



## **MY-CIL Practice Brief #9**

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### **How do CILs and VR agencies work together? CIL-VR agency collaborations for out-of-school youth with disabilities from minority backgrounds**

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**About the MY-CIL Project.** Minority Youth and Centers for Independent Living (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 out-of-school youth and young adults (ages 14 to 24) with disabilities. Specifically, the project seeks to produce and share knowledge that empowers Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to improve outcomes for youth and young adults with significant disabilities from nationally recognized racial and ethnic minority groups who have completed or otherwise left secondary education.

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Centers for independent living (CIL) and state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies have the potential to improve outcomes for youth with disabilities through joint service provision for out-of-school youth ages 14 to 24. CILs and VR agencies offer complementary services for youth:

- CILs focus on the needs of their communities and offer a range of independent living services to individuals with disabilities and their families.
- VR agencies operate state-wide to offer employment services that help people with disabilities obtain or maintain jobs. VR agencies also provide services to support youth transitioning from school to adulthood.

Though many CILs assist out-of-school youth, we know little about CIL and VR collaborations for youth from minority backgrounds, who disproportionately face barriers in young adulthood, and could benefit from the valuable and complementary services of CILs and VR agencies.

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#### **Clarifying terms**

**Youth from minority backgrounds.** MY-CIL uses the term youth from minority backgrounds to refer to transition-age youth and young adults (ages 14 to 24) from nationally recognized racial and ethnic minority groups.

**Out-of-school youth (OSY) with disabilities.** MY-CIL uses the term OSY to refer to transition-age youth and young adults (ages 14 to 24) who have completed or otherwise left secondary education.

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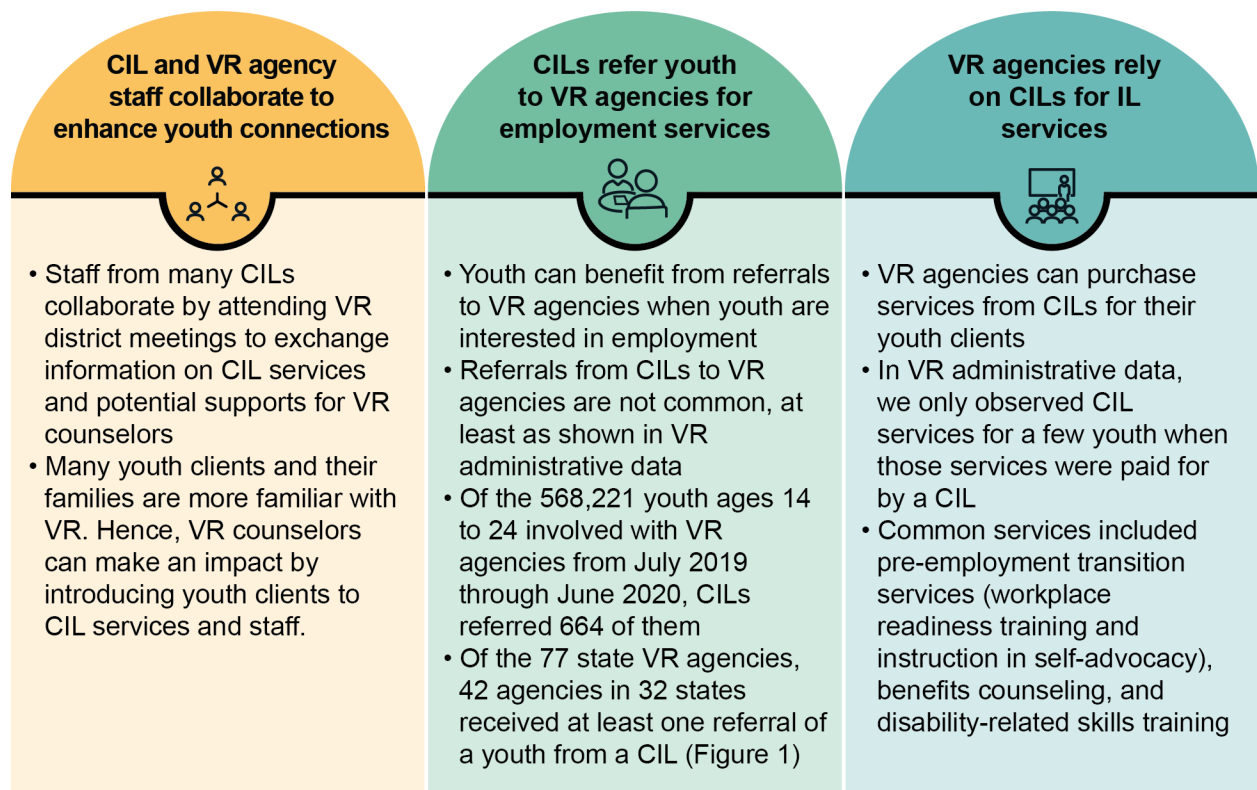
**In this brief:** This brief addresses a single question: How do CILs and VR agencies collaborate to support youth with disabilities? The brief summarizes results from interviews with staff from seven CILs and an analysis of VR agency program administrative data to consider CIL-VR collaborations. This information could be useful for staff from CILs and VR agencies in working

