

# CORE FEATURES OF QUALITY SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

## BACKGROUND

The Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) and the Youth Technical Assistance Center (Y-TAC) are national technical assistance centers funded by the Department of Education: Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to provide technical assistance and training to State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and their partners. A wide variety of stakeholders with extensive supported employment experience from WINTAC, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), Y-TAC, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Marc Gold & Associates, Griffin-Hammis Associates, the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE), the National Disability Institute, LEAD Center, and APSE worked in collaboration over a six month period to develop a document to identify the core quality features of supported employment as a guide for the universal application of these features across service delivery and training providers.

The hope is that service providers, rehabilitation professionals, and others who are involved in supported employment service delivery will use this guide. The goal is to promote consistent training content nationally, increase the number of skilled trained staff, and establish consistency in service delivery to individuals with disabilities. The intended outcome is an increase in the number of individuals who obtain and maintain competitive integrated employment through the strategies, techniques, and interventions described in this document. The core features of quality supported employment services are organized in five sections:

1. Overview of Supported Employment
2. Career Planning
3. Marketing and Individualized Job Development
4. Job Site Training and Supports
5. Ongoing Supports

## 1. OVERVIEW OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) defines supported employment as:

*(38) competitive integrated employment, including customized employment; or employment in an integrated work setting in which an individual with a most significant disability is working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment; and employment that is individualized and customized, consistent with the individual's unique strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice, of the individuals involved.*

Supported employment services are for individuals with disabilities, including youth with disabilities, who have significant barriers to employment and who have been unsuccessful in obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment outcomes. WIOA specifies that supported employment services are for individuals:

*“(A)(i) for whom competitive integrated employment has not historically occurred; or  
“(ii) for whom competitive integrated employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability; and  
“(B) who, because of the nature and severity of their disability, need intensive supported employment services and extended services after the transition to extended services described in paragraph (13)(C), in order to perform the work involved.*

Service providers that provide supported employment services have been referred to as employment specialists, employment consultants, job developers, job trainers, and job coaches. For the purpose of this document, the job title used is employment specialist. The roles of an employment specialist vary depending on the needs of the individuals who are receiving services, and may include consultant, coordinator, facilitator, job developer, technical assistance provider, and trainer. These roles also can vary during the various phases of supported employment as workers with disabilities become more independent. Employment specialists move in and out of these roles depending on the individualized needs of each person being supported and the needs of the business.

Different approaches to delivering services have been used by community agencies to include hiring multiple staff to deliver services. In some agencies, one staff completes the person-centered career profile; a job developer conducts the job search; and a job coach provides on-the-job supports. However, it is recommended for consistency that one employment specialist follow and support the individual from the point of referral to stabilization on the job. If this is not possible, close communication must be maintained between the staff members providing each phase of supports. Otherwise, there will be limited or no connection between the person's work preferences, skills, and the job that is obtained.

## DEFINING FEATURES OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

There are a number of unique features that define supported employment. Most important is a conviction that all individuals with disabilities are employable when given support to secure a job that matches their skills, interests, and unique support needs. These individualized ongoing supports are provided throughout the process of assisting the individual to find and maintain employment. The following presents an overview of the defining features of supported employment.

- Priority is placed on empowering individuals with disabilities to make choices regarding potential jobs and their career paths. Individuals are supported in finding and negotiating jobs of choice that match their interests, skills, and employment preferences.
- Services are delivered in collaboration with individuals with disabilities, their family members and others who support them (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors, employment specialists, case managers, teachers, friends, etc.). Employment specialists ensure that communication is ongoing throughout supported employment service delivery.
- Critical measures of a quality supported employment outcome include the similarity in wages, benefits, and supports provided to the worker with disabilities in comparison to workers without disabilities. The individual with a disability 1) is an employee of the business, 2) earns at least minimum/commensurate wages to other employees without disabilities, 3) receives benefits that are provided to other employees, and 4) is physically and socially integrated in the workplace.
- As needed, employment specialists ensure the integration of supported employment services with mental health services through contacts with professionals providing those services.
- Workers with disabilities have access to the same orientation, training, supervision, and on-going supports offered to all employees in the business.
- Employment specialists collaborate with businesses and workers with disabilities to facilitate social inclusion in the workplace. There are opportunities for the worker who has a disability to interact with and develop relationships with coworkers who are not paid to be with the individual. The individual's work area is physically integrated and within close proximity to other employees without disabilities.
- An important component of providing supported employment services is person-centered career planning that includes identifying each job seeker's skills, interests, and employment preferences. This step precedes and guides job development. Strategies for this process are based on the characteristics and needs of the job seeker.
- The provision of extended services or ongoing supports after employment is a core characteristic of supported employment that differentiates it from other employment services. These supports may be provided at or away from the job.

