

Blending and Braiding Funds and Resources: The Intermediary as Facilitator

Opportunity in Collaboration

Neither schools, nor workforce investment programs, human service agencies, or any other single system alone can pay for and provide the array of services needed to effectively meet the often complex needs of youth with disabilities. When collectively pooled, however, these resources can produce positive outcomes for youth, well beyond the scope of what any single system can hope to mobilize on its own (National Governors' Association, 2004).

There has been an increased recognition on the part of the federal government that the blending and braiding resources from different funding streams is a practical strategy. In fact, states are permitted to make formal requests for waivers of either legislative and/or regulatory authority to accomplish this explicit purpose, identifying in their plans the multiple agencies involved in the development and delivery of services. However, states must rely on local initiatives to effectively meld resources and services. This is where intermediaries can assume a critical role.

Intermediaries can bring together traditionally separate programs and services with separate funding streams, created in response to different priorities, which are administered by a number of federal, state and local agencies. As these parties are convened by intermediaries, they can identify mutually beneficial ways to blend and/or braid funding and resources. Ultimately, these strategies can result in improved services for the two key

Strategies that allow funds and resources to be used in more flexible, coordinated, and sustainable way are critical to the success of efforts to improve the coordination and impact of multiple youth-serving. This brief, the second in a series, focuses on how intermediary organizations can facilitate the blending and braiding of funds and resources to encourage cross-systems collaboration and, in turn, to improve the educational and employment outcomes for all youth, including those with disabilities. This brief identifies strategies that states can use to support local communities in the "blending" and "braiding" of resources, and outlines how cross-systems collaboration and alternative funding strategies can be facilitated by intermediary organizations at both the state and local levels.

clients of the workforce development system – job seekers (youth and adults) and employers.

Blending and Braiding Strategies

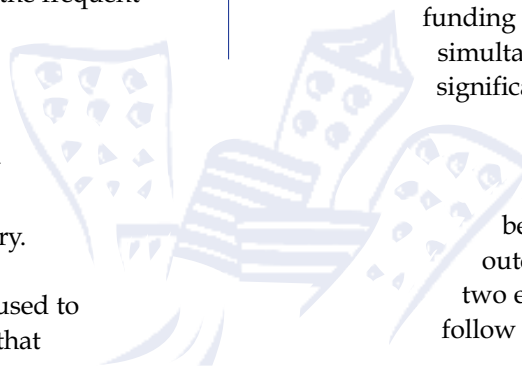
Blending and braiding strategies offer local flexibility and allow providers to focus on youth outcomes and support to employers without the frequent restrictions that categorical funding streams impose. Both strategies allow funds to be used more easily and creatively at the point of service delivery.

"Blended funding" is used to describe mechanisms that

pool dollars from multiple sources and make them in some ways indistinguishable. Blending may require the changing or relaxing of regulations guiding relevant state and federal funding streams by policy makers at the federal, state, or local level to permit program flexibility, and change the way services are structured and delivered. For example, blended monies can be used to fund activities such as collaboration, coordination, program planning, and staff development functions that frequently cannot be adequately funded from just one source.

Blended funding has certain advantages and appeal because it offers significant flexibility for state and local agencies, and reduces work required for reporting and accountability measures. However, blending funds is often more politically difficult because agencies forfeit control of their funds and their ability to track funds to a single service-delivery point. Often agencies are reluctant to contribute to a blended fund, or will contribute only small amounts to pay for activities that cannot be billed to a specific funding source. Nevertheless, under carefully constructed circumstances, blending

funding can simultaneously allow significant flexibility, greater resource impact, and better youth outcomes, as the two examples that follow illustrate.





EXAMPLE: Blending resources to expand employer connections

Work experiences and employment are critical career development activities for youth with disabilities. Schools and service agencies often struggle with making successful connections with employers to make this happen. In addition, employers often complain about multiple and disjointed appeals from diverse organizations representing youth. Some communities have developed a solution to these dual dilemmas by blending their resources for supporting employer-focused networks.

Collaborating agencies, funded from distinct government programs, may each contribute a small annual amount to fund an employer development network based at a neutral intermediary. Ten organizations contribute between \$5,000 to 10,000 or more each to become members of the network, yielding enough money, when pooled together, to launch such an employer development initiative. The intermediary is then charged with establishing new employer contacts, coordinating access to employers who have existing relationships to member organizations, conducting ongoing outreach to employers and business organizations, and providing training to member organization staff on how to conduct effective job development activities.

