

Our Future Matters: Informing the Federal Interagency Strategy

National Online Dialogue and X Fireside Chats



Dialogue: July 24 – August 25, 2023

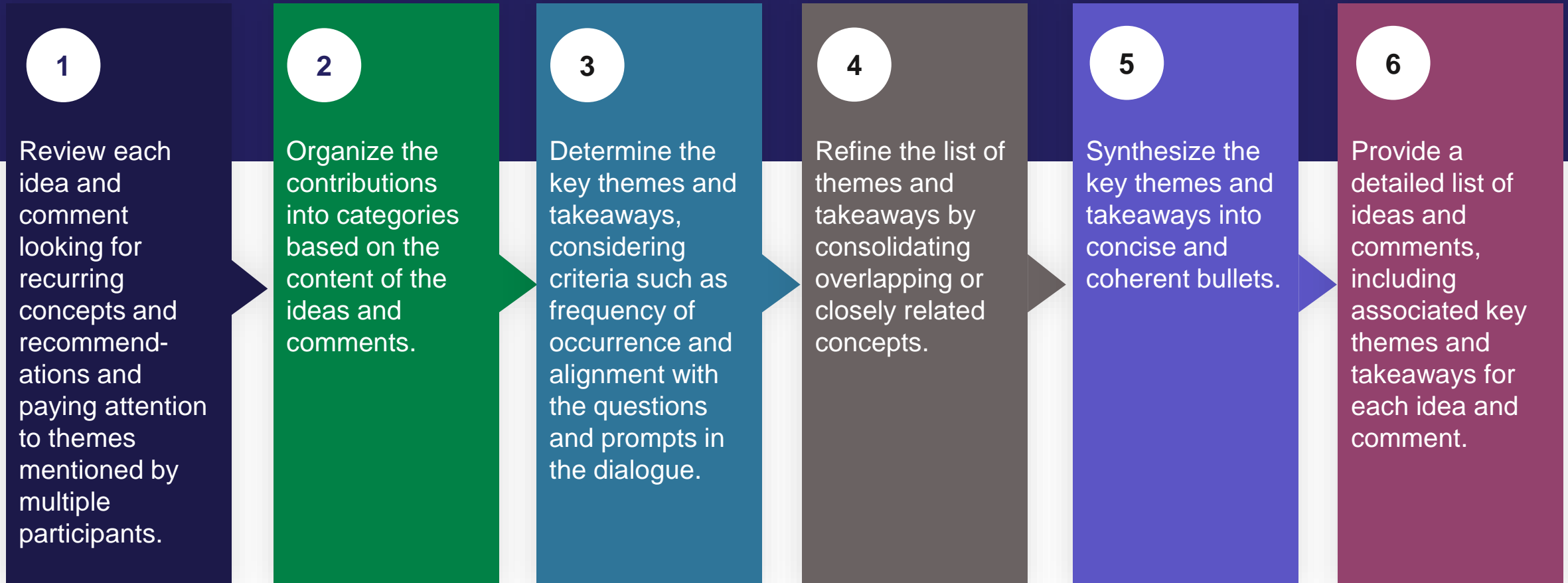
X Fireside Chats: August 17 and September 20, 2023

Dialogue Summary

From July 24 to August 25, 2023, and on September 20, 2023, the ePolicyWorks national online dialogue *Our Future Matters: Informing the Federal Interagency Strategy* gathered ideas from individual participants on ways to improve policies and practices that lead to a smooth transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities. The online event welcomed ideas and experiences from any interested stakeholder, including those with a personal or professional interest in supporting the aspirations of youth and young adults with disabilities to live, work, and thrive in their communities. This report summarizes key themes and takeaways gleaned by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy from the online dialogue, as well as two companion X Fireside Chats held on August 17 and September 20, 2023.

