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Engaging BIPOC Out-Of-School Youth With Disabilities Through Interagency Collaborations: Lessons Learned From Centers for Independent Living

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This study explored partnerships that Centers for Independent Living (CILs) engaged in to deliver services for out-of-school youth (OSY) with disabilities who identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC), a historically under-resourced group. The research team conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with executive directors or staff at seven CILs that serve large populations of BIPOC OSY with disabilities. CILs that participated in this study formed collaborations to support youth with disabilities, including BIPOC OSY. CIL respondents discussed the partnerships they established with vocational rehabilitation agencies, community-based organizations, secondary schools, and institutions of postsecondary education, to provide bidirectional and one-way referrals and connect youth to volunteering, employment, and peer group opportunities. CILs and other organizations that serve transition-age youth might create similar partnerships, particularly with vocational rehabilitation agencies, to reach and engage their minority OSY consumers.

Centers for Independent Living (CILs) empower people with disabilities to live more independently in their own communities. Under the amended Rehabilitation Act of 1973, CILs, which are designed and operated by people with disabilities, provide peer support and mentoring, information and referral services, individual and systems advocacy, independent living skills training, and transition services. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2014) expanded on these requirements to mandate that CILs better assist youth with disabilities in their transitions to adult life after secondary school. There is little literature, however, that focuses on CIL involvement in supporting transition-age youth with disabilities, particularly those who identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC; Mann & Wang, 2021).¹ This study seeks to identify how CILs establish interagency collaborations to address the transition needs of BIPOC out-of-school youth (OSY) with disabilities.

Youth with disabilities face many challenges transitioning to adulthood. Compared with their non-disabled peers, youth with disabilities have lower rates of employment and postsecondary education and higher rates of incarceration (Cheng & Shaewitz, 2021). Many youth with disabilities

experience social and academic difficulties in secondary school, and a substantial proportion drop out of high school or otherwise do not work (Zablocki & Krezmien, 2012). Achieving self-sufficiency in adulthood is a challenge; many youth with disabilities who participate in public Social Security disability programs (e.g., Supplemental Security Income) transition directly to the adult programs, potentially receiving payment support for their whole lives (Hemmeter, 2015).

BIPOC youth with disabilities have higher rates of disability than all youth with disabilities. Relative to non-minority youth with disabilities, these youth have poorer transition and long-term outcomes (Cameto et al., 2003; Lipscomb et al., 2017). Many of these youth require services to help them transition to employment, postsecondary education, and adulthood (Kucharczyk et al., 2022). CILs are one provider of these services for youth with disabilities.

Although CILs and other state and federal programs can help youth with disabilities, many BIPOC youth and their families encounter barriers to accessing services. These challenges include poor communication about independent living services, language barriers, and a lack of community

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¹ In this article, the terms minority and people of color are used interchangeably; some individuals from minority backgrounds might prefer people of color to refer to people who identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color and who might be underserved by disability service providers.

connections and familiarity with CILs as a potential resource (Francis et al., 2018). BIPOC youth with disabilities may encounter unique challenges related to psychosocial adjustment and the intersection of race and disability, including higher poverty rates and higher incidents of police brutality (Frederick & Shifrer, 2018; National Disability Institute, 2020).

BIPOC youth with disabilities and their families may have negative experiences with school educators and community-based service providers such as CILs. These experiences can increase marginalization from services and contribute to poorer post-school outcomes, including lower rates of competitive employment (Francis et al., 2018). BIPOC youth with disabilities merit additional attention from CILs to ensure successful transitions to adulthood.

Despite these challenges, many CILs have established strategies and interagency collaborations to better serve OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds, including partnerships with state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies (Wehmeyer & Gragoudas, 2004). According to a 2020 survey with CIL directors, all 218 CILs surveyed reported serving OSY consumers. Although they represent a small share of many CILs' consumers, overall, the share of OSY among CILs' consumers is larger than the share of OSY among people with disabilities in the general population (Feldman et al., 2022). In the same 2020 survey, 21 percent of CILs reported that at least 50 percent of their OSY belonged to racial or ethnic minority groups (Feldman et al., 2022).

