

New York Alliance for Inclusion & Innovation

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT Learning Institute

Final Report
2019 - 2020

In Partnership with



*The Customized
Employment Learning
Institute was generously
funded by The New York
Community Trust.*



Participating Organizations

Participating in this effort to “disrupt current limitations” were about 60 team leaders and change team members representing the following providers of services to persons with developmental disabilities in New York City:

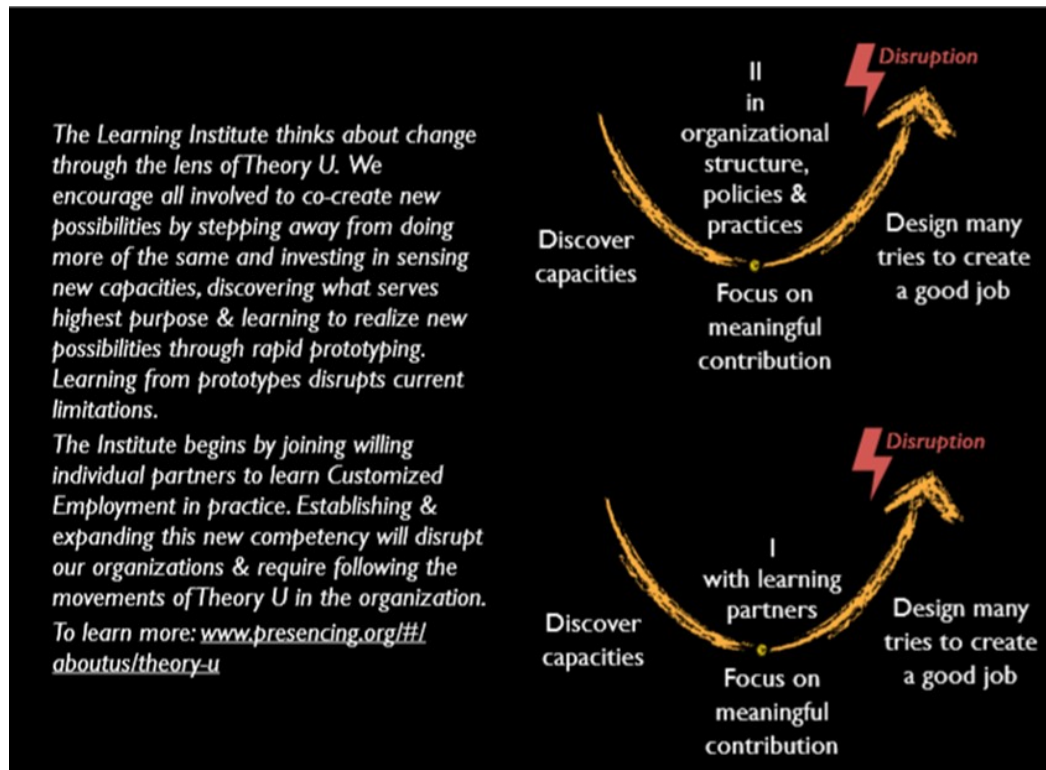
AHRC NYC
 Birch Family Services
 Brooklyn Community Services
 The Center for Family Support

The Block Institute
 Creative Lifestyles
 Heartshare
 Goodwill Industries of Greater NY & Northern NJ

Innovation Resources for Independence
 Meaningful New York
 New York Foundling
 YAI



It is useful to revisit this graphic from the Year One report. Developed by Learning Institute faculty member John O’Brien, it summarizes the NY Alliance’s approach to developing and delivering the Customized Employment Learning Institute.



Key Activities in Year Two

of the Customized Employment Learning Institute

The second year of the Institute ran from approximately May 1, 2019 through August 31, 2020 and, of course, suffered a serious disruption due to the virus. That disruption required revamping plans, to be described below. Key activities included:

APRIL 17, 2019: LEARNING JOURNEY

Learning journeys are integral to the Theory U Framework. On this journey, participants were able to learn from the Customized Employment experiences of Job Path and AHRC NYC.

MAY 5, 2019: WEBINAR: MYTHS BEHIND “WHY I CAN’T WORK”

This webinar was presented by Ray Cebula of Cornell University’s ILR Yang-Tan Institute. It explored the Social Security Administration’s rules and incentives that permit persons with disabilities to work and still maintain their public benefits.

JUNE 4, 2019: PRESENTATION

Institute participants presented on their Customized Employment experiences at the Partners in Employment Summit held in Albany, New York.

JULY 25, 2019: PROBLEM SOLVING

Participants gathered at the offices of YAI in New York City to discuss learnings and share solutions to mutual barriers to implementing Customized Employment.

SEPTEMBER 16, 2019: PRESENTATION BY DR. MICHAEL KENDRICK

This day long lecture and set of exercises was held at CAI Global offices in New York to assist change teams to move past the Discovery phase of Customized Employment by “Learning Through Action”. It also addressed the importance of organizational leadership in order to successfully facilitate a new approach to services such as Customized Employment

OCTOBER 18, 2019: PROBLEM SOLVING

Participants gathered at the offices of YAI in New York City to discuss learnings and share solutions to mutual barriers to implementing Customized Employment.

