Living Well Cross-Site Evaluation
Volume IV: Methodology

Access the full annual report and other evaluation materials here.

Volume IV: Methodology

Evaluation Overview

The Administration on Disabilities (AoD), through the Administration for Community Living's (ACL) Office of Performance and Evaluation (OPE), awarded an evaluation contract to New Editions Consulting, which subcontracted with The Lewin Group (Lewin). In 2017-2018, New Editions gathered data from states in Cohort One (Georgia, New Hampshire, and Virginia) and documented their Living Well models to inform the evaluation design. Lewin initiated the evaluation in the fall of 2018 and completed its third year of data collection in the fall of 2021. The purpose of this cross-site evaluation is to determine:

- How the Living Well grants are being implemented across grantee sites;
- Whether Living Well grantees are meeting the goals of the project; and
- Whether the models implemented across the sites impact the quality of life of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

Each grantee designed at least one integrated model of Community Monitoring and Community Capacity Building to enhance the independence, integration, health, and safety of individuals living in the community. Each model addresses eight Key Features specified in the funding opportunity announcement for Living Well grants (refer to Exhibit 1).

> **Exhibit 1. Eight Key Features of Living Well Models**
>
> 1. Partnerships
> 2. Meaningful and active engagement with self-advocates and families
> 3. Evidence based practices for service improvements
> 4. Building capacity of DSPs and HCBS providers
> 5. Reducing abuse and neglect through community monitoring
> 6. Addressing health and safety with data tools
> 7. Program and outcome evaluation
> 8. Sustainability

Project Objectives

Grantees are implementing model approaches of a coordinated and comprehensive system that include two interrelated core components for enhancing and assuring the independence, integration, safety, health, and well-being of individuals living in the community: (1) Community Monitoring, and (2) Community Capacity Building. Each model[1] will work towards:

- Enhancing the health and safety of individuals by increasing their independence, social capital, self-determination, community integration, productivity, and participation.

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[1] Living Well-Model Approaches for Enhancing the Quality, Effectiveness and Monitoring of Home and Community Based Services for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities; HHS-2017-ACL-AOD-DNIQ-0221. https://acl.gov/grants/living-well-model-approaches-enhancing-quality-effectiveness-and-monitoring-home-and-1

- Strengthening the knowledge, skills, specialization, economic/career prospects, workforce stability, retention, and advancement of direct support professionals.

- Incentivizing the effective adoption and use of evidence based and/or promising practices related to supported-decision making, person-centered thinking, competitive integrated employment, and similar strategies.

- Strengthening and elevating the leadership roles that self-advocacy organizations, Centers for Independent Living, and other peer support networks, in collaboration with families and others, must play in improving and assuring the quality of home and community-based services (HCBS).

- Enhancing the effectiveness and coordination of efforts by the state, the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) network and others to anticipate, avoid, investigate, reduce and remediate abuse, neglect and other rights violations in the HCBS service delivery system for people with developmental disabilities.

- Increasing the capacity of states to effectively implement the HCBS settings rules by providing such services in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities of all ages.

Evaluation Questions

A set of questions guide the cross-site evaluation (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Living Well Cross-Site Evaluation Questions

Focus	Evaluation Questions
Quality and Effectiveness	1. What are the performance measures for determining how the models contribute to improving the quality of life of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD)? 2. How effective are each of the approaches to Living Well? 3. What is the best approach for AoD's future work in this area?
Scalability and Replicability	1. Are the models scalable nationally and/or replicable in other states? 2. Is the grantee model at the right level of scale to test the model? Are there elements missing? 3. What demographic factors impact or are a factor in the ability to scale the Living Well models? 4. What is core to the model, or can parts of the model be scaled? Is the whole model needed to be effective? 5. What changes to policy and practice in the service delivery systems are needed to replicate the Living Well model?
Sustainability	1. Are these models sustainable? 2. What features are necessary to sustain the projects? 3. How do systems need to change and/or what systems must be in place in order to implement one of the models being tested under the Living Well Grant Program?

Data Collection and Analysis

During the 2020-2021 evaluation year, Lewin collected qualitative, quantitative, and observational data through interviews, virtual stakeholder meetings, and semi-annual reports submitted by grantees to ACL in the spring of 2021. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lewin modified its data collection approach by collecting all data virtually and using

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grantees' semi-annual reports to inform data collection efforts to reduce reporting burden on grantees. A standard guide was developed for all grantee interviews conducted in the spring of 2021. Data collection tools are available in **Appendices A, B, C, and D.**

Lewin met bi-weekly with ACL and quarterly the Mission Analytics Group technical assistance (TA) team to coordinate and streamline activities, where possible. For example, the evaluation and TA teams jointly participated in the initial planning interviews and shared materials (e.g., meeting and interview notes) with each other. The evaluation uses a participatory approach, in which grantees provide recommendations on grant meetings or activities for observation, the structure and content of grantee profiles documenting grantee's progress, and the overall evaluation approach. Lewin adapted materials and processes in response to grantee feedback.