Even with these existing data, more research is needed to better understand how CILs collaborate at the state and local levels to serve BIPOC OSY with disabilities. To address gaps in knowledge, the Minority Youth and Centers for Independent Living (MY-CIL) project, funded by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), produces and shares knowledge that empowers CILs to improve outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities who have minority backgrounds and have completed or otherwise left secondary education.² As part of the MY-CIL project, this article identifies promising practices and lessons that CILs employ to collaborate with organizations and better serve youth and families from underserved minority populations. The research team interviewed staff from seven CILs that serve large populations of minority OSY about their state and local outreach, as well as their collaborations to coordinate outreach and plan services for minority OSY. The team sought to answer the following research question: How do CILs form interagency collaborations to address the needs of BIPOC OSY with disabilities? The remainder of the paper summarizes methods, key findings, and implications for CIL practice.

Methods and Data Sources

Participants

Seven representatives, each from a unique CIL, consented and participated in the interviews. The research team used data from a 2020 MY-CIL survey to identify 20 CILs that serve a relatively high proportion of out-of-school youth (e.g., 50 percent or more) who identify as belonging to a racial or ethnic minority group (Feldman et al., 2022), then refined this list ($n = 10$) of CILs to meet IRB requirements. The team purposively selected CILs to ensure racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity in the sample, then requested input on CIL participant recommendations from the MY-CIL executive committee, which includes CIL directors, individuals with disabilities, and national experts on disability and racial equity. The executive committee concurred with the selection and provided additional information about the strengths of the selected CILs in their service delivery for BIPOC OSY with disabilities. Among the 10 CILs contacted, seven agreed to participate in this research study. Most interview respondents were CIL directors or youth program coordinators, and all respondents were familiar with their CIL's outreach and collaboration activities for transition-age youth. The team provided anonymity to all CIL respondents to encourage open communication and participation and did not identify the names of the CILs in this study.

Procedures

The research team conducted semi-structured phone interviews with CIL staff to understand their services, collaborations, and practices for OSY and those from minority backgrounds. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each. The team developed a semi-structured interview protocol that included questions on CIL outreach, engagement, collaboration with state or local organizations, programming for youth, and service delivery experiences (see Appendix A). The research team requested and received input on the interview guide from the MY-CIL stakeholder advisory group and executive committee and made recommended revisions, primarily to pose questions about CIL collaborations with minority-serving agencies. The team subsequently revised the interview guide to address their suggestions. Before the interview, interviewers provided each respondent with a consent form and reviewed and confirmed consent before collecting data. Using the WebEx virtual platform, one interviewer asked the protocol questions to conduct the interview, and a second interviewer recorded the interview and took notes. Interviewers used probes to draw out respondents' observations and elucidate

² MY-CIL is a collaborative effort of Hunter College; the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York; Independent Living Research Utilization; and Mathematica. The Administration for Community Living's National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research and the Office of Independent Living Programs funded MY-CIL to improve outcomes for OSY and young adults (ages 14 to 24) with disabilities.

their experiences in interviews that were recorded and scheduled at the key informants' convenience. The Hunter College Institutional Review Board approved all protocols and consent forms.

Analysis

The research team reviewed automatically generated transcripts from the WebEx platform and interviewer notes. Experienced research team members engaged in an iterative coding process. During and after each interview, team members wrote detailed field notes in a template with a priori categories determined by the research and protocol questions that guided the interviews. In the first cycle of coding, researchers listened to interview recordings and read through transcripts and field notes, taking their own notes and meeting regularly to discuss emerging themes. Through this iterative process, the team developed additional codes related to the functions of organizational partnerships and facilitators and barriers that influenced development and sustainment of the partnerships (Saldaña, 2009).