together to promote employment, independent living, and other positive outcomes for youth with disabilities from minority backgrounds, especially out-of-school youth.

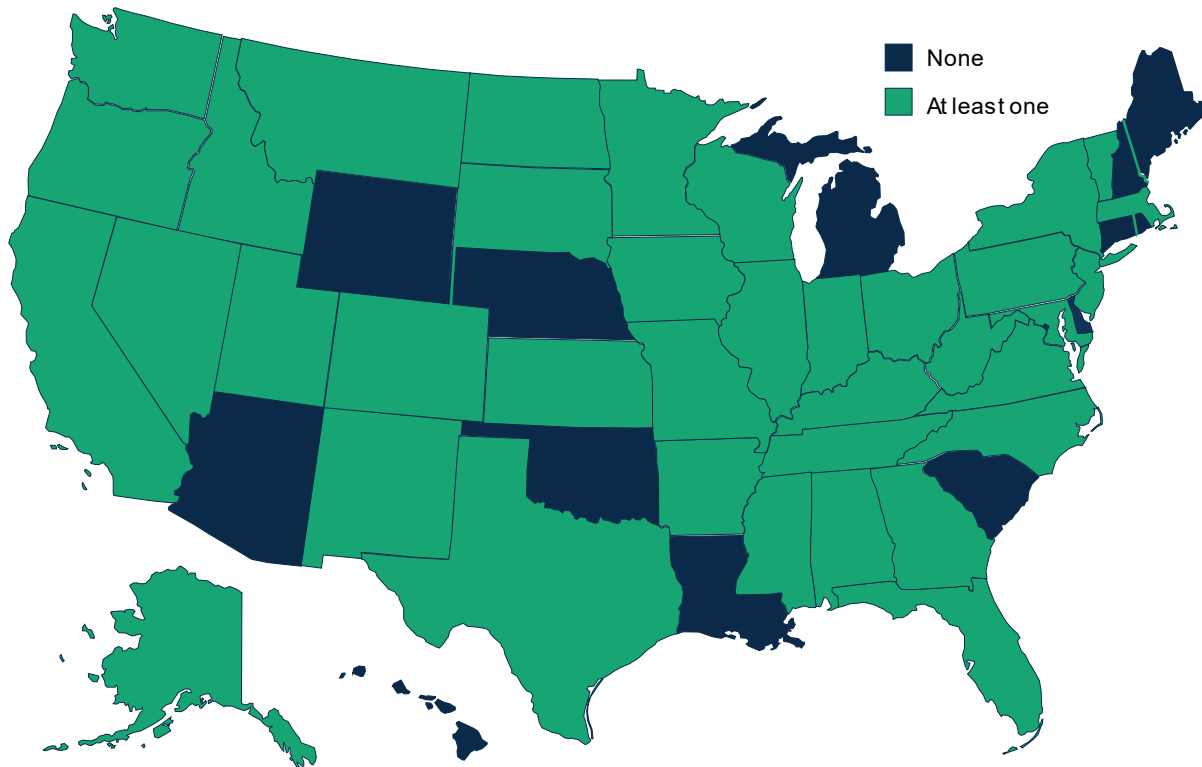
## Findings

In this section, we highlight findings on CIL-VR collaboration strategies and challenges. In the interviews we conducted, CILs described many VR collaboration activities (Exhibit 1). In contrast, RSA data indicate relatively few VR referrals originated from CILs, though the numbers may be underreported by VR agencies. Several CIL interviewees represent communities where racial and ethnic minorities are the majority; however, few described specific initiatives for out-of-school youth with disabilities.