- Supported employment supports are provided for a flexible time period negotiated between the provider agency and the funder based on the needs of the individual. A schedule for fading the initial supports that are provided by the employment specialist is based on the work performance of the worker and is negotiated with the business.
- Employment specialists evaluate the needs of the worker when selecting supports to facilitate independent work performance. This includes identifying the typical natural supports available to any worker with or without disabilities in the workplace.
- Supported employment services augment natural supports and should not be provided as a substitute for the support available to all employees.
- Ongoing supports, beyond initial supports, are designed to facilitate natural supports; solve work-related issues; establish mentor relationships; and maintain communication with the business and worker with disabilities. Where and when these supports are provided are discussed with the worker and based on their needs and preferences. They can occur on or off the job site.

## 2. CAREER PLANNING

An important first step in assisting job seekers with disabilities in obtaining competitive integrated employment is to ensure that each person's skills, interests, and employment preferences are clearly identified. Employment specialists collaborate with the job seeker and others as agreed upon by him or her to develop associated documentation that will guide job development. This documentation should be person-centered and guided by the choices and preferences of the job seeker.

Knowing a person's skills and interests prior to conducting job development for a specific job seeker is critical to providing quality supported employment services. Making a "good fit" between the individual's skills and a job can minimize the training and supports that the individual will need after being hired. Taking short cuts, such as not adequately getting to know job seekers prior to job development, can result in dissatisfaction with the job placement, poor work performance, and job loss.

There are a number of different activities that may be completed and considered a menu of options for career planning. Some job seekers may need fewer options from this menu if they have work experiences while in school, previous work history, or other community experiences that provide rich information on which to base job decisions. Other job seekers with disabilities who have very limited exposure to the community and more significant disabilities may benefit from the more intensive services involved in customized employment, as described in the *Essential Elements of Customized Employment*.

## FEATURES OF QUALITY CAREER PLANNING

**Employment specialists guide career planning by collaborating with job seekers, family members and others who support them, VR counselors, case managers, agency staff, and so forth.** Person-centered planning ensures that the choices and preferences of each individual are respected and represented. Decisions are made “with” job seekers during the process and not “for” them. This includes offering job seekers a choice of who assists them during career planning, including selecting the employment specialist.

**Employment specialists develop person-centered career plans to guide job development that focus on what job seekers can do and not what they can’t do.** Job seekers are described by their skills, strengths, and interests rather than their disabilities. Limitations or work challenges are defined as training and supports that may be needed once the individual is employed.

**Career planning activities are individualized according to the interests and needs of each job seeker.** Employment specialists work with a job seeker one-on-one focusing on their choices and preferences. This includes individualizing the locations for activities specific to a person’s vocational goals and objectives.

**Existing reports and evaluations are reviewed for positive information on the job seeker’s support needs, interests, and preferences.** Job seekers who are referred for supported employment often have undergone evaluations to determine eligibility and to assess their vocational skills. Employment specialists realize that information in these reports may bias expectations for a job seeker’s employment outcomes. Existing reports and evaluations are used to augment the findings from their own observations and interactions with job seekers when developing the person-centered career plan.