DECEMBER 17, 2019: PRESENTATION BY THERESE FIMIAN OF MARC GOLD ASSOCIATES

This day long presentation held at CAI Global focused on the transition from Discovery to job development and the first steps in reaching out to employers.

FEBRUARY 5, 2020: SHARING AND PLANNING

Participants gathered at CAI Global to share success stories, challenges and to brainstorm ideas on how to maintain momentum after the NYCT grant expires. Several themes arose during this conversation:

- integrating customized employment into the maze of state systems and agencies is a significant challenge
- absent organizational change and support from top leadership, it is difficult to successfully implement customized employment
- staff turnover impedes progress in implementation
- when an agency “sticks with the process”, good things happen
- the Discovery process, crucial to customized employment, reveals sometimes incredible findings about people and their families, even those known to providers for years
- it is important to integrate customized employment activities into an organization’s typical routines.

Maintaining Momentum

Participants offered several suggestions to the NY Alliance to maintain momentum going forward after the NYCT grant ends, including:

- incorporating customized employment into NY Alliance’s annual conference
- establishing ongoing networking activities for providers of customized employment
- offering ongoing opportunities to meet in person
- providing information/education/advocacy with Care Coordination Organizations on the importance of understanding employment funding streams
- supporting organizational structural changes necessary to the implementation of customized employment.

Mentoring Activities

of the Customized Employment Learning Institute

As in year one, experienced Job Path staff continued to provide mentoring to each participating agency.

Mentoring activities included:

- conversations with CELI teams about individuals in the Customized Employment process;
- discussion on the overall experience (for example, strategies/troubleshooting during Discovery)
- having a CELI team member observe a planning meeting and/or having mentor join a planning meeting of someone on the CELI team
- CELI team member shadowing a mentor in a Job Development activity
- sharing examples and providing assistance with visual resumes



Photos of participants at work during a Learning Institute session.

COVID Disruption

The pandemic ended all-in person sessions. The NY Alliance, Job Path and Institute faculty settled upon closing the institute with three remote sessions, the themes of which were:

Look Around

August 12, 2020

Look Back

August 19, 2020

Look Ahead

August 26, 2020

Prior to holding the final three sessions, several participants were interviewed to “prime the pump” for the actual sessions. These are samples of the questions interviewees were asked.

LOOK AROUND

- Given your experiences with customized employment and the current environment (Covid, BLM), what possibilities do you see?
- How are these experiences affecting you and your community?
- How are they impacting your commitments?
- Are these commitments still worth pursuing?
- How are you sustaining yourself in this environment?

LOOK BACK

- What lessons have you learned?
- Has customized employment affected the people you support, you, your organization, the system?
- When you look back, what if anything makes you feel proud?
- When you look back, what do you wish you could have done differently?

LOOK AHEAD

- What more can you ask of yourself, your organization and the larger system?
- How might organizational and systemic structures and resources be redesigned and redirected to support customized employment?
- What gives you hope for the future?
- What do you fear as you look ahead?

Look Around

The first of the three remote sessions, Look Around, was held on **August 12, 2020** with 34 participants. As they “looked around”, participants had things to say such as:

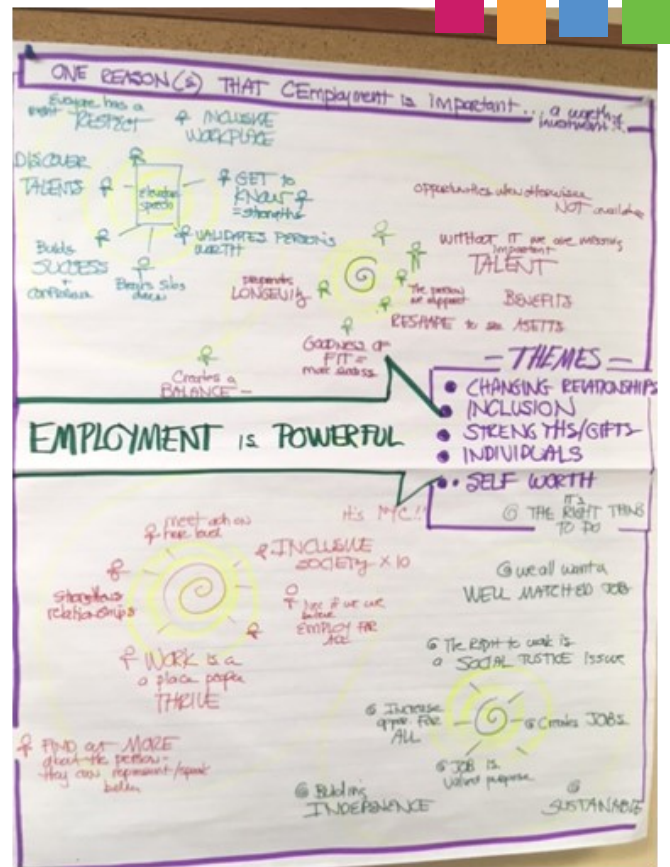
We have re-invented Customized Employment practices for the on-line environment.