### Exhibit 1. Summary of findings on CIL-VR youth collaborations



**Figure 1. Number of referrals from CILs to state VR agencies among youth who had contact with state VR agencies from July 2019 to June 2020**



Source. RSA-911 data from program year 2019. Data may be underreported by VR agencies. This program year includes the start of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the data for this and prior years were similar regarding referrals, so we do not believe the pandemic affected our observations.

## Practice considerations

This brief points to the potential ways that staff from CILs and VR agencies can work with each other. VR agencies and CILs can play complementary roles in supporting transitions, and coordination between the two can ensure that each leverages the other's resources effectively to meet youth's needs.

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*Our CIL partnership with VR helps to provide trustworthiness with youth because many of the youth work with the same VR counselor for a long period of time. They get to know and trust that counselor. Our partnership with VR is really important to building relationships with youth.*

- CIL Staff

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CIL staff indicated a broader level of work with VR agencies, but also raised concerns with their work together. First, they indicated that they receive few referrals from VR agencies, indicating the potential for more interactions. Second, CILs often encounter technology and

communications barriers when working with VR agencies, such as incompatible MIS systems, which can hinder their collaborations.

Finally, CIL staff described few collaborations for out-of-school youth from minority backgrounds, a group with poorer transition outcomes in several areas, including employment, college enrollment, and VR acceptance rates.

CIL staff may want to answer the following questions as they work with youth:

- What are the needs of out-of-school youth in my community?
- Do I know who to call at my local VR agency office when I have an employment-related question?
- When have I reached out to my local VR agency? For which youth?
- Do I know which of our youth consumers use VR services? Have I talked with their VR counselor on how I can support the youth in their employment goals?
- What services can I offer to youth receiving VR services, but aren't yet connected to my center?

Both CIL and VR agency staff may need to intentionally foster and develop interventions specifically for out-of-school youth from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds and their families, similar to intervention efforts designed to address the long-term needs and outcomes of specific subpopulations of youth with disabilities. Examples of such efforts include transition programs for youth receiving Social Security disability benefits or programs offering work-based learning experiences. During our interviews, few CIL staff mentioned a specific CIL-VR agency focus on this population. However, many CIL staff worked with a majority-minority consumer population, including those from Hispanic, African American, Asian, and American Indian backgrounds. As such, CILs could offer an important pathway to connect these youth to the employment services offered by VR agencies.

Both CILs and VR agencies might consider tracking the youth they have in common. CILs, for example, could flag youth to be referred to VR agencies and follow up with the agency on their VR involvement. VR agencies could monitor youth referred by CILs and document the characteristics of such youth to identify potential positive collaborations and gaps in their relationships with CILs.

## Methods

We used a mixed-methods approach to understand collaborations between CILs and state VR agencies on youth with disabilities.

- From qualitative interviews during 2021 with staff from seven CILs in California, Georgia, Illinois, New York and Oregon, we learned about current practices, challenges, and successes.
- Through analyses of administrative data from state VR agencies, we learned about the number of referrals they received from CILs for youth who had contact with the VR agency in program year 2019 (July 2019 to June 2020), the services those youth received in that year, and the services that youth used from CILs during that year.

The findings in the practice brief should be considered in light of three limitations. First, they reflect the views of staff from seven CILs. Additional interviews with staff from other CILs or from VR agencies, along with interviews with youth and families from minority backgrounds, could offer additional—or different—insights. Second, we do not believe that the VR administrative data fully captures all actual CIL-VR agency collaborations that exist, and so our analysis only shows a minimum level of contact between CILs and VR agencies. Many referrals from CILs to VR agencies—and vice versa—may be informal or not easily documented.

### To learn more about MY-CIL

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To learn more about MY-CIL, please visit: <https://minorityyouthcil.com/>

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