Dialogue Process

To identify key themes and takeaways from the online dialogue *Our Future Matters: Informing the Federal Interagency Strategy*, ePolicyWorks employed a standard crowdsourcing methodology. The process involved several steps:



Key Themes and Takeaways (1)



Consider changes and updates to Social Security

Ideas included raising Social Security Disability Insurance benefits to meet the federal poverty level; allowing in-kind support from family and friends without reducing Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments; increasing the SSI Student Earned Income Exclusion age limit to 25; streamlining the disability determination process across states; increasing resource limits and income exclusions; and reducing administrative burdens by conducting annual benefit reviews to prevent underpayments and overpayments.



Create and support opportunities for peer mentoring

Ideas included developing training, tools, and resources to build a workforce of peer mentors that includes youth with disabilities; developing group-based peer mentor summer training programs led by state youth leadership organizations; using national and state networks of advocacy agencies and resource centers to support peer mentoring; and creating leadership-focused peer mentoring programs for high school and college students with disabilities with the potential to advance into paid positions.

Key Themes and Takeaways (2)



Develop transition support for the specific needs of disabled youth in rural areas

Ideas included providing funding to Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to provide skill-building and paid job training for disabled youth; tailoring disability employment policies to account for differences between urban and rural areas, particularly in transportation, job availability, and wages; addressing health care shortages in rural areas by using mobile platforms; and partnering with colleges and universities to build medical capacity and create clinical training experiences.



Educate employers

Ideas included expanding community outreach to educate employers on building disability-inclusive workplaces; providing job coaches to support workers with disabilities; educating employers on the low-cost or no-cost nature of many workplace accommodations; fostering employers' understanding of diverse communication styles, such as those of autistic individuals; expanding vocational programs in high schools; and fostering career connections between school districts and local businesses.

Key Themes and Takeaways (3)



Encourage the Federal Government to serve as a model employer

Ideas included conducting a national outreach campaign to educate disability service providers about federal job opportunities nationwide, not just in Washington, D.C.; creating on-the-job training programs to help young adults with disabilities build expertise and transition successfully into federal roles; assigning a mentor to all new federal hires with disabilities; providing accommodations, such as flexible schedules, remote work options, and plain language standard operating procedures; and promoting individuals with disabilities into agency leadership roles.



Ensure higher education is accessible and inclusive of young adults with disabilities

Ideas included ensuring universities provide reasonable accommodations comparable to those in a student's high school Individualized Education Program (IEP); investing in and replicating successful university programs that train, educate, and employ students with disabilities; integrating workforce development into higher education to allow students to learn while earning money; increasing support and funding for neurodivergent students, including training and compensating student assistants or paraprofessionals; and offering wraparound services such as mental health care and educational support during the early years of postsecondary education to help students overcome barriers and increase independence.

Key Themes and Takeaways (4)



Expand home-based services to include transition services

Ideas included addressing the shortage of home and community-based services (HCBS), which are essential for individuals with disabilities to live independently in their communities; improving HCBS infrastructures, including long waitlists and funding limitations; and promoting stronger federal enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the *Olmstead* decision to ensure that people with disabilities can live and receive services in the most integrated community settings.



Focus on improving access through transportation

Ideas included enhancing coordination among departments of transportation, education, and health to ensure access to safe, reliable, and affordable transportation; increasing funding for direct transportation for young adults with disabilities and streamlining the application process, particularly in rural areas; encouraging state educational agencies to address transportation needs in their planning; and ensuring local governments have the funds to support and expand transportation options, including free or alternative modes for individuals with disabilities.

Key Themes and Takeaways (5)



Improve the transition from schools to adult services

Ideas included leveraging schools to improve the transition from school to adult services for disabled youth; ensuring employment is a key focus in IEPs; encouraging career and technical education for students; integrating pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs into high school offerings; and having schools share essential information about students' strengths and needs with parents/caregivers to support eligibility for adult services.



Include transition information and support in school (including Tribal school) curricula and resources

Ideas included starting speech and occupational therapy early to better prepare students for the job market or higher education; teaching job-related skills such as communication, resume writing, and interview preparation; offering career exploration and work experiences through internships and summer jobs; ensuring students advocate for themselves during IEP meetings; providing in-school support services through occupational therapists and vocational rehabilitation counselors; preparing students and families for transition with independent living skills and IEP/ITP guidance; offering accessible after-school programs; providing culturally appropriate resources with interpreters; and supporting an Employment First model to transition students into competitive integrated employment.