We have noticed and reached beyond some self-limiting responses. We have felt the power of shifting attention and energy from defensive efforts to protect what may be gone forever to a search for new possibilities.

We have responded to the digital divide so that those off-line are not out of touch.

We recognize the potential for stronger alliance with a growing and multifaceted movement for social justice as awareness of the ways that racism and ableism reinforce each other to our communities' cost.

Some relationships have grown. Topics of conversation have broadened as we help each other figure out how to make the best of constrained situations. We have learned more about some people's home lives and come closer to some families.



A rendering by Beth Mount that captures Learning Institute participants' reflections on Customized Employment.

Exploring what is within walking distance of people's homes has revealed new opportunities and connections.

Some of us have been reassigned to roles that give us the perspective of offering support in residential settings or delivering family support.

Those who continue to do essential work under unprecedented conditions demonstrate the power of co-worker and supervisor expectations.

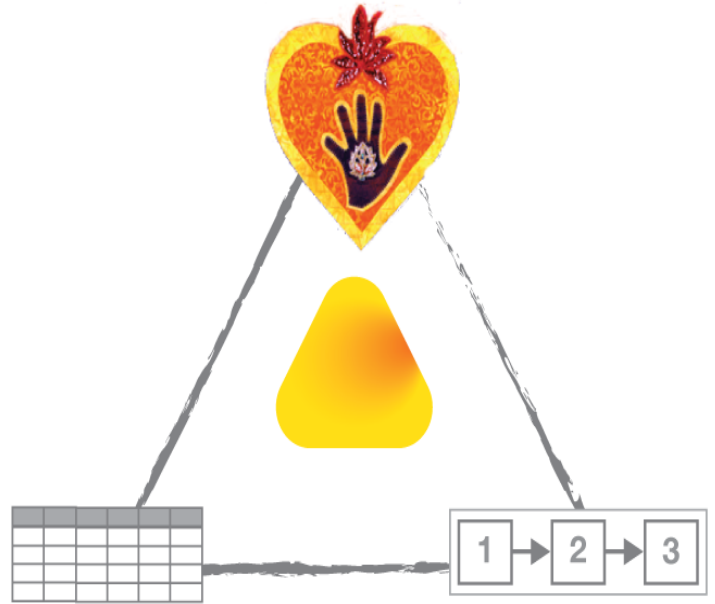
We have discovered even more about some people's interests, capabilities, and connections; sometime even among people we have served for a long time.

Look Back

The second remote session, Look Back, was held on **August 19, 2020**, with 25 participants.

Faculty member John O'Brien compiled these reflections on the session. The graphics were created by faculty member Beth Mount.

One way to look at Customized Employment highlights a concern for reconciling different, potentially competing, aspects of the work. This perspective visualizes Customized Employment as shaped by three attractors. Right relationship among these attractors sets the conditions for sustainable success and meaningful work, signified by the energy gradient in the center.



I. A well defined **method**, a sequence of procedures validated by years of practice. A curriculum supports learning to reliably carry out the procedures. Practitioners can be certified. Skilled application offers good odds for success.

II. A set of administrative requirements, signified by a **grid**. Timely compliance that stands up to inspection assures the flow of payments and maintains good standing in human service systems.

III. A form of **relationship** that brings life and art to the work. Good relationships embody the intelligences of heart, hand, and consciousness. They animate the process, bringing acuity to observation, creativity and depth to thinking, and courage to representation. In difficult situations they inspire improvisation. With sustained commitment and good support practitioners can develop their capacity for artful relationships.

Look Ahead

The third and final remote session, Look Ahead, was held on **August 26, 2020** with 26 participants. These are some of the thoughts of those participants, again compiled by John O'Brien.

To improve our practice of Customized Employment:

Tune even more sensitively to detect and amplify desire to work among the people we serve. This is the energy source that keeps us going.

Continue to explore the possibilities of working virtually. Develop online platform and techniques to facilitate Discovery.

Extend the radius of curiosity and stay alert to new forms and conditions of employment. Be creative in imagining how the restoration of economic activity can benefit from customized jobs. Don't become fixated on lost jobs, be open to what is coming back. This means being out there, exploring what is growing in people's neighborhoods.

Keep stretching to include job seekers who challenge us.

Be highly disciplined and well organized to minimize the energy that goes into billing and compliance measures.