Once codes were finalized, team members engaged in a second round of coding and analyzing field notes and transcripts. Interviewers and research staff then created analytic summaries to describe findings across topics of interest based on outreach, engagement, collaboration, programming, and service delivery. Senior research team members compared and discussed the coding and thematic analysis to reach a consensus on the findings. The second author (Martin) reviewed the summaries for completion and accuracy. The research team used themes and findings to address the evaluation questions in this formative report and conducted member checks with two of the CILs for input on the accuracy of the findings.

Findings

Functions of Organizational Partnerships to Serve Youth With Disabilities

CIL staff described collaborating with various organizations to reach youth with disabilities through referrals and to fill gaps in service provision. Specifically, respondents discussed collaborating with VR agencies, schools, colleges, and other community organizations to deliver services for youth with disabilities. Though collaborations did not explicitly focus on BIPOC OSY with disabilities, many of the partnerships reached this population. See [Table 1](#) for more information on each type of collaboration.

Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies

All CIL respondents said they partner or collaborate with their state VR agencies to address the needs of their clients, including BIPOC OSY. In particular, these collaborations are key for making and receiving consumer referrals, filling gaps in service provision for youth with disabilities, and fostering interagency knowledge exchange.

Bi-Directional Referrals

Most respondents discussed the importance of CIL-VR partnerships to reach and establish strong relationships with youth with disabilities through reciprocal referrals. For example, one CIL director estimated that transition-age youth make up half of their referrals from VR agencies (the other half being adults). A few respondents described efforts to partner with VR agencies or establish formal CIL-VR liaison relationships to engage OSY with CILs. CIL respondents noted that having a liaison relationship with a VR agency can help build relationships with youth consumers because VR counselors are a familiar and trusted point of contact for youth and their families.

CIL-VR bidirectional referrals help fill gaps in youth services, including follow-up support for both CILs and VR agencies. Respondents noted that VR agencies help CIL-referred clients open new VR cases for those ready to transition directly into employment, which fosters independence and provides consumers with options. On the other hand, CILs can offer independent living services to youth that the VR agency and other VR partners do not typically provide, such as benefits counseling, housing assistance, assistive technology, or self-advocacy. "The beauty of the collaboration we have [with VR] is when we receive the referral for these individuals that are out of secondary education, we can attach the independent living services," said one CIL director. "We can throw every resource we have as a CIL in combination with [the VR agency] finding the employment services." CILs can also work with VR agencies to co-monitor the transition from high school to adult life. For example, one respondent said their CIL reaches out to youth before they leave high school and continues to work with them when they exit. "I think that's the most fulfilling component of (CIL-VR) collaborations," a respondent said. "The VR partnership serves those ready to transition directly into employment with minimal pre-employment work."

Networking and Interagency Knowledge Exchange

A few CIL respondents described efforts to foster interagency knowledge exchange, such as attending internal VR meetings to educate staff on the CIL's services and supports to which VR counselors can refer youth. Another CIL got involved with VR orientation sessions to reach youth who needed services. "We were there on a weekly basis doing orientations [and] we specifically wanted to focus on youth," said the respondent. The orientations helped with "getting people's information and then linking them up with services at our center."

Secondary Schools and Postsecondary Education

Almost all CILs reported partnering with secondary schools and postsecondary institutions to create programs and referral pathways for transition-age youth with disabilities.

Table 1. Functions of CIL Collaborations to Address the Needs of Youth With Disabilities

	Number of CILs with the partnership (n = 7)	Bi-directional referrals	One-way referrals	Networking and interagency knowledge exchange	Creating programs for youth with disabilities	Connecting youth to volunteering, employment, and mentoring opportunities	Supporting partner initiatives
Vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency	7	X		X			
Community-based and local non-profit organizations	7	X			X	X	
Secondary schools and postsecondary education	6		X		X		
Other state and local government agencies	6		X				X
National and statewide disability organizations	5		X	X		X	
Employers	3					X	

Creating Programs for Youth With Disabilities

CILs reported working with schools to develop transition services programs to deliver case management, self-advocacy, and pre-employment services. Student-focused programs included summer workshops for secondary school students interested in college, as well as efforts to connect students to volunteer and work-based learning experiences. One CIL worked with community colleges that serve large populations of BIPOC students to create academic programs for transition-age youth with disabilities. Youth in the program earned associate degrees and certifications in subjects such as engineering design and graphic design.