**Employment specialists interview job seekers to discuss their vocational goals including employment conditions, needs, and preferences.** Informal conversations with job seekers, including family members and other people in their lives, form the foundation on which to select career planning activities. Other important information to collect during these conversations includes transportation options, work schedule, hours, benefits, wages, workplace characteristics, impact of work on disability benefits, and so forth. Employment specialists develop open-ended questions to guide the conversations. Job seekers are assisted in selecting people who may provide information on their interests, skills, and work preferences, if needed by the individual.

**Employment specialists spend time with job seekers during familiar daily activities to learn more about their interests and skills.** Skills that a job seeker shows in familiar community settings can be different from those in facility-based agencies or programs that are specifically designed for individuals with disabilities. Informal observations in familiar settings can provide information on the job seeker’s functional skills and abilities (i.e., communication, mobility, social, functional academics, etc.) when doing familiar activities that they select.

**A variety of community-based experiences may be conducted to assist in career planning.** The job seeker and his or her support team are offered a variety of options to include job shadowing, volunteer work experiences, and work-based assessments. Not all of these experiences may be needed by all job seekers. If community-based work experiences, including assessments, are used, then the following features are offered as guidance.

**Job shadowing experiences are used to assist job seekers in gathering information on their interests and preferences for employment.** During these experiences, a job seeker follows or “shadows” an employee, within specific businesses of interest. These one-on-one experiences may develop as a result of connections with the job seeker’s friends and family members as well as other community connections, including the supported employment agency’s connections. Each job shadow experience is specific to the job seeker’s work preferences and not selected because of agency convenience.

**Volunteer work experiences, also referred to as service-based learning, may assist job seekers in identifying their work interests and preferences.** Volunteer work should not be a prerequisite to employment, and individuals must offer their services freely and without coercion. Individuals with disabilities may volunteer for religious, charitable, or similar non-profit organizations but may not volunteer services to for-profit private sector businesses as guided by the Fair Labor Standards Act. They also should not replace workers without disabilities who are paid by the business or organization to do the work. If a person is involved in a volunteer position as part of the career-planning process, information must be gathered efficiently and align with the parameters for work-based assessments that are detailed in this document.

**Work assessments may be conducted in community businesses.** Work assessments, sometimes referred to as situational assessments, use the settings, materials, employees, and tasks at a business to assess an individual’s skills, interests, and employment preferences. Businesses are selected in collaboration with the job seeker participating in the assessments, and are not “generic” to all job seekers at an agency. Work assessments for the purpose of supported employment services are not conducted in facility-based programs or other agencies that are specifically for individuals with disabilities. Work assessments are used to identify barriers to employment and support needs (as well as strengths and interests) rather than to justify exclusion of the job seeker from needed services.

**Employment specialists follow the U.S. Department of Labor’s guidelines for non-paid work, including volunteer work, as described in Chapters 10 and 64 of the Wage and Hour’s Field Operations Handbook.** These guidelines determine what constitutes an employment relationship between the person with a disability, the rehabilitation facility or school, and/or the business where the individual volunteers or participates in assessments. Employment specialists track the number of hours an individual participates in 1) vocational exploration, 2) assessment, and 3) training per job experienced to ensure that the hour limits are not exceeded.

**Employment specialists negotiate with businesses where work-based assessments occur to select tasks/job duties that match the individual's interests.** They observe the business prior to the assessment to develop training and observation materials, such as task analyses. Employment specialists also negotiate for employees of the business to interact with and support the individual during the work assessment, if possible.

**Employment specialists observe job seekers during work-based assessments to determine their current skills as well as to identify how they learn new skills.** They observe the individual to determine interest and engagement in the work tasks as well as reactions to the characteristics of the business, and estimate the level of coworker and workplace supports and training that may be needed after job placement. This information provides the foundation on which jobs can be analyzed to identify a good fit for the job seeker. The purpose of work assessments in supported employment is not to identify areas for pre-employment training or to “screen out” individuals from receiving supported employment services.

**Employment specialists observe job seekers to identify the impact that the characteristics of a setting may have on the individual's behaviors** (e.g., noise, clutter, organization, items, people, available support, etc.). They use this information to match the person's support needs to the characteristics of a potential workplace.