Key Themes and Takeaways (6)



Integrate wraparound supports and services into the transition process

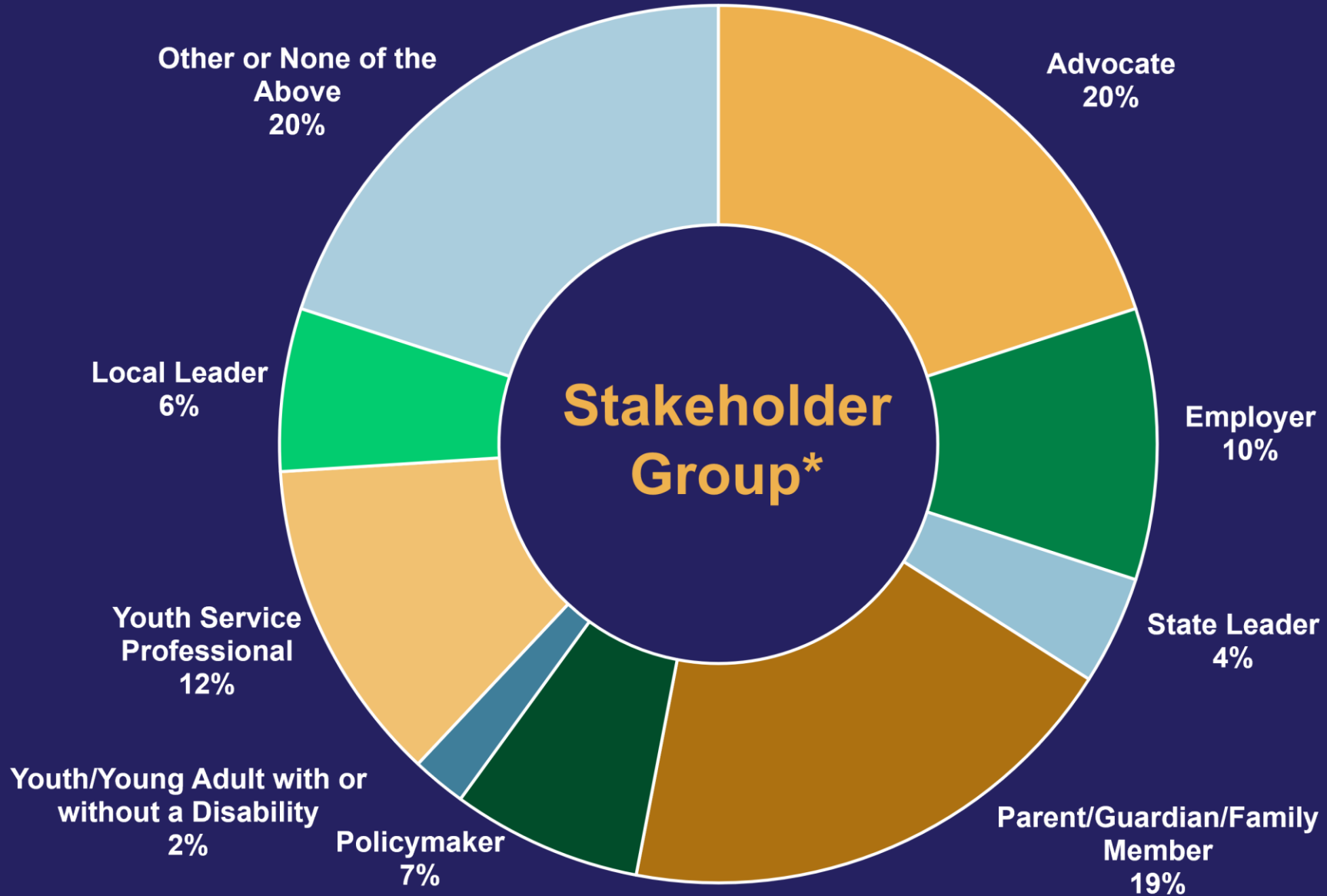
Ideas included providing financial education for budgeting, money management, and asset savings strategies; offering and increasing funding for work incentive planning with accurate information on how employment impacts benefits; providing health and mental health care education for young adults; focusing on teaching functional life skills and soft skills; providing assistance with executive functioning skills; and ensuring access to HCBS, including affordable housing, in-home care, public transportation, community access, and CILs.