One-Way Referrals

A few respondents engaged with school staff, such as special education teachers, principals, and social workers, to keep them up to date on CIL programs and offerings. In doing so, CILs ensure school staff know CIL services and can refer students directly to the CIL.

National and Statewide Disability Organizations

Many CIL respondents discussed partnering with national disability-focused organizations and statewide groups that provide disability services to build organizational capacity and provide bidirectional referrals to services and opportunities for their joint clients. National disability-focused organizational partners included the Independent Living Research Utilization, the National Federation for the Blind, and the National Disability Mentoring Coalition. Examples of state and regional provider groups included state independent living councils, regional centers (which coordinate services and supports for people with in-

tellectual and developmental disabilities), and other service provider groups (which gather providers that serve youth with disabilities in a particular region).

Networking and Interagency Knowledge Exchange

Through national conferences and networking opportunities, national disability-focused organizations guide CILs on promising practices to better reach and provide services to youth with disabilities. CILs also learn from and share best practices for programming and operations through regular meetings with state and regional groups that provide disability services.

Connecting Youth to Opportunities and One-Way Referrals

National and statewide disability organizations and provider groups connect CIL clients to conferences, mentors, training, and peer group opportunities. CILs also described receiving referrals for transition-age youth from minority backgrounds from other service providers in these groups to receive the CILs' employment services and join peer support groups and workshops. "I think mainly it is really networking and reminding people [of our services]," said one CIL respondent. "I take every opportunity that I can...to say, 'Hey, here's what we've got going on. This is what's coming up next.'"

Community-based and Local Nonprofit Organizations

CILs discussed partnerships of varying intensity with community-based organizations and local nonprofits to collaborate on programming, share referrals, and offer vol-

unteering opportunities for their clients, including youth with disabilities. Overall, respondents discussed the importance of collaborating with local organizations with specialized expertise to supplement CILs' broad set of services and mandate to support people with disabilities across their lifespans. "If you were looking at us [as a CIL], you'd see a whole collage of all these different services, resources, technical support, networking, wherever we can get it from to meet the goal of the individual," said one CIL respondent.

Creating Programs for Youth With Disabilities

CILs described their experiences working with community-based organizations and local nonprofits to co-create programming for youth with disabilities. For example, one CIL teaches Literacy Zone classes, a grant-funded program, at nonprofit organizations and college campuses for people who did not receive their high school diplomas. Another CIL receives funding from a local corporate foundation to run a summer program to support career readiness for OSY. The foundation also hosts tours of the company and provides supplies for CIL events. Other CILs bring in scientists from local employers to support science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programming or work with civic organizations to teach CIL participants about the democratic process and voting.

Bidirectional Referrals

To increase their reach, CILs can also create bidirectional referral relationships with local organizations that serve different populations. For example, one CIL has a bidirectional referral relationship with an anti-poverty organization that provides food, clothing, case management, and medical services to people with low income. "If [community-based organizations] have any clients who can benefit from our services, we become a community resource for them as well," said one CIL respondent. "They refer clients to us, and we can help [clients] in any way possible." Another respondent shared;

Collaborating with organizations with a targeted focus is helpful because the outside orgs can bring that expertise and information to the table to broaden the opportunity for the individual that has started with us. There's no way that we can be all things to all people. Without these tentacles...No matter how big or small they may be, as big as the National Federation [is] or as small as the local Food Angels group [is], they have a more common point [with consumers] to tap into.