In such an arrangement, each of the organizations have distinct responsibilities to their respective funders. Nonetheless each is able to expand employer contacts by blending a small amount of their categorical funds to achieve better employment outcomes for the youth each serves and to create a more coordinated and convenient connection to youth for employers.

EXAMPLE: Shared Fiscal Responsibility

Creative and flexible blended funding has been an important element in the success of Oregon's Youth Transition Program (Timmons, 2005). A federal grant supported the development of an innovative partnership between the Oregon Department of Education (DOE), the Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Department (OVRD) and the University of Oregon, which is now in its 14th year. This partnership was created to provide extensive transition services to youth focusing on the areas of self-determination; post-school planning; job training and placement; academic,

vocational and personal-social instruction; and post-school follow-up. When the initial grant funding ended, the partners decided to share fiscal responsibility for the program, and have been able to be responsive to changes in each partner's ability to contribute each year. The OVRD pays for half of the project upkeep for any LEA that can match their contribution. The LEAs administer the blended funds that pay for community-based transition specialists. The University of Oregon continues to contribute training and technical assistance to the program.

EXAMPLE: Establishing joint processes and procedures

The Florida Crown Workforce Board, Inc. (FCWB) and the Florida High School/High Tech Program (HS/HT) have coordinated their resources in order to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of workplace experiences and individualized education for youth with disabilities in Region 7. A MOU agreement established joint processes and procedures that enabled the partners to integrate their current service delivery systems resulting in a seamless and comprehensive array of education, human service, job training, and other workforce development services for HS/HT participants (ages 14-18). The joint responsibilities include: an integrated referral and client tracking system; a shared informational database available to customers for self-service; shared client information; participation in a joint planning process to identify customer and employer needs; participation in a program review and continuous improvement process; joint negotiation of outcomes measures with

FCWB; and joint negotiation on the processes for assessment, career management, job development, referral and placement processes, staff capacity building and resolution of disputes with other system partners. The FCWB provides teachers and support staff, facilities, cross-training opportunities for program staff, and program enrollment and coordination services for the HS/HT Program in all counties within Region 7. In turn, the Florida HS/HT helps the One-Stops with student enrollment, documentation of eligibility, curriculum development, and access to other local agencies and service providers within the Region. Operational costs are shared between FCWB and Florida HS/HT utilizing various cost allocation methodologies. Funds are braided to support curriculum development, training, support staff, student incentives, office space, computer hardware and software, utilities, and coordination efforts with other agencies and service providers.



Braiding is a funding and resource allocation strategy that taps into existing categorical funding streams and uses them to support unified initiatives in as flexible and integrated a manner as possible. Braided funding differs from blended funding in that in braiding the funding streams remain visible and are used in common to produce greater strength, efficiency, and/ or effective-ness. This allows resources to be tracked more closely for the purpose of accounting to state and

federal administrators, thus contributing to long-term sustainability. Implementing a braided funding approach requires significant attention be paid to administrative issues. Communities must ensure continued accountability for assessing services, data collection and reporting requirements, and payment arrangements of each collaborating agency. Braiding also requires political will, not to mention effective intermediary coordination, to

EXAMPLE: Flexible funding for mentoring efforts

The Pangea Foundation (San Diego, CA) was awarded a grant by ODEP to serve as an intermediary organization that builds the capacity and knowledge of faith-based and community organizations to provide mentoring services to young people with disabilities. A substantial portion of the grant monies were subcontracted to seven local faith-based and community organizations to conduct mentoring activities (i.e., adult and peer mentoring, e-mentoring, tutoring, job-shadowing, service learning, leadership development, and youth development). These subcontractors serve individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing, blind and visually impaired, physical disabilities, or have developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, or cancer. A focus of the grant has been leveraging community-school partnerships, and helping small community-based organizations partner with schools to implement disability mentoring programs.

Pangea has been very resourceful in their efforts to blend and braid resources that enhance their mentoring work for youth with disabilities. For example, funds from the Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) (U.S. Department of Commerce) and Abilities Network funds (CommerceNet; The California Endowment) have been blended to support the development of a web-based data mentoring management

system. In addition, Pangea has provided corporate donated computers (Household Finance) to their subcontractors that have been upgraded with accessibility software provided by Microsoft’s accessibility division.