Provide transition services inclusive of medically complex individuals

Ideas included allowing waiver programs to cover the costs of nurses for young adults who need medical support to participate in community activities and social programs; ensuring that medically complex individuals are welcomed in community facilities and receive necessary personal care; offering flexible day programming options that help individuals build social networks; and encouraging communities to make activities accessible for everyone.

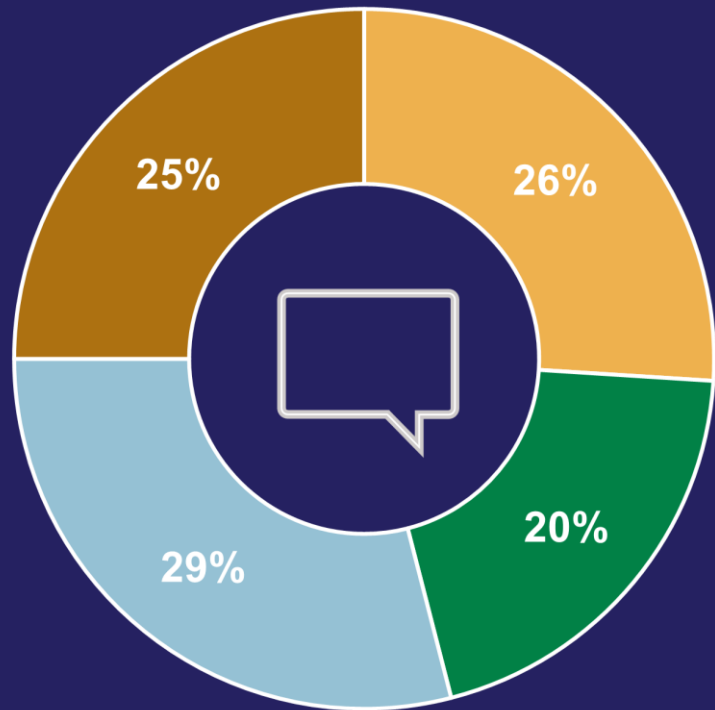
Registrant Metrics (1)



*Registrants were able to choose more than one answer.

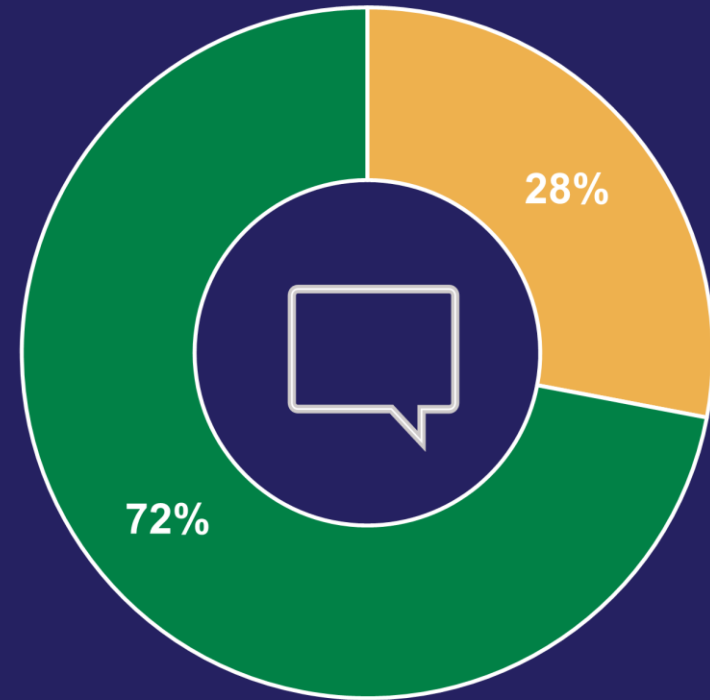
Registrant Metrics (2)

Organization Type*



- Nonprofit or Advocacy Organization
- Educational Institution
- Government
- Other or None of the Above

Government Breakdown*



- State or Local Government
- Federal Government or Federal Technical Assistance Center

*Participants were able to choose only one answer.