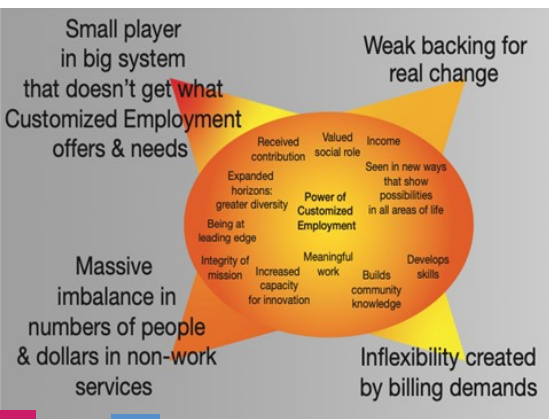
To better establish Customized Employment in our organizations:

We are stronger together. Stay connected.

When we are small teams in big organizations, the results of our practice of Customized Employment are our best source of influence.

Make the case to increase the number of staff roles dedicated 100% to Customized Employment. Decrease the number of other hats Customized Employment staff must wear.

John O'Brien's image captures some of these thoughts:



Move out of our organizational niche. Spread knowledge of the difference Customized Employment makes to more of our co-workers. Advocate for a leadership commitment to make employment a concern in every job description.

Share the lessons of Discovery widely. Encourage more people to focus on people's presently unknown capacities.

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

In Action

Stories
of Success

CELI In Action



Josh (second from left) on stage at the Hall with co-workers and Cristina Perera from the Center for Family Support

Josh

Josh is a young man who was working in a maintenance position but whose heart was in the arts. His support person from the Center for Family Support approached Carnegie Hall where Josh was eventually hired as an usher.

His uncanny memory allowed him to memorize the seating arrangements and the history of the Hall, which he likes to share with patrons. When the Hall closed due to the virus, CFS helped him find a new job at TJ Maxx in lost prevention and enticing people to sign up for TJ Maxx credit cards.

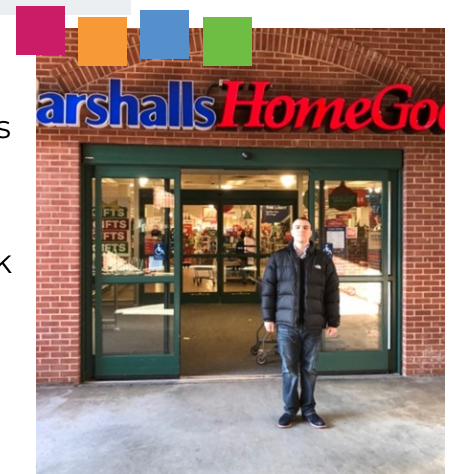
Hear from Josh in this video clip: <https://youtu.be/g-v6e1k13rY>

Louis

Louis is a young man with limited speech but an earnestness to work and to be a contributing citizen. With help from the Center for Family Support, he was hired at Marshall's in New Rochelle at the onset of the pandemic. He went back to work just after the 4th of July with support mostly from his dad and his co-workers. He works in loss prevention now, 5 days/week. His most recent performance evaluation was perfect.

A brief conversation with Louis can be heard here:

<https://youtu.be/09Ypxq-lr6Q>



Louis stands proud in front of his place of employment.

Richard

Richard is in his 30's and had little work experience but did have a passion for skateboarding. His support staff from Heartshare, Mark, took notice of the passion and approached Zumiez, a skating clothing shop with a small section of skateboard components. When Mark described Richard to the folks at Zumiez, their response was, "hey, we know that guy. He's in here all the time helping our customers." Mark helped to customize a new job in the skateboard components section of the store where all his supports were provided by his co-workers. Richard lost his job due to the pandemic but is hopeful he will be back soon.

Continuing to Spread the Word

On October 27, 2020, the New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation sponsored a webinar for a statewide audience of about 75 persons, to help bring the message of Customized Employment beyond the borders of New York City. Job Path and three other agencies discussed their experiences in the Institute, best practices and, as always barriers and obstacles to implementing Customized Employment. Participants' positive reviews of the webinar can be found in Appendix One.

Some Final Conclusions

In February, just before the lockdowns began, 13 persons had found employment and 42 others were in the Discovery or Planning phases of Customized Employment. There is no way to know how these 42 would have fared without the virus induced interruption.

At least one agency began a significant organizational redesign to foster better implementation of Customized Employment.

Customized Employment is a form of social innovation and, not surprisingly, its enactment is similar to most other forms of social innovation.

At the beginning, we see it thrive on the edges of organizations, outside the decades old constraints imposed by bureaucratic structures. Those constraints and unfriendly regulatory and funding schema demand that social innovators design work- arounds and creative approaches to the work. These innovators learned that discipline and perseverance are key to implementing new and untried methods. They also learned that Customized Employment is a tool to enact social justice, i.e. employment is for everyone regardless of disability and, beneath all, it is unjust to maintain people in unemployment and non-contributing roles due to disability.

Financial Summary

A summary of the income and expenditures of the grant's activities is included below.

Staffing costs exceeded expectations but other costs, especially room rentals and food, were well under budget essentially balancing each other.

