

GRANT PROFILE

COMMUNITIES OF FOCUS

University of Massachusetts Boston – Institute for Community Inclusion is implementing their Community Collaborations for Employment (CCE) grant in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Lawrence is located about 30 miles north of Boston, Massachusetts with a population of around 90,000 people. The target population for this grant is transition age youth in Lawrence and their families. More than four in five residents in Lawrence identify as Hispanic, with most speaking a language other than English at home. Nearly one quarter of the residents in Lawrence live in poverty.¹

GRANT RECIPIENT

University of Massachusetts Boston – Institute for Community Inclusion

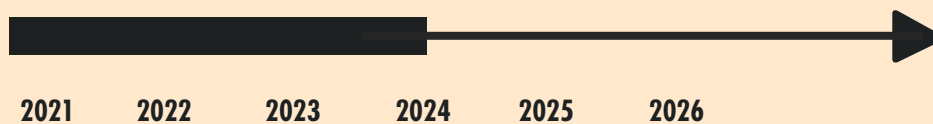
PROJECT TITLE

Lawrence Partnership for Transition to Employment

ABOUT THE CCE GRANTS

Among transition age youth with disabilities, employment is associated with improved health outcomes, increased quality of life, greater opportunities for socialization and relationship development, and a greater sense of belonging.² Yet, many students and youth with disabilities do not have the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities to pursue higher education, training, and careers. To address these disparities, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) issued CCE grants to increase and enhance collaborations across existing local systems in one or more communities. CCE grants aim to maximize a seamless experience and outcome of youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) as they transition between school and post-secondary education or competitive integrated employment (CIE) in the community. ACL awarded seven five-year CCE grants starting September 30, 2021, and ending September 29, 2026, through its [Projects of National Significance program](#). This mid-term report summarizes grant activity through February 2024.

CCE Mid-Term Report and Grant Timeline



¹ United States Census Bureau. (2022). Lawrence City Massachusetts Quick Facts. United States Census Bureau. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lawrencecitymassachusetts/PST045223#PST045223>.

² Castruita Rios, Y., Park, S., Chen, X., & Tansey, T. N. (2023). Collaborations to Support Employment Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities. *Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Journal*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.52017/001c.72655>



MASSACHUSETTS CCE PILOTS/COMMUNITIES (as of December 2023)

Community Name	Lawrence, MA
Estimated Total Population³	87,954 (2022)

OBJECTIVES AND FRAMEWORKS

The Lawrence Partnership for Transition to Employment project aims create a sustainable model that results in:

1. Improved employment and post-secondary education outcomes and long-term career success through improving collaboration among local partners;
2. Improved transition processes and experiences for youth and families; and
3. Improved transition to work outcomes for youth with ID/DD in Lawrence.

To guide their project work, the Massachusetts CCE grant team leverages the six principles of [Collaborating for Equity and Justice](#). The principles directly address race, ethnicity, and social class by giving equal power to community members to decide key priorities and building leadership and power among community members. These decisions focus on changing whole systems, identifying evidence-based approaches, and supporting group members to lead the work.

STATE AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Variations in youth transition outcomes occur, in part, due to varying demographic, economic, political, and historical factors in each state. The following factors provide valuable context for the external conditions in which the Massachusetts CCE team implements their grant.

Lawrence, Massachusetts is a diverse community with a large immigrant population. A former manufacturing hub, the city experienced economic challenges in recent decades, as evidenced by the proportion of residents living in poverty. This is particularly significant among students in special education at Lawrence public schools, many of whom are classified as economically disadvantaged. Transition age youth with disabilities in Lawrence Public Schools experience low expectations and stereotypes based on language, disability, and socioeconomic status. The recent implementation of a free local transit system in Lawrence benefits students by providing access to essential services and employment opportunities. While the availability of disability services in Lawrence is a strength, lack of awareness and cultural and linguistic competencies are common barriers to using these services.

³ As reported by the Massachusetts CCE Team.



GRANT ACTIVITIES BY STAGE



COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE PILOT

Each CCE grant established a community collaborative pilot – a broad range of diverse community partners involved in all aspects of the grant and representing stakeholders across developmental disabilities, education, advocacy, and employment settings.

Community Collaborative Structure

The Massachusetts CCE grant team’s community collaborative includes a full collaborative, a steering committee, and four workgroups.

▶ **Full Collaborative**

The Massachusetts CCE team’s full collaborative, the Lawrence Partnership for Transition to Employment (LPTE) Consortium, meets quarterly in a virtual or hybrid format. The consortium guides the overall direction of the project by providing input on resources and challenges. The Massachusetts CCE team uses the six principles of Collaborating for Equity and Justice to guide the LPTE. At each meeting, the team presents a summary table of principles and selects one for discussion.