**Employment specialists develop a job seeker's person-centered career plan in collaboration with the person, professionals funding the services, and the person's support network, including mental health professionals where helpful.** The plan includes information on the job seeker's skills, preferences, and support needs, including the ideal characteristics of a potential workplace. Information is presented in descriptive terms without value judgments. This career plan guides job development specific to each job seeker's work preferences.

**A formal meeting is held that includes the job seeker, the VR counselor, the employment specialist, agency staff, mental health professionals, and other individuals who participated in career planning.** Job seekers are assisted in selecting individuals to attend the meeting if needed and requested.

### 3. MARKETING AND JOB DEVELOPMENT

Organizational marketing is used to develop networks with the business community and is an on-going process. The purpose of marketing is not to find jobs for individuals with disabilities but to position the agency as a resource that can meet the needs of businesses. Employment specialists may support businesses by providing resources on hiring workers with disabilities, universal design information, suggestions on workplace accommodations, and other information around supporting workers with disabilities in the workplace.

Marketing should be the responsibility of everyone in the supported employment agency. When relationships are built in the business community, employment specialists have contacts that may

benefit specific job seekers once job development activities begin. These relationships can also be beneficial during person-centered career planning, providing opportunities for work-based learning experiences, job shadowing, informational interviews, and other activities. In other words, an agency's business contacts developed through organizational marketing can make it possible to identify a specific business that matches the vocational interests and preferences of a specific job seeker.

Job development includes targeted activities for a specific job seeker after the person-centered career plan has been completed. Preferably, the employment specialist who supported the job seeker through career planning is the same one who supports the job seeker in job development. This employment specialist is most familiar with the skills, interests, and work preferences of a specific individual and can better analyze businesses to find a good match or fit in a workplace. This includes representing the job seeker as a qualified applicant/employee who brings skills and value to the business.

Job development can include assisting the job seeker in applying for positions that are available in the community's labor market. Negotiating changes in the job description to match the needs of the job seeker is a critical component of quality supported employment services. This may include changes such as: 1) trading marginal functions for other tasks that match the job seeker's skills; 2) adding tasks that are not getting done or not done regularly in exchange for removing other tasks; 3) making accommodations; 4) changing how tasks are completed; and so forth. The extent to which a job description is negotiated will be specific to the needs of each job seeker. Some individuals may be hired with no or minimal modifications to a job description while others may need extensive negotiations.

## FEATURES OF QUALITY MARKETING AND JOB DEVELOPMENT

**Employment specialists develop business connections for the purpose of building business partnerships.** The purpose of organizational marketing is to establish business networks in the community. The goal is to learn about the local labor market and develop a pool of businesses that are interested in the services offered by the supported employment agency. Establishing relationships with businesses can provide opportunities for a specific job seeker when job development begins.

**Supported employment agencies present a business image and have an employment presence in their communities.** Employment specialists have business cards and promotional materials (e.g., brochures, audio-visual materials, website, social media accounts, etc.) that present their business services. These materials describe supported employment in business terms including services familiar to business (e.g., recruitment, training, and technical assistance).

**All materials, including websites and social media, use language and images that highlight skills, abilities, and interests of the job seekers.** Individuals are presented as valuable employees, and marketing materials do not focus on or emphasize disabilities. Permission to use



information that is identifiable such as photographs, videos, or other personal identifiers must be obtained from each job seeker prior to use in the agency's marketing materials.

**Employment specialists conduct business interviews as part of a marketing plan to learn more about a business' products and/or services.** They interview employers to ask questions on current and future business needs. Employment specialists also observe the workplace to better understand the business culture and workflow. Contact information, current and future hiring needs, description of the products and services, and other business details are organized in a database for future reference.

**Supported employment agencies network with community business organizations (e.g., Disability: IN, Chambers of Commerce, SHRM, etc.).** This may include having a business advisory board. Employment specialists make presentations to local civic organizations, business organizations, and employers to market their agency as a resource for business personnel needs. They also provide information about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), disabilities, inclusive hiring practices, accommodations, universal design, Section 503 requirements for Federal contractors, etc., to promote their agency as a resource for technical assistance and information on hiring a diverse workforce.