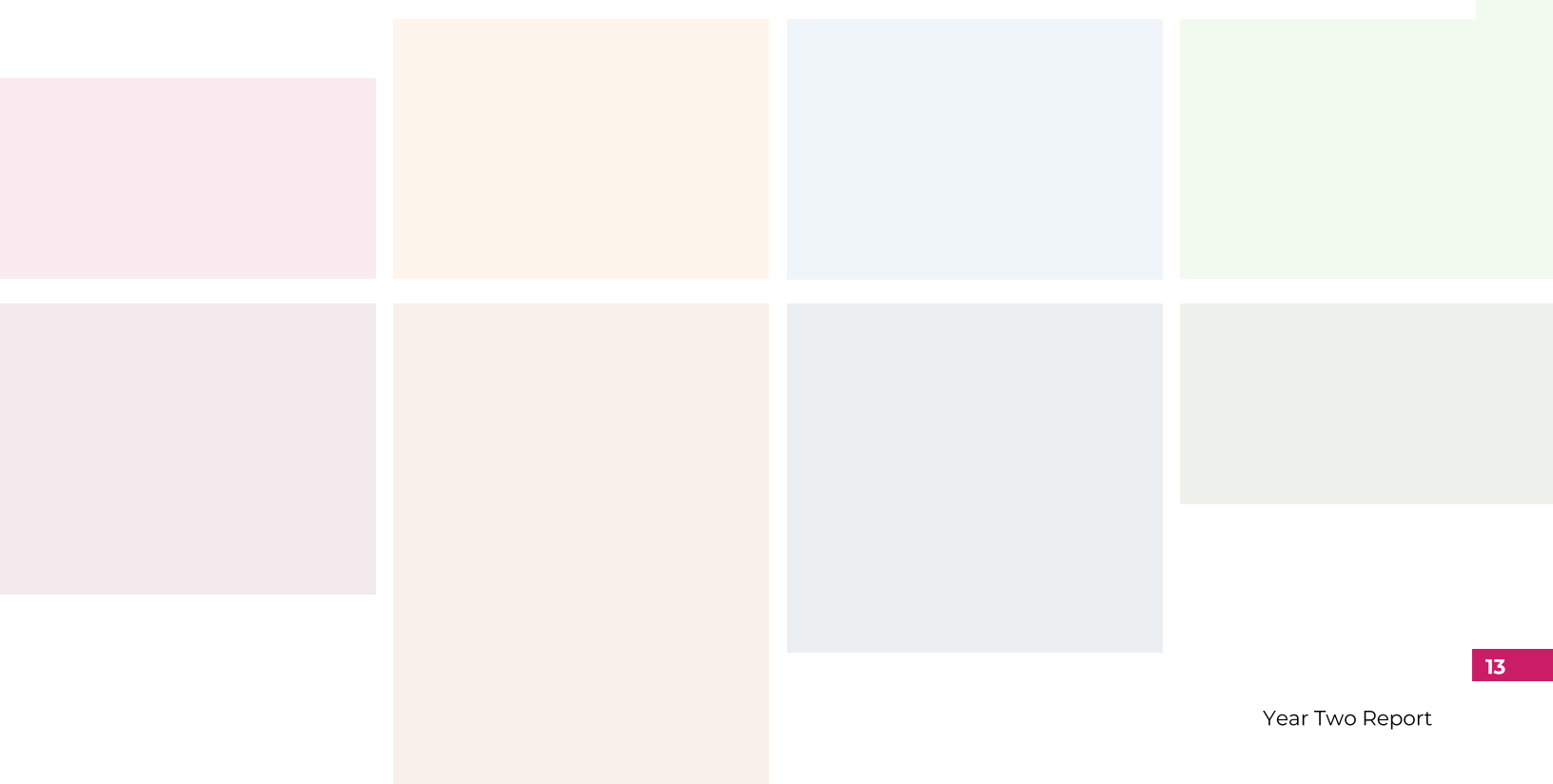
Customized Employment Learning Institute Budget vs Actual Expenditure Summary by Year

	Grant Budget	Year			Total
		Year 1 4/1/18-3/31/19	Year 2 4/1/19-3/31/20	Year 3 4/1/20-9/30/20	
Personnel	5,000.00	8,013.99	6,337.28	1,927.64	16,278.91
Fringe Benefits	1,300.00	2,226.51	2,986.98	447.02	5,660.51
Subcontractor	35,400.00	17,700.00	17,700.00	-	35,400.00
Consultants	20,000.00	12,405.20	3,625.60	3,472.00	19,502.80
Travel	8,000.00	5,322.99	1,613.66	-	6,936.65
Supplies	3,000.00	174.46	-	-	174.46
Other	26,600.00	7,643.65	6,205.77	13.94	13,863.36
Admin	9,930.00	-	-	2,183.31	2,183.31
Total	109,230.00	53,486.80	38,469.29	8,043.91	100,000.00