Connecting Youth to Volunteering and Employment Opportunities

Local organizations can offer volunteering opportunities and work site tours for CIL clients to build experience for future employment. "[Volunteering opportunities] allow our clients to...see what other resources are available out in the community, and [they] give them some job opportunities," said one CIL respondent. "When you're out volun-

teering, if you do a great job, if there's a job opening, sometimes they'll look internally to their volunteers."

Other State and Local Government Agencies

CILs build authentic connections with communities by partnering with other state and local government agencies to refer, connect with, and create opportunities for youth with disabilities. Partners included developmental disability agencies, police liaisons, state and local departments for public health, social and health services, and county and city governments.

One-Way Referrals

CILs created referral relationships with other state and local government agencies, including police liaisons to connect with justice-involved individuals, the state department of social and health services, and county and city governments. Staff from three CILs described developmental disability agencies as important collaborators. The nature of collaborations differed, from personal relationships with the staff from these agencies to formal vendor agreements, but all CILs that worked with developmental disability agencies focused on referrals for services, which included referrals of OSY with disabilities.

Supporting Partner Initiatives

CILs worked with state and local partners to support initiatives that are important to their communities, including partnering with the public health department to facilitate COVID-19 vaccination and outreach efforts for underserved populations and state emergency preparedness organizations and agencies to reunify children with families in emergencies.

Employers

A few CILs work with local employers, including government agencies, nonprofit organizations, grocery stores, hospitals, and local and minority-owned businesses.

Connecting Youth to Employment Opportunities

CILs worked with local employers, especially those known to hire and promote people with disabilities, to conduct field trips, organize job fairs, and expose participants to different options for their future. One CIL works with Black-owned small businesses in the community to conduct presentations and trainings so that youth in their service area feel represented.

Facilitators and Barriers to Forming and Sustaining Interagency Collaborations

When discussing interagency collaborations, CIL staff shared facilitators of and barriers to initiating and sustaining partnerships. Successful strategies included proactively reaching out; deepening and leveraging existing partnerships to build new collaborations; and investing time, staff,

and resources in building deep relationships with other organizations. Barriers included lack of partner follow-through and dysfunctional or ineffective business practices.

Proactive Outreach to Form Relationships

Some CIL respondents described proactive efforts to form relationships, especially with VR agencies and schools, to reach more youth with disabilities. One CIL respondent said, “The initial outreach, the initial relationship came from us, reaching out to [the VR agency]. I’m thinking that would be a good source of youth with disabilities that we were missing in our organization.” Another respondent described making the first step to partner with their VR agency by “getting up in front of their face all the time” to facilitate vendor approval and finalize fee-for-service contracts. One CIL reached out to a local school system to offer CIL services to students and now attends meetings with the system’s office of diverse learners.

Deepening and Leveraging Existing Partnerships

Many CILs deepened existing partnerships to serve youth with disabilities. CIL–VR partnerships grew out of the Social Security Administration’s Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (1999), which allowed options for assistance to those with disabilities, such as CIL services, other than merely relying on the state VR agency. Since Ticket to Work began, CILs, employment networks, Work Incentives Planning and Assistance providers, and Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security began providing services to Social Security beneficiaries. Many CIL respondents described growing their VR relationships from these existing programs.

CIL respondents also leveraged existing partnerships to gain access to new partners and opportunities. For example, VR agencies might have deeper relationships with schools and can connect CILs to those partners through joint grant applications or introductions. If CILs had successful outcomes from collaborations or programs, they broadcast that success to win over new partners. For example, after building a successful STEM program with secondary school students and broadcasting that success in the media, a local community college reached out to the CIL to build a new program for youth with disabilities to earn certificates. Other CILs used similar methods to secure new funding for an existing program and built relationships with the school system by word of mouth among school staff.