Dialogue Metrics



7,130

visits to the online dialogue



1,044

page views during the dialogue



185

registrants in the dialogue



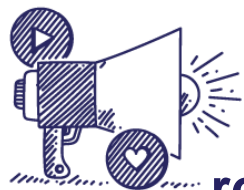
40

states represented, plus the District of Columbia



51%

of registrants participated in the dialogue, submitting an idea, comment, or like



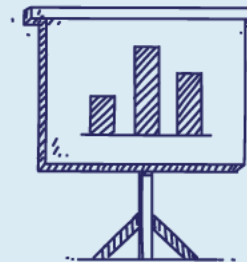
35

resources shared
(spreadsheet)



5.5 min.

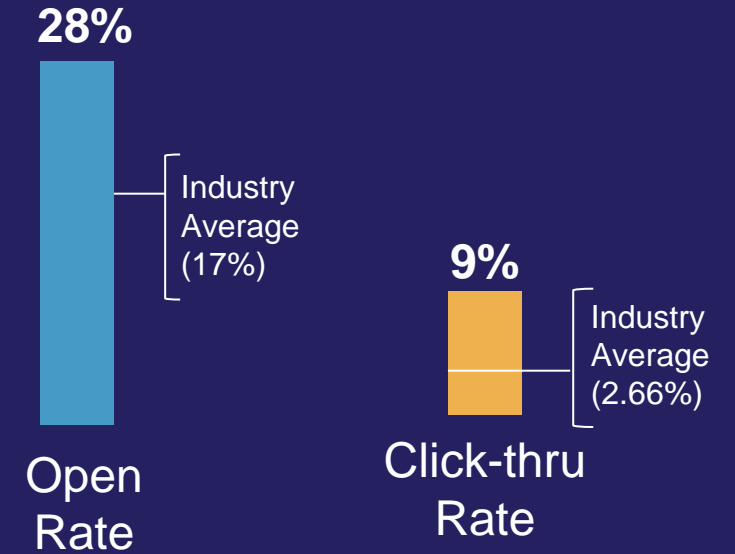
average duration of engagement



See all the ideas and comments submitted during the dialogue!
(spreadsheet)

Stakeholder Outreach

Email Metrics



X Metrics



Our Future Matters: Informing the Federal Interagency Strategy X Fireside Chats Overview

August 17 and September 20, 2023



Participants took part in real-time, interactive discussions to gather input and ideas on policies, practices, strategies, and approaches to support successful transitions for youth with disabilities.



On August 17 and September 20, 2023, @ePolicyWorks hosted two X Fireside Chats. These chats created a space for stakeholders and subject matter experts to share insights, ideas, and resources to inform DOL regarding services for youth with disabilities.

Featured guests for the X Fireside Chats included the Maryland Department of Disabilities, the National Down Syndrome Congress, the Institute for Educational Leadership, the Corps Network, and the Center for Advancing Policy on Employment for Youth. Along with chat participants, the featured guests provided insightful responses.

Please note that X chat responses were integrated into the key themes and takeaways presented on slides 3, 4, and 5.

X Fireside Chats Metrics

630

engagements with posts shared by @ePolicyWorks
(clicks, reposts, replies, follows, likes, or post expansions)



10,951

impressions of posts shared by @ePolicyWorks



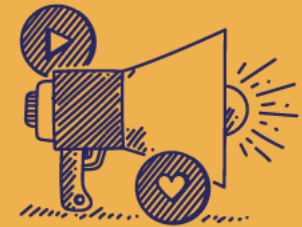
184

posts with the #EPWChat hashtag



5

featured guests



27

resources shared (spreadsheet)