**Job development activities are conducted specifically for individual job seekers.**

Employment specialists use the person-centered career plan to guide the job search and assist a job seeker in developing a job search plan. Business contacts are identified from the agency's contact database, the job seeker's social networks, and other networks that are consistent with a job seeker's work preferences, interests, and skills. If the agency does not have established contacts with businesses that align with a job seeker's preferences, interests, and skills, it must build new ones that are in alignment.

**Job seekers are actively involved in the job development activities that are outlined in their job search plans.** Employment specialists assist job seekers in developing portfolios, resumes, visual resumes, cover letters, letters of introduction, references, audio-video materials, and other job application documents in various media formats, including electronic, digital, and print.

**Employment specialists provide information on disclosure to job seekers and assist them in deciding what, when, and how to disclose disability information to businesses.** Disclosure is guided by the need for accommodations and how to best present this information. Emphasis is placed on how the job seeker is a qualified applicant for a position and brings value to the business. Employment specialists use language and images that respect the job seeker's disclosure choices.

**Employment specialists engage business contacts on behalf of the job seeker.** To the extent possible, job seekers are involved in making business contacts based on the preferences and needs of each individual. Employment specialists complete informational interviews, tours, and workplace observations to evaluate the business culture, with the job seeker whenever possible.

Employment specialists review open positions and existing job descriptions to determine if the workplace is a good fit for the job seeker represented.

**Employment specialists negotiate accommodations and job duties based on the job seeker's work preferences and needs.** This includes negotiating hours, wages, work areas, type of supervision, breaks, coworker supports, training, and so forth. Employment specialists respond to businesses' concerns about job seekers' abilities, interests, and challenges while considering each job seeker's preferences and permission for disclosure. To the extent possible, the job seeker negotiates his or her own accommodations and job duties with assistance from the employment specialist as needed.

**Employment specialists support job seekers in representing themselves to businesses based on the preferences and support needs of each individual.** They support job seekers in the interview process, including accompanying the job seeker to the interview, if requested and needed. They assist the job seeker in completing applications; submitting resumes, including visual resumes; and other pre-employment activities as required by the position. They negotiate working interviews to assist individuals who have communication barriers in better self-representing their skills. Employment specialists assist job seekers in the hiring process, including follow-ups with potential businesses, until a job is confirmed.

#### 4. JOB SITE TRAINING AND SUPPORTS

A distinguishing feature of supported employment is the availability and delivery of individualized supports in the workplace. Learning occurs on the job rather than in pre-training prior to job placement. A detailed job analysis; identification and use of workplace supports, including natural supports; natural cues; compensatory strategies; systematic instruction; and workplace accommodations are the core features of a well-developed job site training and support plan.

Employment specialists base workplace support decisions on the preferences and support needs of workers with disabilities, in collaboration with the workers and their employers. The plan includes the type of supports and training that are needed as well as who will provide them. Critical to the provision of these supports is considering how they will be delivered in order to promote independence from, not dependence on, the employment specialist. This includes identifying natural cues and supports from the first day of employment as part of a well-thought-out plan.

Employment specialists do not insert themselves into the business by completing work or assuming supervisory responsibility for the worker with disabilities. Their role is to work in partnership with the business to identify company personnel, including the supervisor and/or coworkers, who will support the new employee with a disability. To the extent possible, coworkers are the first choice for providing assistance and training to the worker with disabilities.

When the employment specialist provides training and support, the least amount of assistance necessary for the worker to learn the job should be provided. The decision to add training and support is based on data collected on the individual's work performance. Employment specialists are careful not to provide too much assistance, which can result in the employee with disabilities becoming dependent on the employment specialist. On the other hand, sufficient training and support must be provided to ensure that the worker with a disability learns his or her job and becomes connected with coworkers. Finally, the employment specialist should develop a schedule for fading the assistance and support they provide, as part of a job site training and support plan.

In some cases, workers with disabilities (e.g., workers with mental health conditions and other non-visible disabilities) may choose not to disclose their disability to the business. Initial job training and supports for these individuals are negotiated between the worker and the supported employment agency. Each of the quality features that follow should be modified to take into account how supports will be provided if the worker has not disclosed his or her disability to the business.