Initial Planning Interviews. Lewin held one-hour, semi-structured interviews with each grantee's project team and one member of the Mission Analytics Group TA team. ACL staff participated as observers in a sample of the interviews. Interview questions focused on planned activities during the 2020-2021 grant year, including any changes to grant objectives, key contextual factors influencing grant implementation, and requests for TA. Lewin recorded each interview, took notes, and used the data to plan subsequent evaluation activities.

Semi-Annual Report. Grantees submit reports to ACL semi-annually documenting their progress toward grant goals and objectives, challenges encountered, and planned activities. Lewin compared its data collection tool for the grant leadership interview with each semi-annual report and removed any duplicate questions from the data collection tool. Lewin then extracted grantees' responses from their semi-annual reports and analyzed the responses to ensure the data thoroughly addressed questions removed from the data collection tools. Lewin documented any gaps and added grantee-specific questions to interview guides to collect missing data.

Virtual Stakeholder Meetings. In lieu of in-person site visits, Lewin virtually participated in stakeholder meetings with each grantee. These varied events, including workgroup meetings, trainings, planning sessions, and stakeholder meetings, ranged in length from 90 minutes to multiple days. Lewin documented observations in notes for each stakeholder meeting and provided notes to ACL and Mission Analytics Group.

Key Informant Interviews. The Lewin evaluation team conducted a series of 60-minute key informant interviews to characterize each grantee's model and identify components or approaches that may be leading to success. The interviews were held with each grantee's project leadership (e.g., project director/principal investigator, project manager/coordinator, evaluator). The interview focused on grant process, structure, roles, and contextual factors affecting grant implementation and progress.
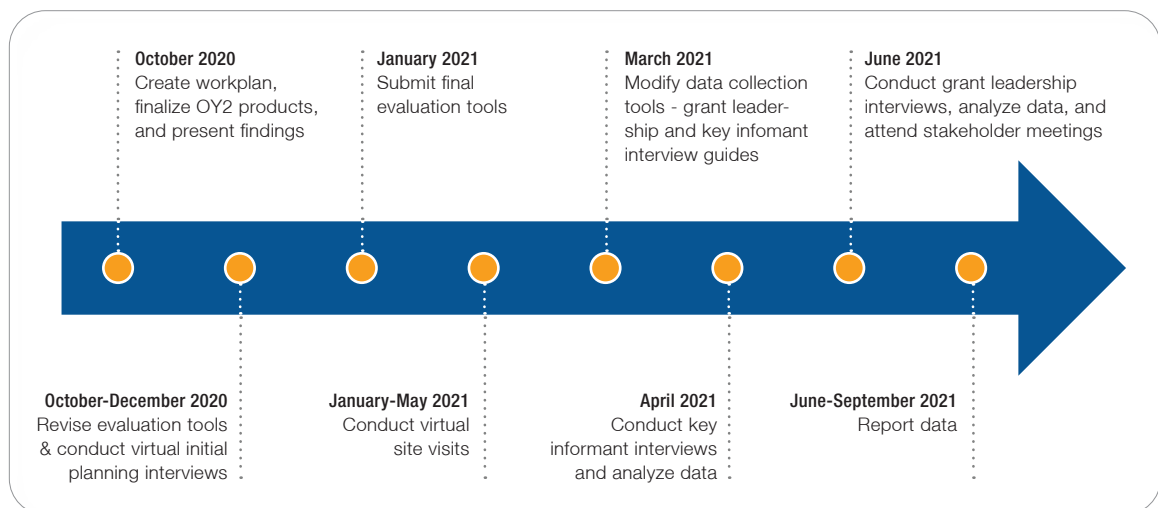
Grant Leadership Interviews. As the final data collection activity in this evaluation cycle, Lewin conducted a 60-minute interview with members of each grantee's leadership team. The interview focused on progress toward grant objectives, accomplishments to date, challenges or contextual factors influencing grant implementation, and specific areas of interest identified through analysis of grantee's semi-annual reports.