Grant award

100,000.00

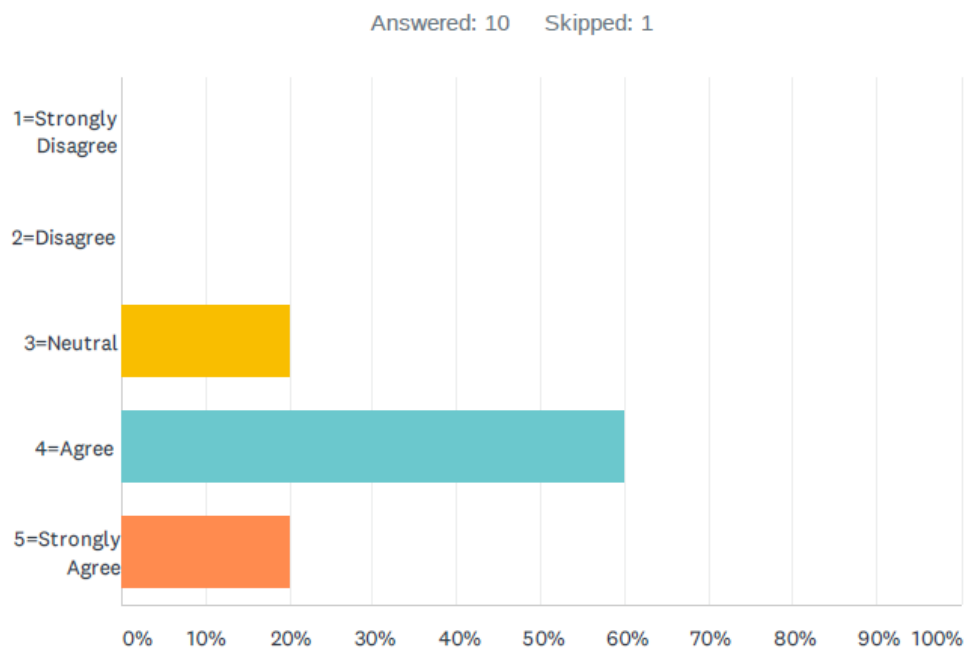
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Appendix One

On October 27, 2020, the New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation sponsored a webinar for a statewide audience of about 75 persons, to help bring the message of Customized Employment beyond the borders of New York City. Job Path and three other agencies discussed their experiences in the Institute, best practices and, as always barriers and obstacles to implementing Customized Employment. Participants' positive reviews of the webinar can be found below.

Q1 Was the program content consistent with the course description?



Q2 What was the most valuable part of this webinar?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 2

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	See how cities are being successful with Customize employment	10/29/2020 8:46 AM
2	successful CE placement stories	10/28/2020 5:49 PM
3	The conditions that need to be present for a job seek to succeed.	10/28/2020 9:25 AM
4	getting an understanding of connections with other agencies	10/28/2020 8:59 AM
5	learning of Marc Gold Associates	10/28/2020 7:41 AM
6	Hearing from people who benefitted from a CE approach	10/27/2020 6:48 PM
7	Real life examples of successful approaches and outcomes	10/27/2020 5:29 PM
8	The stories discussing how customized employment works for the people we support.	10/27/2020 4:08 PM
9	The hands on experience of the presenters	10/27/2020 3:32 PM

Appendix One cont'd

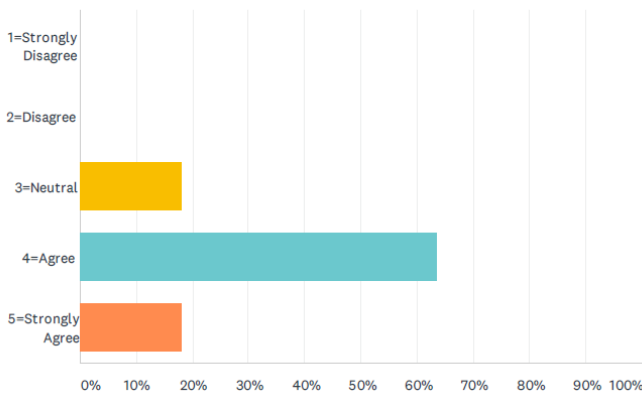
Q3 What was the least valuable part of this webinar?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I would have like to hear more on model that is designed for rural communities where employers are not willing to crave a job descriptions to be more customize for individuals.	10/29/2020 8:46 AM
2	funding the customized employment model outside of a grant is still difficult.	10/28/2020 5:49 PM
3	n/a	10/28/2020 9:25 AM
4	the funding	10/28/2020 8:59 AM
5	It was all very good!	10/27/2020 6:48 PM
6	Too much time spent with introductory material	10/27/2020 5:29 PM
7	none. It was all valuable	10/27/2020 3:32 PM