Ongoing Communication With Partners

CIL respondents discussed lack of partner follow-through and the importance of maintaining ongoing communication with partners. Two CILs shared that though they partnered with VR agencies, they did not receive many referrals from them. “The most frustrating part is not getting as many referrals and not helping as many youth as we know we can,” said one CIL director. CILs prioritized partnerships by involving the executive director and other staff,

including youth or employment directors, marketing specialists, or a combination of staff, to help develop partnerships. “It’s being able to communicate what our needs are and listen to what [our partners’] needs are and be understanding and be kind,” she said, about the CIL’s successful relationship with a school system. Another respondent shared, “If you don’t [keep in ongoing communication], a couple of months go by and [partners] forget you. Keeping those partnerships and collaborations ongoing is really important.”

Interoperability of Business Processes and Systems

CIL staff shared that dysfunctional or inefficient business processes and systems limit the effectiveness of their collaboration. In particular, the use of paper-based case materials and incompatible technology and invoicing systems slow down partnership activities. One CIL noted that their VR agency requires consumers to print or drop off paperwork, often without language translation, which poses a significant barrier for the CIL’s Spanish-speaking clients. Clients also often lack access to printers, computers, and internet, which limits their capability to complete and submit required paperwork.

Establishing Sustainable Funding Structures

Many CILs used a combination of federal and state CIL-specific funding, along with funded partnerships, to expand their capacity and service offerings for youth with disabilities. Most CILs said they were funded as VR vendors to provide independent living services, and two of these CILs specified use of fee-for-service contracts. A few CILs also shared that they used their VR funding to expand service offerings for out-of-school youth. For example, though one CIL’s VR contract only pays for services provided to students who are in school, the payments contribute to overhead funding that allows OSY to attend the same summer workshops and receive other services. For partnerships with community-based organizations, a few CIL respondents shared that partners funded CIL participation. One CIL director advised other CILs to use funding from the Administration of Community Living (ACL), which allows significant flexibility in defining services to provide transition-age youth, to implement new programs to fulfill clients’ needs. Though the ACL defines the population that must be served through its funding, it does not define how CILs serve them. “The sky’s the limit,” the CIL director said. “Look beyond the entitlements. Look at ways in which people with disabilities can create more for themselves.” If the program is successful, he added, the next step is to find a more sustainable funding source from other partners.

Discussion

CILs that served large populations of BIPOC OSY with disabilities formed partnerships with a variety of organizations to better serve the needs of youth with disabilities. Although partnerships served BIPOC OSY, they did not focus on this population. Common partners included VR agen-

cies; secondary schools; statewide or regional provider groups; developmental disability agencies; community-based organizations; and other local, state, and national agencies and organizations. Most often, partnerships focused on providing bidirectional and one-way referrals, leveraging the strengths of each partner organization or agency to link youth to different types of services and supports. Other functions included connecting youth to external opportunities, including volunteering, employment, and peer group opportunities, creating programs for youth with disabilities, and providing networking and knowledge exchange between organizations.

All CIL staff described VR agencies as primary collaborators. CIL–VR partnerships provided bidirectional referrals to fill gaps in services and fostered information exchange between agencies. Because of the organizations’ different but compatible philosophies—VR focuses heavily on employment, and CILs specialize in person-centered independent living services including employment (Flannery et al., 2002; Plotner & Walters, 2022)—the two partners can provide services to mutual clients based on their particular needs. CILs can then provide independent living services along a spectrum of goals that other VR vendors do not typically deliver.

Relationships with secondary schools and community colleges also helped CILs reach OSY. Through relationships with school systems and individual school administrators, special education teachers, and social workers, all CIL respondents reported receiving referrals of OSY who need support. Respondents also shared that they engage students in services before they leave school to help them transition to adult life. Existing research indicates that partnerships with schools might support better transition outcomes for youth with disabilities (Hasazi et al., 1999; Plotner & Walters, 2022). Furthermore, other studies support engaging students in transition-related programs and opportunities, such as vocational education classes, paid work experience, and transition planning before graduation, because they predict higher levels of employment or schooling after secondary school graduation (Benz et al., 1997, 2000; Plotner & Walters, 2022). Though a prior study demonstrated lacking cross-system coordination between CILs and secondary schools (Plotner et al., 2017), the CILs interviewed had strong relationships with schools. Specifically, one CIL worked closely with a school system’s office for students with special needs, which helped them connect with special education teachers and social workers at individual schools.