Lewin coded qualitative data from semi-annual reports, key informant interviews, and grant leadership interviews using the ATLAS.ti software. This allowed the team to triangulate information for the identified themes. Evaluators first categorized data using the two core components required for each grantee's model (Community Monitoring and Community Capacity Building), then applied a set of pre-determined codes based on the eight Key Features of Living Well models. To ensure inter-rater reliability, evaluators double-coded a sample of the findings and resolved disagreements through discussion. Once discordance was resolved, emergent themes were identified. Lewin provided grantees an opportunity to share written and verbal feedback on draft annual findings in August 2021.

Timeline

Lewin initiated year two of the evaluation in October 2020, building on activities that occurred during years one and two of the evaluation. **Exhibit 3** provides a timeline of the year two evaluation activities.

Exhibit 3. Timeline of Evaluation Activities 2020-2021

October 2020
Create workplan, finalize OY2 products, and present findings

January 2021
Submit final evaluation tools

March 2021
Modify data collection tools - grant leadership and key infomant interview guides

June 2021
Conduct grant leadership interviews, analyze data, and attend stakeholder meetings

October-December 2020
Revise evaluation tools & conduct virtual initial planning interviews

January-May 2021
Conduct virtual site visits

April 2021
Conduct key informant interviews and analyze data

June-September 2021
Report data

Appendix A: Initial Planning Interview Guide

The initial planning interview opens the data collection period for the third year of the Living Well cross-site evaluation. The interview will provide an opportunity for each grantee to highlight key activities planned for the 2020-2021 evaluation year and discuss upcoming meetings and events. Grantees will also have an opportunity to ask questions about the evaluation.

At least two members of the evaluation team will participate in each interview. One member of the TA team will be invited to attend. One evaluation team member will conduct the interview, and one member will take notes. With the grantee's permission, the team will record the interview. Prior to the interview, the team will review each grantee's most recent semi-annual report. Grantees should ensure that they have reviewed the final report from the 2019-2020 evaluation year. The interviewer will conduct a semi-structured interview using each of the following guiding questions and supplementing with optional prompts, as needed, based on the information available from the grantee's semi-annual report.

Opening:

Introduce yourself and the note taker briefly with your names and reiterate role on the project. Ask for or state the name(s) and job title(s)/role(s) of the interviewee(s) in the Living Well demonstration for the recording.

Thank you for your meeting with us today. We're excited to hear about the high-level developments in your work and plans to support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in Living Well.

As a reminder, we've asked to record this interview to ensure fidelity in the event that we need to clarify sections of our notes. Do we have your permission to record this interview? (Wait for them to confirm). Thank you.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

1. How are things going for your team?
    a. **Prompt:** Are there any new contextual factors that you expect to affect your work this evaluation year (e.g., state policy, state budget, engagement of key stakeholders, pandemic response)?
    b. **Prompt:** Do you have any major updates to your Living Well grant team or approach since the semi-annual report? Any staffing changes?

2. What are your priorities for this year related to **Community Monitoring**? We expect this to help us focus our evaluation efforts throughout the course of the year.
    a. Prompt: From our Final Report in 2019-2020, we identified:
        i. **(Activity 1 from 2019-2020 Grantee profile)**
        ii. **(Activity 2 from 2019-2020 Grantee profile)**

b. **Prompt:** Do you plan to continue with next steps on these activities this evaluation year? Are any of the activities completed? Are you planning to begin any new key activities related to Community Monitoring this evaluation year?

c. **Prompt:** Are there any key activities that you have decided to no longer pursue?

3. What are your priorities for this year related to Community Capacity Building?

a. **Prompt:** From our Final Report in 2019-2020, we identified:

i. **(Activity 1 from 2019-2020 Grantee profile)**

ii. **(Activity 2 from 2019-2020 Grantee profile)**

iii. (**Activity 3 from 2019-2020 Grantee profile)**

b. **Prompt:** Do you plan to continue with next steps on these activities this evaluation year? Are any of the activities completed? Are you planning to begin any new key activities related to Community Capacity Building this evaluation year?

c. **Prompt:** Are there any key activities that you have decided to no longer pursue?

4. Thanks for sharing those details with us. Now we'd like to talk about our evaluation plans for the year as well as give you a chance to share any administrative details or plans you may already have set.

a. We plan to collect data from the semi-annual reports again and follow-up on this data collection through grant leadership interviews during the first half of June. We would also like to continue attending stakeholder meetings and/or conduct key informant interviews (insert more details of data collection after meeting with ACL).

b. If you know the details of any Living Well events for the upcoming year, we would love to hear about them, especially anything upcoming in January. Otherwise, we will be reaching out in January to learn more about your planned events and meetings.