▶ **Steering Committee**

The Massachusetts CCE team holds monthly steering committee meetings to discuss logistics and emerging themes from the project. There are 12 steering committee members, including the director of support from the Arc of Greater Haverhill-Newburyport, the Lawrence area director of the Massachusetts Developmental Services, the transition and multilingual family engagement specialists from Lawrence Public Schools, a counselor from the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, the senior project director from Massachusetts Advocates for Children, and members of the grant leadership team.

▶ **Workgroups**

The Massachusetts CCE team established four workgroups in September 2023, aligned with the four priority areas for their transition plan. Workgroups meet approximately monthly and share updates with each other at quarterly consortium meetings. Each workgroup has approximately 10 members, including one steering committee member.



Community Collaborative Members, Roles, and Diversity

The LPTE Consortium includes a range of stakeholders including representatives from the state Department of Developmental Services and Vocation Rehabilitation, service providers, the city’s mayor’s office, local high schools, technical schools, community colleges, four-year colleges, local advocacy groups, an independent living center, the regional transportation authority as well as parent advocates. Recently, members of the Massachusetts team met with the Mayor of Lawrence, the city’s Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator, and an aide. The Mayor expressed support for the project and facilitated a connection with the city’s internship coordinator who now participates in the LPTE.

Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

The Massachusetts CCE team recruited a diverse group of partners to attend community collaborative events. Through regular engagement and relationship building, the team generated interest from new partners. The team encountered barriers engaging youth with ID/DD as fully as they hoped, citing barriers such as transportation and scheduling. The grant team initially noticed a lack of communication among stakeholder groups and fostered networking and coordination through additional in-person and hybrid meetings. The Massachusetts CCE team makes a concerted effort to engage Spanish-speakers within Lawrence by providing all communications and grant materials in English and Spanish and providing a Spanish interpreter for meetings. However, there is still missing information and insight that cannot always be fully captured through translation and interpretation efforts.



LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Landscape analyses for the CCE grants aim to assess community resources, strengths, needs, and gaps related to providing consistent and seamless services for youth with ID/DD and their families that promote opportunities for CIE, post-secondary education, and independent living.

Landscape Analysis Approach

The Massachusetts CCE team’s landscape analysis consisted of community conversations and discussions with students and parents. The team completed their landscape analysis activities between November 2022 and April 2023.



▶ Community Conversations

The Massachusetts CCE team held five community conversations, both in-person and virtually, in November 2022 and February 2023. Participants included professionals, family members, and youth. The questions for these community conversations explored desired outcomes for youth with disabilities, areas of opportunity for helping youth find employment, and community strengths.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What outcomes do you think are important for youth with disabilities in Lawrence when they leave school?
- What are one or two things that would help youth with disabilities find employment when they leave school?
- What are one or two strengths within the Lawrence community that could help youth with disabilities find employment?
- In four years, what services, supports, and opportunities for work would you like to see for youth with disabilities in your community?

▶ Student and Parent Discussions

Fewer family members and youth than expected attended community conversations. The Massachusetts CCE team supplemented these conversations with a meeting with a parent advocacy group and discussions with two groups of high school students. The Massachusetts CCE team's bilingual coordinator served as a critical facilitator of this additional outreach, as she is someone that youth and family members know and with whom they feel comfortable sharing.

Landscape Analysis Findings

Findings shared by professionals, families, youth with ID/DD, and other community conversation participants coalesced around three themes:

▶ Key Outcomes for Youth With Disabilities in Lawrence

Youth with ID/DD identified the importance of being able to set their own goals and make individual decisions, including opportunities to gain practical skills for success in adulthood and access person-centered planning resources. They also noted access to career planning, vocational training, and support for obtaining jobs and social connections as essential. They also want others to help champion, coach, or mentor them for post-school life.



► Utilize the Strengths of the Community to Help Transition Youth

Lawrence is a tight-knit community that promotes inclusive values and a collaborative culture, making the community itself an asset to support transition for youth with disabilities. The community has access to state- and local-based disability services, free public door-to-door transportation for individuals with disabilities, a large network of small businesses, and several advocacy and support groups for families of people with disabilities.

► Implement Recommended Strategies

Respondents recommended improving the transition from school to adult services, offering more work experiences while students are in school, expanding employment preparation activities, preparing students for aspects of adult life other than employment, building self-advocacy skills, and increasing engagement with families and local businesses.

To disseminate findings from their landscape analysis, the Massachusetts CCE team created a written summary in English and Spanish and presented the findings at a quarterly consortium meeting to gather feedback. Through conversation with their consortium members, the Massachusetts CCE team narrowed down priorities identified in their landscape analysis into the four workgroups for their transition plan activities.

Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Community conversations engaged diverse individuals to understand strengths, resources, and gaps in the community related to transition. To facilitate participation, the Massachusetts CCE team provided childcare and food for participants. Initially, the team faced challenges with lower family participation at community conversations held at schools, potentially due to the hesitation to discuss transition challenges in the school setting. To bridge this gap, the Massachusetts CCE team, through their bilingual coordinator, held additional interviews in other community settings. This additional data collection brought in more individuals and families. The Massachusetts CCE steering committee and LPTE Consortium provided valuable feedback about the landscape analysis approach and findings throughout the process, and the steering committee and Consortium will continue to inform grant activities as the project moves toward transition plan implementation.