Many after-school funding sources have been braided to enhance subcontractor mentoring activities. For example, Callaway Golf Company Foundation funded after- school computer labs for students with disabilities that are available to the mentoring programs. Funds from numerous sources (The California Technology, Trade and Commerce Agency Division of Science, Technology & Innovation; Kids Included Together San Diego, Inc.; Wells Fargo Bank of Trustees for the Samuel J. & Katherine French Charitable Trust; and others) are used for after-school mentoring programs that include youth with disabilities.

Strong school-community partnerships and the flexibility to blend and braid funds have allowed Pangea to reduce barriers to participation for youth with disabilities in mentoring programs. Recently, they forged a partnership with the California Corporation for National Service, which awarded Pangea five AmeriCorp VISTA positions to assist with this mentoring program and other disability-related programs.

EXAMPLE: Service integration for transitioning youth

Since 2002, the Tennessee Customized Employment Partnership (TCEP) national demonstration project has braided resources from the Career Center, special education, and the disability employment system to create model "customized" employment plans, and provide needed supports for youth and adults with significant disabilities. TCEP braids funds both on a systems-level and on an individual level with differing purposes.

At the systems level, funding strategies involve coordinating funding from the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) One-Stop system with those of the local school system, and the state Vocational Rehabilitation and developmental disabilities service delivery systems in order for youth with disabilities to achieve employment as they transition from school to work and adult life.

In order to insure that job development, job coaching, assistive technology, and other necessary services are in place for individual youth, funds from these systems are accessed and “braided.” Braided funding involves utilizing funds from multiple funding sources to meet the costs of components of employment plans that are customized to each person’s needs. For example, multiple funding sources may include a variety of agencies such as the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), the Division of Mental Retardation Services (DMRS), Social Security Administration (SSA) work incentives, schools, and non-profit agencies. Braided funding is particularly critical because it can provide the opportunity for both short-term and long-term employment supports for individual youth with disabilities who find employment while still in school and keep it upon school exit through adult service system support (TCEP, 2004.)



encourage and support the inter-agency collaborative efforts necessary to apply the resources of multiple systems to particular community youth initiatives. In the three examples below the requisite multi-party collaboration resulted in streamlined and effective service delivery.

Blending and braiding funding strategies are not mutually exclusive and can work to complement and reinforce each other. Both funding strategies require collaboration, coordination, and cooperation across multiple programs, agencies, and systems. The level of collaboration and

coordination is not easily achieved unless there is some mechanism to facilitate it, such as an organization or agent acting as an intermediary between the involved agency and service system partners.

The creative blending and braiding of resources for workforce development at the state level (commingling funds and leveraging monies and resources) requires states to examine their organizational structures for delivering employment-focused programs and implementing the WIA in a more integrated fashion. The “integration” of funding streams, as well as programs

and services (including employer services) into one organizational structure would create “one-stop” services and supports to customers; provide a stronger base for partnerships with employers and the community; eliminate duplication of efforts and create efficiency; and diminish coordination issues. Ideally, such a structure would be individualized and consumer-driven rather than one which requires the customer to fit into a “one size fits all” system.

How Intermediaries Can Help

In the simplest of terms, a workforce intermediary is an organization which seeks to assist the two key customers of the workforce system — job seekers and employers, through coordination and collaboration among and between a myriad of agencies and providers that impact service delivery. The intermediary must be trusted by an array of organizations with resources to be able to facilitate the communication across organizations, coordinate the alignment of their resources, and ultimately to improve successful placements with employers. The intermediary role can take many forms. An example in Detroit shows how new systems can be built. In this case, a key part of the strategy was not to build a new staff-laden organization, but rather to function as a broker of resources with the explicit purpose of strengthening key organizations on the supply side of workforce investment.

Actions at both the state and local level must occur to develop and implement blended and braiding strategies within the context of a planning process that focuses on the strategic use of resources to achieve desired results. Intermediaries can facilitate this process by helping community and service agency leaders lay the groundwork by:

- a) articulating a clear vision of what services need to be improved and what youth outcomes are desired;

EXAMPLE: Consolidated approach to service delivery and information sharing

The State of Utah has created a comprehensive, integrated approach to workforce development services. A 1992 study revealed that employment training services in Utah were administered by six different agencies and in 23 separate state or federal programs. In response, in 1996, Utah revamped its approach to workforce development by consolidating five state agencies into one, Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS), and giving this new agency responsibility for major employment and training programs, and other supportive services. This workforce reform supported the state’s commitment to a seamless delivery system that: a) integrates workforce and related services to foster self-sufficiency for all residents; b) has a strong customer orientation toward meeting the employment needs of business and job seekers; and c) delivers services through a One-Stop network built on statewide administration and regional collaboration. As a result, the state of Utah has greater flexibility to shift funds to enhance responsiveness to local needs and circumstances; and has enhanced point-of-service satisfaction of its dual customers. Finally, since the state retains major accountability for performance, frontline workers have

more time to concentrate on the quality of services.