5. Thank you for providing all of this information. Before we wrap up, do you have any questions for the cross-site evaluation team at Lewin?

a. **Prompt:** Do you have any questions about Lewin's evaluation structure for the year?

b. **Prompt:** Is there anything else that you think we should know?

Closing

Thank you for your time today. If you have any other thoughts, questions, or ideas after today's call, please do not hesitate to reach out to either team by phone or email. If you need contact information, we can provide that now.

Appendix B: Key Informant Interview Guide

Introduce yourself and the note taker briefly with your names and roles on the project. Ask for or state the name(s) and job title(s)/role(s) of the interviewee(s) in the Living Well demonstration for the recording.

Thank you for meeting with us today. As you know, the purpose of the Living Well grants is to increase community integration and independence of individuals with DD and improve HCBS by developing and testing one or more model approaches of a coordinated and comprehensive system. These model approaches include two interrelated core components: Community Monitoring and Community Capacity Building. Our interview today will focus on these model approaches. When we use the term "model" throughout this interview, we are focusing on the following domains, which are adapted from Wendy Hirsch's Change Implementation Framework:[2] Structure, Process, Roles, and Context. Using these interconnected domains will help us to understand your model as a whole. We would like to understand how each of these has evolved and grown throughout the duration of the grant. In order to do that, we'd like you to think about the evolution of your model from when you were first applying for the Living Well grant to the present.

We recognize that some of the topics discussed today may be sensitive or could have political implications. We ask that you try to answer our questions honestly, and we will not identify information that could identify particular grantees or stakeholders when discussing sensitive issues. As always, you will have a chance to review any part of the report that contains information about your grant project before it is released publicly.

As a reminder, we've asked to record this interview to ensure fidelity in the event that we need to clarify sections of our notes. Do we have your permission to record this interview? (Wait for them to confirm). Thank you.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Topic 1: Process
Planning
1. How did you plan and prepare prior to beginning to implement your grant model? This includes writing your application and initial planning once you have received the grant. Note: While each grant activity/initiative may have its own implementation timeline, these questions focus on the holistic grant implementation.

    a. In what ways is your planning and preparation facilitating the implementation of your grant?

    b. Did you have time to adequately prepare? Please describe any barriers or challenges related to implementation for which you could not prepare.

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[1] https://wendyhirsch.com/implementation-framework#:~:text=%EF%BB%BFChange%20Implementation%20Framework,an%20art%20and%20a%20science

Implementing

2. How would you describe your implementation process so far (e.g., more linear, more circular)?

    a. Have you made adjustments to your process as you have evaluated your progress?

    b. How do you identify process improvements to be made?

    c. Describe what, if any, quality assurance measures do you have in place that allow you to incorporate changes to your model?

Topic 2: Structure

Planning

3. How did you initially interpret the term 'model approaches' as it is used in the FOA?

    a. How did your interpretation of the term model approaches impact the structure of your project?

4. Beyond your interpretation of the term model approaches, what else impacted your project structure (e.g., prior grant experience, existing stakeholder group)?

Implementing

5. In what ways has your project structure evolved in response to changing goals or objectives?

6. In what ways does your grant structure (e.g., organization of workgroups, cadence of meetings, team communication) facilitate or support progress toward your project goals?

7. In what ways does your grant model or structure pose challenges or barriers to progress toward you project goals?

Topic 3: Roles

Planning

8. As you designed your model approaches to this grant, in what ways did you envision stakeholders contributing to the success of your model? What roles did you envision stakeholders playing?

Implementing

9. How would you characterize the roles of those responsible for leading and implementing your grant?

    a. Do roles tend to be clearly defined and distinct? Are roles evolving?

    b. Does there tend to be a top-down or bottom-up approach to leadership?

10. Grantees are engaging stakeholders across various categories. How have the different roles played by these stakeholders contributed to the success of your grant?

    i. Self-advocates

    ii. Families

    iii. DSPs/provider staff

    iv. State staff

    v. Others

Topic 4: Context

11. How did you account for contextual factors that you thought may impact your project while designing your model? If so, which factors did you expect?

12. How has your understanding of internal/external contextual factors prepared you to adapt when faced with barriers or challenges?

    a. What took you by surprise?

13. How does your understanding of internal/external contextual factors make you uniquely equipped to carry out your grant activities?

    a. To what extent are you building on prior successes?

    b. How do past efforts come into play?