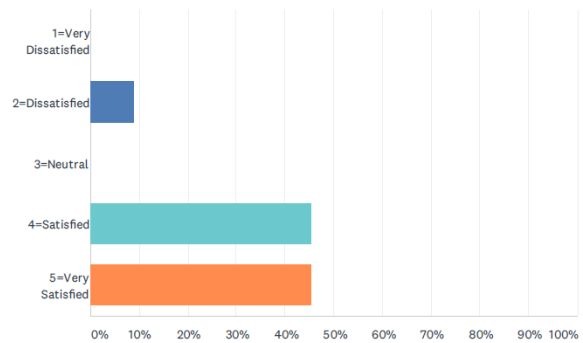
Q4 Was the program content well organized?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



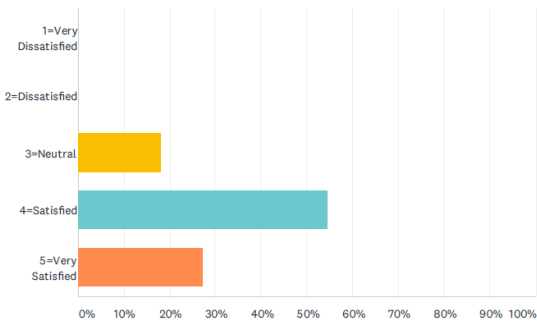
Q5 How satisfied were you with the presenters depth of knowledge on the subject matter?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



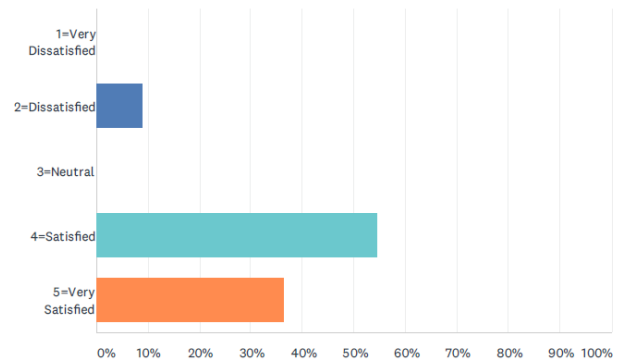
Q6 How well did the presenters handle questions and answers from the audience?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



Q7 How would you rate your overall satisfaction with this program?

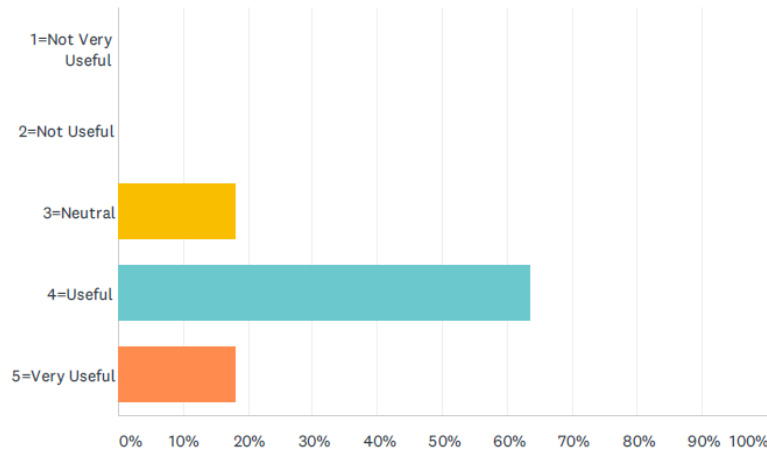
Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



Appendix One cont'd

Q8 How useful was the information presented in today's program?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



Q9 What suggestions do you have for improvement for this program?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 6

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Many of the partners are from upstate locations hearing on NY City is great but not a useful in smaller settings.	10/29/2020 8:46 AM
2	No changes.	10/28/2020 9:25 AM
3	i would have liked to hear more about how to get the funding, the difference between funding and if grant proposals were submitted what was the process	10/28/2020 8:59 AM
4	none really	10/28/2020 7:41 AM
5	I'd like to hear more real life examples and ideas for creative approaches to connecting with employers especially in this age of COVID	10/27/2020 5:29 PM

Q10 Please share any additional comments about this webinar.