Additionally, in 2001, a joint committee was created under the charter of the Utah DWS and the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR) to focus on the implementation of the MOU between these agencies as required under the WIA. This partnership between DWS and USOR provides jointly-funded services in job development and placement in an effort to increase competitive employment outcomes for Utah job seekers with disabilities. The partners (authorized individuals from each agency) exchange data and information from their respective computer databases in order to enhance service delivery to their customers. They shared information on wages earned; public assistance participation; case management and employment planning; and disability status. This information sharing activity led to a reduction in staff time for data entry, less duplication of paperwork for customers, and less time needed to process and act on the information. Over time, this shared effort has led to higher placement rates, and higher initial earnings, earnings over time, and retention rates.



EXAMPLE: Establishing a broker of resources

Using funds from an ODEP Innovative Grant, the City of Detroit's Employment and Training Department implemented the project, "Detroit Youth Overcoming Challenges," on behalf of the local Workforce Development Board. The American Society of Employers (a group comprised of employer associations) served as the intermediary between the Detroit workforce development system, including the city's Department of Career Development-Rehabilitation Services, and the city and county public school systems. The intermediary organization worked to infiltrate both the workforce development and education systems by first gathering commitment from both systems to participate as strategic partners in braiding funds and strategizing resource allocations to best serve youth in their area.

Relationships were strengthened using a consulting team approach rather than hiring a few full-time project staff. Consultants with strong connections to the community, but not beholden to certain organizations, were tapped to assist WIA youth providers in developing new partnerships and funding strategies with school systems. The American Society of Employers served as the "steward of resources." Since the budgets of state and local government agencies within the workforce development system remained tight, it was essential that these systems worked together to ensure resources were efficiently and effectively utilized during the grant period as well as after the grant had ended. In response, the intermediary formalized structures to commit and connect resources and keep all partners working together on behalf of their youth customers after the demonstration program ended. The intermediary organization also cultivated relationships between entities to aggressively and competitively pursue new funding opportunities.

- b) developing and sustaining inter-agency partnerships and collaborations between agencies that fund and deliver youth services and between these agencies and employer groups;
- c) identifying and understanding the range of resources that can potentially support youth;
- d) adapting administrative systems (data-tracking and cost-allocation systems) so that they can track the use of funds and report back to multiple sources; and
- e) establishing technical assistance and training to help programs manage collaborative initiatives and joint administrative processes.

Intermediaries can adapt their roles to meet both state and local opportunities and needs. Table 1 (*see page 6*) illustrates potential activities that intermediaries at the state and local levels can perform to help communities adopt blending and braiding strategies.

It is not necessary or even realistic for an intermediary to fulfill all of these roles. Rather, Table 1 merely reflects the wide range of intermediary assistance possible at the state and local levels to support initiatives to blend and braid funds and resources.

The Importance of Evaluation

Ultimately, the flexibility of service delivery that blending and braiding allows must be accompanied by the accurate measurement of outcomes and the accountability for funds spent. This requires service partners to coordinate monitoring across agencies, and to demonstrate relative costs and benefits across agencies and funding systems. This is another key role that an

intermediary can play. Serving employers effectively is important to a well functioning service delivery system for youth. Intermediaries can minimize the confusion that categorical programs create for employers. Supply-side workforce investment system partners, that is, those organizations and agencies that directly serve youth who will supply the current and future workers for employers, are often challenged to find ways to penetrate the demand side of the universe, that is, the employers. Employers' participation in government supported youth employment programs would be significantly enhanced by the intentional pooling, of funds for employer recruitment such as in the "blending resources" examples above. Demand-centered blending and braiding can also be used address the employers' need for a workforce that meets specific industry standards, for example when schools and workforce investment providers coordinate, resources to help youth attain these standards.

Summary

Strategies that allow funds and resources to be used in more flexible, coordinated, and sustainable ways are critical to the success of efforts to improve the coordination and impact of multiple youth serving systems. Blending and braiding funds encourages the structuring of new funding streams and facilitates their coordination with existing streams.

Blending and braiding strategies also allows funds to be allocated in different ways — based on outcomes and goals, rather than through the use of narrow or categorical funding streams.