Wrap Up

Finally, we want to ask you to reflect on your overall experience developing your overall model under this grant.

14. Is there anything else you would want future grantees to know regarding model approaches?

    a. What advice about grant structure, process, roles, and/or context would you give a future grantee based on what you have learned through this process so far?

Appendix C: Grant Leadership Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us and for sharing your semi-annual report. The purpose of today's grant leadership interview is to learn more about the current status of your grant activities and your progress toward outcomes. While we spent the key informant interviews understanding how you have structured your model design as well as the planning and implementation behind your grant activities, today we will be focusing more on the content of your activities, how you are progressing toward grant outcomes, and we will be following up on some items that we have identified in the semi-annual report.

Before we begin, do we have your permission to record this interview? The recording will strictly be used for internal, note-taking purposes.

Standard Questions
These are questions that will be asked of all grantees.

1. As you consider the grant objectives for this project, what would you identify as your top achievement(s) for this past year? What resources, activities, contextual factors contributed to these achievements?

    a. How have you leveraged partnerships, including those with self-advocates and family members, in the last year to achieve progress toward grant objectives (As opposed to individual project goals)?

    Grant objectives:

    i. Enhancing the health and safety of individuals by increasing their independence, social capital, self-determination, community integration, productivity and participation.

    ii. Strengthening and rewarding the knowledge, skills, specialization, economic/career prospects and work force stability, retention and advancement of direct support professionals.

    iii. Incentivizing the effective adoption and use of evidence based or promising practices related to supported-decision making, person-centered thinking, competitive integrated employment and similar strategies.

    iv. Strengthening and elevating the leadership roles that self-advocacy organizations, Centers for Independent Living and other peer support networks, working together with families and others, must play in improving and assuring the quality of home and community based services.

    v. Enhancing the effectiveness and coordination of efforts by the state, the DD Act network and others to anticipate, avoid, investigate, reduce and remediate abuse, neglect and other rights violations in the HCBS service delivery system for people with developmental disabilities

2. Are there changes that need to occur in your state context or systems to successfully implement your grant?

3. What are some grant activities you anticipate doing differently moving forward as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., new issues gaining traction, shift in focus, continued use of virtual formats)?

   a. What have you learned through your COVID-19 response that you can apply in the future to support the health and safety of individuals with I/DD?

4. You noted in your semi-annual report the following activities related to **Community Capacity Building:**

   a. **(Activities from semi-annual report)**

      i. What are your goals in this area, and to what extent are you progressing toward your goals? What have been the facilitators and barriers around these efforts?

5. You noted in your semi-annual the following activities related to **Community Monitoring**:

   a. **(Activities from semi-annual report)**

   b. What are your goals in this area, and to what extent are you progressing toward your goals? What have been the facilitators and barriers around these efforts?

6. What outputs and outcomes is your evaluation measuring to determining whether your Living Well model contributes to improving the quality of life for individuals with I/DD?

   a. How are you using the findings from your evaluation to inform your project activities (e.g., refining interventions)?

7. Are there core elements of your Living Well model that must be present for it to be effectively scaled or replicated? Is the whole model needed to be effective or can parts of it be scaled or replicated?

8. Please describe any progress toward project sustainability in the last year. What key elements (either internal or external) are necessary to sustain your project?

Follow up to Semi Annual Report

These will be individualized questions crafted for each grantee based on the data they provided during the Semi-Annual Report. Any questions not thoroughly answered through the Semi-Annual Report will be discussed during the grant leadership interview.

9. **Question based on semi-annual report**

10. **Question based on semi-annual report**

11. **Question based on semi-annual report**

Appendix D: Performance Report Template

Recipients of discretionary grants from ACL must submit regular performance reports: A semi-annual report at the conclusion of each six-month reporting period and a final report, which takes the place of the last semi-annual report, at the conclusion of the grant. Grantees document their activities and accomplishments in the semi-annual report by providing a narrative response to the following questions:

1. What did you accomplish during this reporting period and how did these accomplishments help you reach your stated project goal(s) and objective(s)? Please note any significant project partners and their role in project activities.

2. What, if any, challenges did you face during this reporting period and what actions did you take to address these challenges? Please note in your response changes, if any, to your project goal(s), objective(s), or activities that were made as a result of challenges faced.

3. How have the activities conducted during this project period helped you to achieve the measurable outcomes identified in your project proposal?

4. What was produced during the reporting period and how have these products been disseminated? Products may include articles, issue briefs, fact sheets, newsletters, survey instruments, sponsored conferences and workshops, websites, audiovisuals, and other informational resources.