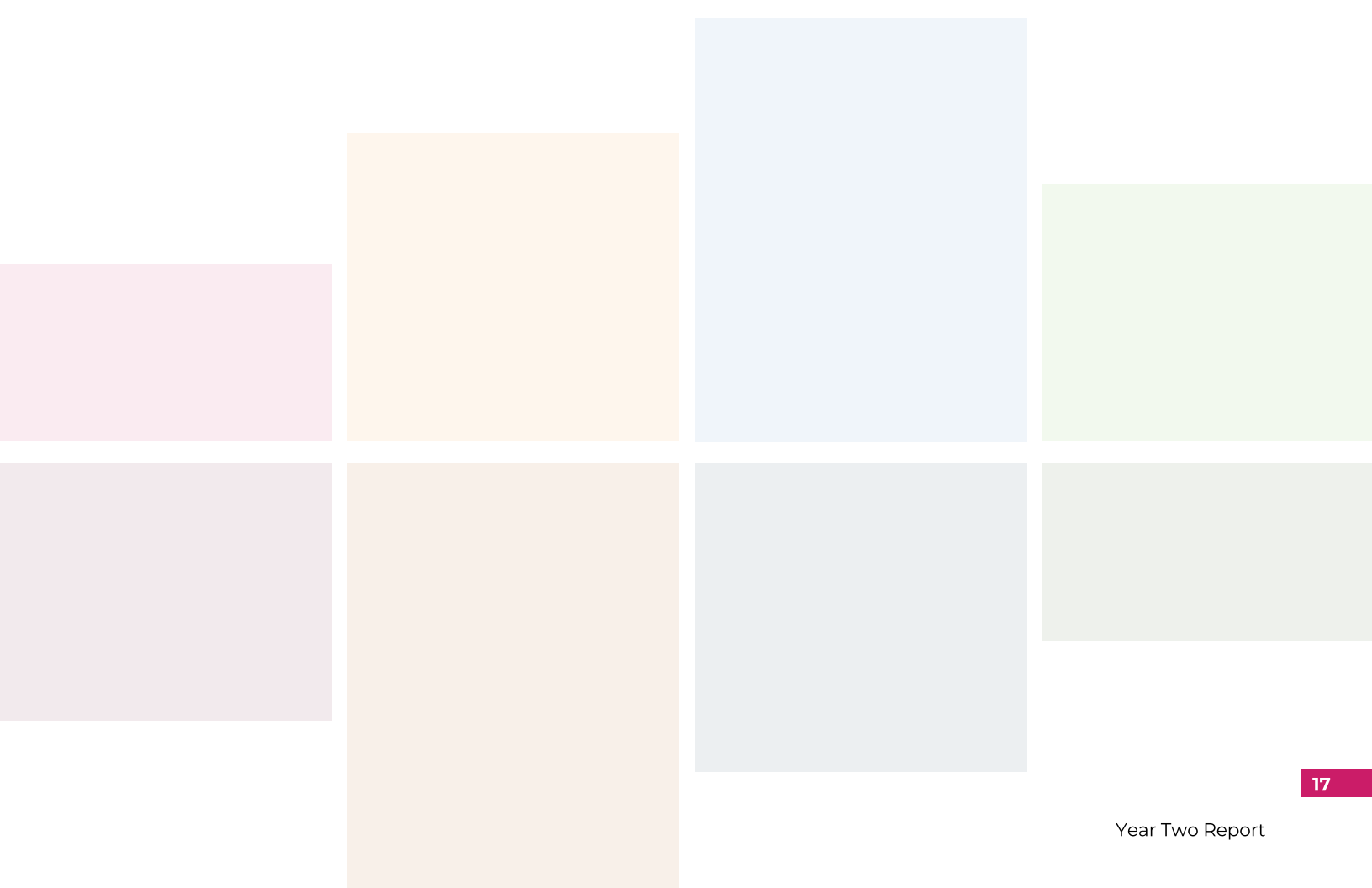
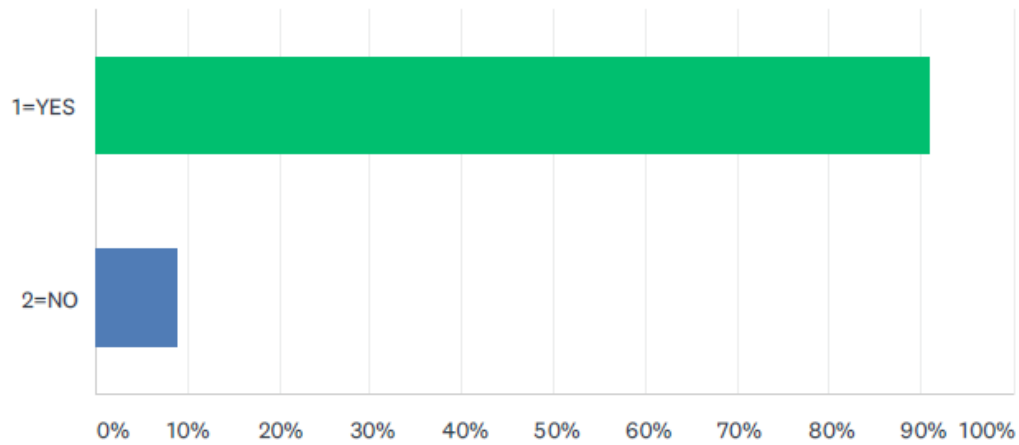
Answered: 3 Skipped: 8

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	none	10/29/2020 8:46 AM
2	I enjoy hearing about the journey of the different Employment services and how they approached the transitions into employment from the workshops.	10/28/2020 9:25 AM
3	I like the one hour format.	10/27/2020 3:32 PM

Appendix One cont'd

Q11 Would you recommend this program to a friend?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0





NEW YORK
**ALLIANCE FOR
INCLUSION & INNOVATION**

The New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation (NY Alliance) envisions a society where individuals with disabilities are contributing citizens with equal rights and the ability to live full, productive and meaningful lives.

nyalliance.org