across the state. Vermont's interagency teams are diverse and include members from college programs, the Department of Labor, employment centers (e.g., state and private agencies that support individuals facing barriers in employment), adult learning centers, family networks, and more. Teams meet regularly (e.g., monthly, quarterly) to share local and statewide initiatives, trainings, and resources. They also conduct needs assessments and develop strategic plans to address student needs.

Conclusion

Interagency collaboration fosters strong partnerships, maximizing efficiency and student success, leading to a higher return on investment. Collaborative interagency teamwork from schools, agencies, students, and families, is a strong predictor of positive post-school outcomes, including paid employment (Test et al., 2009; Wehman, et al., 2014). Meeting the needs of transition students is a complex process. It is beyond the capacity of one person or agency and is shown to be less effective in isolation. Effective transition planning requires a collaborative approach, with a unified vision, leveraged by shared expertise and diverse services for mutually beneficial outcomes for teams and for the students served. Our third guide, [A Seamless Transition Timeline: When to Engage Professionals and What to Expect from Their Services](#), will outline primary transition activities and provide a practical roadmap.

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