When used effectively and coordinated with the help of an intermediary, these funding



TABLE 1: INTERMEDIARY ACTIVITIES TO FACILITATE USE OF ALTERNATIVE FUNDING STRATEGIES

Area of Community Need	Potential <u>State-Level</u> Intermediary Activities	Potential <u>Local-Level</u> Intermediary Activities
<p>Articulating a clear vision for service improvement that reflects agreement on common outcomes for youth and strategies to streamline services to employers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating ongoing strategic planning for supporting employer engagement in the preparation of all youth for the world of work; and • Providing strong leadership to lay the groundwork for identifying and coordinating financial resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating ongoing strategic planning for specific youth service and employer engagement improvements; • Convening local leadership (key stakeholders) to establish a clear vision of what services need to be financed or re-organized (a community implementation plan); • Providing strong leadership to lay the groundwork for identifying and coordinating financial resources.
<p>Developing and sustaining interagency partnerships and collaborations between agencies that fund and deliver youth services and between these agencies and employer groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in the development of state plans that include waivers allowing blending funds for specific youth initiatives. • Training service providers to use various funding streams that operate within distinct systems to support services to youth and employers; • Providing support for training and technical assistance aimed at helping local initiative leaders understand the funding landscape and tackle administrative barriers to coordination; • Managing specific initiatives that feature interagency partnerships; and • Sustaining commitments for collaborative agreements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convening local decision-makers for collaborative planning across various agencies and programs; • Examining how specific local programs can work together to fund particular services/activities; and • Sustaining commitments for local collaborative agreements.
<p>Identifying a range of youth serving resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying existing budget assets and gaps in their current use of potential funding sources; • Identifying and interpreting resources uses, restrictions and reporting requirements; and • Leading the development of grant and funding applications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying budget assets and gaps in their current use of potential funding sources; • Using resource mapping to identify funding for various services and activities— then, matching funding streams to programmatic goals of the system; • Identifying and interpreting resources uses, restrictions and reporting requirements; and • Leading the development of grant and funding applications.



TABLE 1: INTERMEDIARY ACTIVITIES TO FACILITATE USE OF ALTERNATIVE FUNDING STRATEGIES

Area of Community Need	Potential <u>State-Level</u> Intermediary Activities	Potential <u>Local-Level</u> Intermediary Activities
Adapting administrative systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting as fiscal agents, handling the task of coordination and efficient use of multiple funding streams; • Developing a data infrastructure that can provide the essential information needed to ensure accountability and demonstrate outcomes; • Evaluating the impact of efforts to blend and braid funds and resources, and encourage adjustments in strategies/activities based on this assessment; and • Demonstrating program or initiative effectiveness to support continued funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting as fiscal agents, and handling the task of coordination and efficient use of multiple funding streams; • Developing a data infrastructure that can provide the essential information needed to ensure accountability and demonstrate outcomes; • Evaluating the impact of efforts to blend and braid funds and resources, and encourage adjustments in strategies/activities based on this assessment; and • Demonstrating program or initiative effectiveness to support continued funding.
Providing technical assistance and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing cross-training and technical assistance on aspects of youth services, such as job development, service accommodation for disability, etc. • Providing support for training and technical assistance for professionals and staff of collaborating agencies and organizations as they perform newly assigned roles; and • Linking providers to important sources of training, technical assistance, and professional networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing cross-training and technical assistance on aspects of youth services, such as job development, service accommodation for disability, etc.; and • Providing support for training and technical assistance for professionals and staff of collaborating agencies and organizations as they perform newly assigned roles. • Linking providers to important local sources of training, technical assistance, and professional networks.





strategies can help reduce duplication; increase the efficient use of resources; reduce the administrative burden of multiple categorical programs; and fund supports and services that are more integrated and coordinated so that youth and employer customers of the workforce investment system benefit. Intermediaries can play an important part in coordinating these efforts, and in helping to create a forum for building capacity across state and local agencies and partners to combine and share funds and other resources. Intermediaries can also serve to link these efforts to continuous improvement of youth educational and employment outcomes.

Finally, and significantly, intermediaries can help to insure that employers will be more easily engaged in youth employment programs. Neither youth nor disability status will dissuade employers from bringing young people with disabilities into their workplaces. Through the use of intermediaries, the categorical distinctions become less important because intermediaries can help to ensure that mechanisms are in place to directly address the employers' needs.

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