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# Vocational Rehabilitation Partnerships with Higher Education Programs Serving Students with Intellectual Disability

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## Vocational Rehabilitation Partnerships with Higher Education Programs Serving Students with Intellectual Disability

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The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act led to increased funding and expansion of higher education programs that serve students with intellectual disabilities (ID). Between 2010 and 2015, grant funds were awarded by the Office of Postsecondary Education to 27 institutions of higher education (IHEs) in 23 states to create model demonstration programs aimed at developing inclusive higher education options for people with ID. These programs are called Transition Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, or TPSIDs. Annual program and student data from each TPSID were collected by the TPSID National Coordinating Center at Think College.

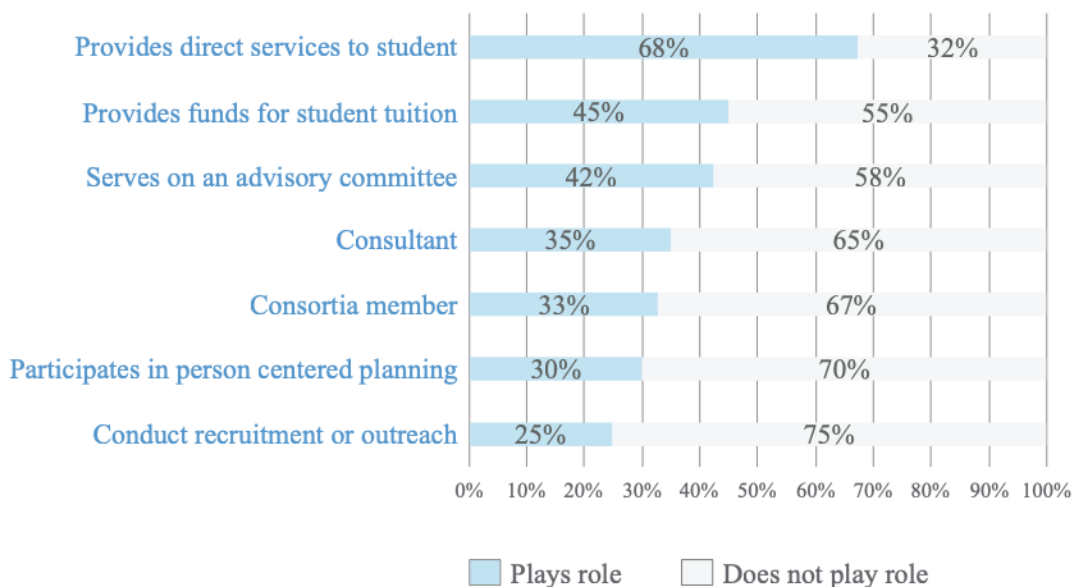
In the fifth and final year of grant funding (2014–2015), TPSID projects were implemented at 52 IHEs. Sixteen programs operated on single campuses, and 11 operated as consortia, with various satellite campuses. Thirty-eight of these programs were implemented in four-year IHEs, and 14 were implemented at two-year IHEs (Grigal, Hart, Smith, Domin, Weir, & Sulewski, 2016).

Students with ID enrolled in the TPSIDs engaged in both academically inclusive college courses (open to all students), and in specialized college courses (only for students with ID). They participated in internships, work-study, and integrated paid employment. Students also participated in social clubs and organizations and, in some cases, lived in student housing.

Collaboration with external agencies was a critical component in these programs. Partnership with state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies was the most frequent form of collaboration. State VR agencies played various roles in their partnerships with the TPSID programs.

## Figure 1

**Common Roles Played by VR as a TPSID Program Partner (N=40)**



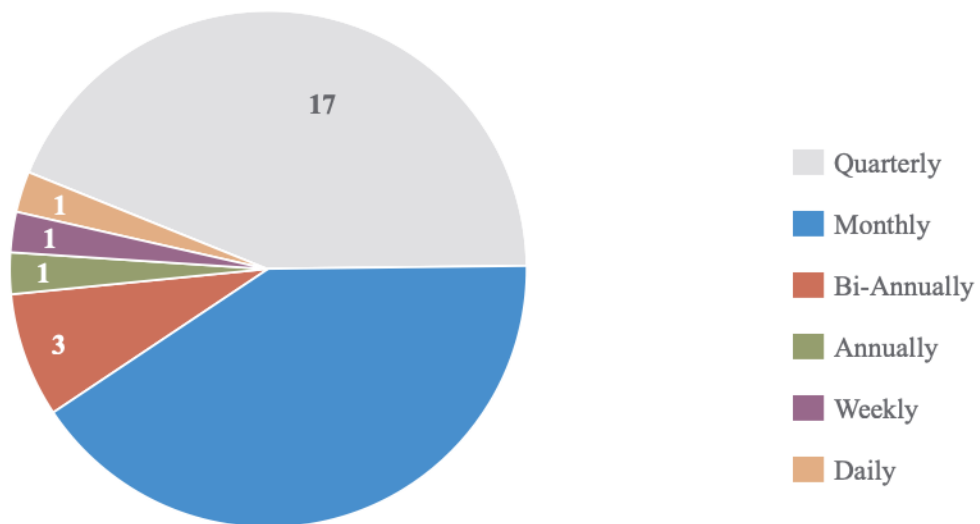
Forty of the 52 IHEs operating TPSIDs (77%) partnered with VR programs, and rates of partnership were the same at two- and four-year IHEs. As reflected in Figure 1, providing direct services to students with ID was the most common role played by VR partners (68%), followed by paying student tuition (45%) and participating in the project advisory committees (43%). Most TPSID programs interacted with their VR partners on a quarterly or monthly basis (see Figure 2).

Up until recently, higher education as a path toward better employment outcomes has been a road less traveled for students with ID. But it is a path rife with opportunity. Students with ID attending IHEs that host TPSID programs are employed at twice the national average of transitioning youth with ID (Grigal & Hart, 2013). As these programs continue to proliferate, it will be important that they not only continue to partner with VR, but that the roles played within these partnerships become clearer and more strategic. Future studies need to examine the impact of VR involvement in employment engagement and credential attainment of youth with ID who participated in these programs.

Postsecondary education is a vital component in career development and expanding earning potential over a lifetime, whether one has a disability or not. As the central goal of state VR programs is to engage people with disabilities in employment, the salient role that postsecondary education plays toward achieving this goal for students with ID cannot be overlooked.

**Figure 2**

**IHE Frequency of Interaction with VR**



## References

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Grigal, M., Hart, D., Smith, F. A., Domin, D., Weir, C., & Sulewski, J. (2016). Think College National Coordinating Center: Annual report on the transition and postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities (2014–2015). Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.

## About the Authors

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**Think College at the Institute for Community Inclusion at University of Massachusetts Boston serves as the National Coordinating Center (NCC) for the TPSID projects. The NCC provides training and technical assistance and conducts evaluation of the TPSID projects.**

Think College is a national organization dedicated to developing, expanding, and improving research and practice in inclusive higher education for people with intellectual disability. By generating and sharing knowledge, guiding institutional change, informing public policy, and engaging with students, professionals, and families, Think College seeks to expand inclusive higher education options and improve employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability.

For more information about the National Coordinating Center at Think College visit [www.thinkcollege.net](http://www.thinkcollege.net)



**College Options for Students with Intellectual Disability**

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