TRANSITION PLAN

Transition Plan Development and Implementation

Informed by landscape analysis findings, CCE grant recipients must develop and implement transition plans to address the needs of youth with ID/DD and their families. Each grant recipient develops and implements a unique transition plan approach, tailored to their community or communities' needs, to achieve their intended outcomes.

Transition Plan Development Approach

The Massachusetts CCE team developed their transition plan through discussion and input from their consortium members and steering committee, ultimately narrowing down the priorities identified in their landscape analysis into four key areas of focus for their transition plan. These priorities align with their four workgroups, which will determine goals and timelines for activities to address their respective priority areas.

▶ **Partnering With Families**

This workgroup focuses on supporting, educating, and building trust with families and partnering with schools to develop student-centered transition plans.

▶ **Provide Work Experiences in School**

This workgroup focuses on helping youth obtain varied work experiences while in school to help make informed decisions about their future career and educational opportunities.

▶ **Fostering Cross Agency Connections**

This workgroup focuses on collaborating across agencies to reduce duplication of services and ensure families are aware of their options.

▶ **Preparing Students for Other Aspects of Adult Life**

This workgroup focuses on assisting youth to transition into aspects of adult life not related to employment, such as self-advocacy, building and maintaining friendships, and obtaining a driver's license.

To help guide the development process, the Massachusetts CCE team developed a template for planning with space to fill out goals, objectives, activities, individuals responsible, resources, outputs, and due dates.



To help communicate workgroup activities as they develop their components of the transition plan, the Massachusetts CCE team developed a project [website](#).

Transition Plan Characteristics and Activities

Each of the four workgroups meets approximately monthly and is in the process of developing a specific implementation plan. Members of the grant leadership team participate in each of the workgroups and the workgroups each provide updates during quarterly consortium meetings to ensure coordination across the workgroups and to encourage a shared understanding of goals. The workgroups are in the initial stages of developing their transition plan activities, but efforts so far include:

▶ Partnering With Families

This workgroup is working with families who attend consortium meetings to share their success stories with other families to help spread knowledge about grant activities.

▶ Provide Work Experiences in School

This workgroup is collaborating with local businesses to compile a list of available job opportunities for youth with ID/DD in school.

▶ Fostering Cross-Agency Connections

This workgroup is clarifying transition information for youth and their families by developing a database of information and resources related to transition and employment for families in multiple languages. Within transition-related services, there can be several silos that make it difficult for all stakeholders or interested parties to have access to the full landscape of resources and information.

▶ Preparing Students for Other Aspects of Adult Life

This workgroup is collecting resources and rewriting them in plain language. They are conducting focus groups to gather insight from youth with ID/DD on how these resources can best support their transition and adult life.

Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

The Massachusetts CCE team invested considerable time to thoughtfully engage the LPTE consortium and steering committee members in reviewing landscape analysis findings, creating a broad list of priorities for their transition plan, and then narrowing down the list to the top priorities. After establishing their priorities, the team created four workgroups to move the work forward. This intentional, stepwise process facilitated buy-in among participants, and each of the workgroups will collaborate on the activities and timelines for their respective efforts. The Massachusetts CCE team established a Microsoft Teams site to communicate with workgroups and is testing use of their [project website](#) for disseminating workgroup activities.



EVALUATION



Each grant recipient will use process and summative evaluation techniques to analyze the delivery of project activities and determine the project's success in meeting intended outcomes.

Methodology and Approach

One evaluation tool the Massachusetts CCE team is using is the [Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory](#), which assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the group related to collaboration across 22 factors. Factors include the history of collaboration or cooperation in the community, shared vision, engagement of stakeholders, and understanding and trust in the group. The Massachusetts CCE team conducted a baseline inventory at the beginning of the project, which showed no areas of concern but indicated some borderline scores with opportunity for improvement as well as many strengths. The team aims to improve collaboration throughout the project and will conduct the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory again at the end of the project as a comparison to measure impact. The Massachusetts CCE team plans to implement a data dashboard to track outcomes and a demographic survey of their consortium members, which will help them assess how representative the consortium is of the broader community. As their transition plan activities develop, the Massachusetts CCE team will further refine their evaluation approach.

Intended Outcomes

The Massachusetts CCE team tracks progress toward their intended outcomes in multiple ways, such as tracking the number of youth receiving vocational rehabilitation services and pre-employment transition services, participating in work-based learning, and attending transition workshops and Individualized Education Program meetings. They are collecting data for all intended outcomes and will have data by the end of the grant.

LOOKING AHEAD

- Transition plan workgroups will design and begin implementing activities.
- The Massachusetts CCE team will launch a data dashboard to evaluate improved transition process and improved post-secondary and employment outcomes for youth outcomes in conjunction with CCE transition plan development.