CILs collaborated with a variety of other organizations, including community-based organizations; employers; and other local, state, and national agencies and organizations, to connect youth with opportunities for growth and self-development. Other studies described individual types of interagency or interorganizational partnerships, including with local governments, colleges and universities, faith-based institutions, and developmental disability agencies, to improve independent living outcomes for people with disabilities (Lopez et al., 2009; Sheppard-Jones et al., 2018; Swanson, 2018), but this study provides an overview of

CIL partners and partnership functions at a higher level. CILs’ diverse partnerships indicate an ability to leverage the strengths of the organizations and agencies in their communities for the benefit of youth with disabilities, but they do not specifically address the needs of BIPOC OSY with disabilities. To fill this gap, CILs might collaborate with organizations for traditionally underserved minority groups, such as the NAACP, which could improve outreach and service delivery for BIPOC youth with disabilities in their service areas, or with juvenile justice organizations, which could facilitate services for justice-involved youth and OSY.

CIL staff discussed the importance of forming deeper relationships with partners to help develop programs. Some CIL respondents said they provide education on the types of services CILs offer to improve referral rates from partner organizations. To build closer relationships, CILs can also offer trainings or workshops to their partners that center CIL staff members’ lived experiences as people with disabilities and the supports they needed as young adults to transition to adult life. One CIL respondent shared that their VR agency counterparts did not respect CIL staff’s ability to act as employment network providers under the Social Security Administration’s Ticket to Work program because of their disabilities; this may point to a gap in training that CILs can help fill.

CILs also pointed to funding as an important facilitator in forming sustainable partnerships with other organizations and discussed fee-for-service arrangements for service provision in addition to using federal, state, and CIL-specific funding. To leverage available funds, CILs might use the relatively flexible Administration of Community Living funding to pilot new programs developed with partners and then search for more sustainable funding through fee-for-service arrangements with partners. In fact, CILs are encouraged to diversify their funding through self-sustaining programs (Holt et al., 2015).

Limitations

This study has three limitations. Although CIL respondents recalled information about collaboration and services for BIPOC OSY, they did not systematically share data about the number of BIPOC OSY served with each collaboration. Because of the study design, the research team did not gather data from non-CIL organizations about their experiences with CILs. In addition, this study and data collection was limited to seven CILs that serve large numbers of BIPOC OSY. As such, study results might not be broadly generalizable or representative of all CILs. Instead, this study might provide insight on promising practices for serving this population from the perspective of CILs that often serve BIPOC OSY with disabilities.

Implications for Practice and Directions for Future Research

CILs that seek to improve service delivery for BIPOC OSY with disabilities might benefit from analyzing the functions of existing relationships with partners in their communities and then exploring ways to create new relationships

or deepen existing ones. CILs can conduct network analysis mapping of existing and potential partners, especially with organizations that primarily serve minority populations, to assess how well-connected they are within the community and identify opportunities for further engagement. CILs can also form partnerships that specifically serve BIPOC OSY as a population of interest. To form effective partnerships, CILs can devote staff, time, and resources to cultivating deep relationships and deepen or leverage existing relationships to gain access to new opportunities and partners. CILs can also complete bidirectional referrals to increase the number of youth served, fill gaps in services, foster the exchange of information and best practices, and provide youth with opportunities for growth and self-development. CILs may benefit from partnering with organizations that

already serve BIPOC OSY in their service area or by consulting these youth to understand their needs and collaborating with organizations with expertise in fulfilling those needs. Future research should examine employment or IL outcomes for youth and young adults after participating in joint VR-CIL programs and services, and identify which services provided through collaborations are most impactful for transition. Researchers might also study the structure of collaborations to examine the types of agreements, including memorandums of understanding, that are most conducive to providing joint services that impact transition outcomes.

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Supplementary Materials

Appendix A

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