



Rhode Island Statewide Workforce Initiative (RISWI) Self-Direction Staffing Survey, 2026

Prepared for the RISWI Coordinating Council and Key Collaborators



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Introduction

Self-directed supports let individuals choose and hire their own direct support professionals (DSPs). They decide who provides their support, what tasks are included, and when services take place, offering greater flexibility and personal control. However, this model also means individuals assume responsibilities typically managed by provider agencies, such as recruiting, hiring, training, scheduling, and paying DSPs.

For several years, Rhode Island has gathered workforce data to better understand the effectiveness and stability of the direct support workforce. This information has helped the state monitor progress and identify ongoing challenges, but it has largely been limited to data from provider agencies. Comparable information has not been systematically collected from individuals who self-direct their services and serve as employers of DSPs.

To fill this gap, the state partnered with key stakeholders and the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota to develop and pilot the Rhode Island Self-Direction Staffing Survey.

The Self-Direction Staffing Survey was first piloted in July 2025 to test workforce-related questions and assess whether the survey delivered clear and informative findings. Based on survey results and feedback

from the respondents, the survey was revised after the initial pilot.

The 2nd Annual RIPIN Self-Directed Supports Conference provided another and different opportunity for a second round of data collection using the Self-Direction Staffing Survey. The University of Minnesota hosted a booth at the conference where attendees could learn about and take the survey.

Like the first round, the second round of the Self-Direction Staffing Survey was conducted online using Qualtrics. An anonymous survey link or QR code were available to respondents to access the survey which could be completed on an iPad, computer, or other mobile device. It was open to people who self-direct their services, as well as family members or others who help them and could respond on their behalf. A flyer with information about the survey was available at the booth for respondents to take with them, if they preferred to complete the survey after the conference. The survey and information flyer were available in both English and Spanish.

The second round of the survey was open from March 20 through April 10, 2026. RIPIN sent two email reminders of the survey deadline to conference attendees.

Survey Results

Note of Caution: The findings from the second round of this pilot reflect early, self-reported information provided by survey participants. The results are not representative of all self-directed staffing in Rhode Island and should not be generalized to the full self-direction system. These data are intended to support learning and testing only and should not be used to draw conclusions about the overall self-direction staffing situation in the state.

A total of 72 usable responses were received in the second round of the survey. Of those responses, 20% indicated that they had taken the survey in the initial pilot. Fifty-seven percent (41 survey responses) were associated with the same fiscal intermediary.

Respondent:

- 15 (21%) – person self-directing.
- 54 (75%) – family member of person self-directing.
- 3 (4%) – someone else.

Number of staff employed:

- Average = 3, range 0-7

Type of staff:

- 29% - parents, 24% - other family members, 47% - non-family members.
- 33% reported having only family members as staff, 21% reported no family members as staff, and 46% reported having both family members and non-family members as staff.

Tenure:

- More than 50% of staff have worked for the person for more than 2 years.

Wages:

- Average = \$27.12, range \$21.00-\$45.00
- For respondents who had only family members as staff, the average hourly wage was \$27.27.
- For respondents who had non-family staff only, the average hourly wage was \$27.23.
- For respondents who had both family and non-family staff, the average hourly wage was \$27.30.

Overtime:

- 10 (14%) paid overtime to staff
- For respondents who had only family members as staff, 18% (4 people) paid overtime.
- For respondents who had non-family staff only, 0% paid overtime.
- For respondents who had both family and non-family staff, 17% (5 people) paid overtime.

Benefits:

- 7 (10%) of respondents offered health insurance to their staff; 6 said they had staff enrolled.
- 8 (11%) offered other benefits; these included holiday pay, mileage and gas cards.

Turnover:

- 50 (75%) had no turnover in 12 months.
- Of those who had turnover, the range was 17%-400%.
- 21% of staff were fired, the rest (79%) quit voluntarily.

Vacancies:

- 30 (42%) currently trying to hire more staff. Most (21) trying to hire 1 staff person.
- For respondents who had only family members as staff, 41% (9 people) were currently trying to hire more staff.
- For respondents who had non-family staff only, 50% (7 people) were currently trying to hire more staff.
- For respondents who had both family and non-family staff, 40% (12 people) were currently trying to hire more staff.
- Majority (16) trying to fill at least 10 hours per week.

New hires:

- 43% hired new staff in the last 12 months.

Training:

- Respondents were asked if they offered training to their staff. Of the 70 respondents who answered, 41% indicated they offered training to their staff. A variety of training was provided, including documentation, medical, safety, communication, financial, autism training, etc.



Additional comments:

A range of open-ended comments were also shared. Overall, respondents continue to have trouble finding and keeping DSPs. Many felt training opportunities should be improved and the capacity to provide benefits like paid time off and health insurance should be optimized. They raised concerns about relying on family caregivers, limits on work hours, and pay and experience levels that don't reflect the value of DSP work.

Future Considerations and Recommendations

Self-directed workforce data collected in this second round of this pilot study provide continued insights into the workforce providing supports and services to individuals who self-direct. The respondents were largely individuals who had not taken the first survey, and results were consistent between the two administrations.

The findings are promising and noteworthy; however, the sample size was relatively small compared to the total number of individuals who self-direct in Rhode Island. In particular, the small sample sizes prohibit making meaningful comparisons between subgroups of self-directing employers (e.g., those with family members as staff vs. those with no family members as staff). Gaining a fuller and more accurate under-

standing of the workforce that supports people who self-direct will require ongoing data collection from a broader group of participants. Continued efforts in this area are essential.

Looking ahead, Rhode Island should conduct self-direction staffing data collection on a regular cycle. Several options should be considered.

The first is to incorporate ongoing self-direction staffing data collection into existing activities such as person-centered planning meetings, routine check-ins, and service reviews. Embedding data collection within standard workflows—rather than treating it as a separate task—can make the process more efficient, consistent, and meaningful. To make this approach effective, the state should equip staff with straightforward guidance, practical tools, and focused training. This could involve providing short, easy-to-follow instructions or checklists that clarify what data to gather, the appropriate timing, and how to record it. Integrating simple tools—such as quick digital forms or built-in prompts within existing systems—can enable staff to collect information seamlessly during everyday interactions. Training should cover both the mechanics of data collection and its broader purpose, ensuring staff recognize how it contributes to better services and outcomes. Regularly sharing concise data summaries with teams can further highlight its importance and encourage consistent use.

The second approach may be to use a statewide event or events such as the Annual RIPIN Self-Direct-

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ed Supports Conference as a mechanism to collect data from attendees. Lessons learned from the data collection effort this year would enhance the delivery of the survey and increase participation in future years.

Beyond these options, it is important to explore additional data collection approaches that can engage a wider and more representative population of individuals who self-direct their services. Gathering information on a regular, recurring basis makes it possible to track changes over time and gives the state a deeper, more comprehensive view of persistent staffing challenges and opportunities for improvement within self-direction.