## FEATURES OF A QUALITY JOB SITE TRAINING AND SUPPORT PLAN

**The employee with a disability is a partner in his or her plan for job site support.** The worker's preferences and conditions for success should always be taken into consideration when designing the plan. The plan includes the selection of workplace support strategies as well as when and how to involve coworkers in providing instruction and supports. Natural supports must be part of the plan so that the typical processes of the workplace are available to the worker with disabilities.

**A Job Duty Analysis is developed by the employment specialist in collaboration with the worker's supervisor and/or coworkers.** The job duty analysis is developed and refined prior to the first day of employment by conducting interview(s) to ensure that the job duty analysis meets the business needs. During the analysis, the employment specialist observes how the job duties are performed, including identifying efficient ways to adapt them to the worker's support and training needs. The employment specialist also analyzes the workplace culture. For instance, it is important to observe the workplace to identify "unwritten rules" that coworkers follow. Core features of a quality job duty analysis include the following.

- The job duty analysis should be developed with and approved by the worker's supervisor.
- The job duty analysis provides a sequence of job duties, including the location and time each occurs.
- The skills, natural cues, and supplies/tools associated with each job duty are described.
- The job duty analysis provides information on orientation and mobility requirements as well as safety concerns to be addressed.
- Information is included on supervisor/coworker availability to provide natural supports.

- Any changes in the way the job duties are typically completed to accommodate the worker with disabilities is negotiated with and approved by the supervisor.

**The workplace is analyzed for natural supports that are available prior to the first day of employment and during the job training phase.** The employment specialist observes the workplace to identify how supervisors and coworkers typically provide support to all employees. This includes having conversations with the supervisors and coworkers to discuss how they can provide these same supports to the worker with disabilities.

**The employment specialist facilitates the development of natural supports, if needed, while considering the preferences of the worker with disabilities.** This includes demonstrating ways to improve natural supports to meet the needs of the worker with disabilities. Employment specialists involve supervisors and coworkers from the first day of employment in providing supports to the worker. They also evaluate their own behaviors to ensure that they are not preventing the supervisor and coworkers from providing natural supports to the worker with disabilities.

**If needed, task analyses are identified or developed for the skills in the job duty analysis.**

Employment specialists determine if the business has already developed step-by-step procedures for the skills that the worker with disabilities will be performing. If so, these analyses can be used as the starting point for the worker. The following are important considerations when developing task analyses in the workplace.

- Employment specialists observe coworkers performing the tasks to determine if modifications need to be made for the worker with disabilities.
- If the company's step-by-step procedures do not fit the needs of the worker, the employment specialist collaborates with the business to modify the task analysis.
- Any changes are discussed and approved by the business to ensure the skills/tasks are completed to the company's standards.
- Task analyses are used to collect data on the worker's performance as well as to train the worker to develop skills, when needed.

**Each task is analyzed for natural cues that will be available to the new employee, beginning the first day of employment.** A natural cue represents a feature of the workplace or job task that signals the worker what to do next. Typically, they can be seen, heard, touched, or smelled. Employment specialists observe the workplace and talk with the supervisor and coworkers to identify these cues.

**Employment specialists inconspicuously collect data to evaluate a worker's performance.** A well-planned job site training and support plan includes how data will be collected on the job site. Beginning the first day of employment, data is used to evaluate the need for instruction and the worker's initial level of independence. Data is collected on an on-going basis to make modifications to the job site training and support plan, such as changing instruction, adding compensatory strategies, and adding cues. Data is also used to determine when the worker is

independent on the job. On-going dialogue is maintained with the supervisor on the worker's performance and progress.

**Job site training strategies are identified based on the employee's support needs, and a plan for who will provide the training and support is in place beginning the first day of employment.** Data is collected beginning the first day of employment to identify skills for which the worker with disabilities needs instruction. The design of the instructional program includes a training objective; data collection procedures; prompting procedures; reinforcement; and natural cues, natural supports, and compensatory strategies. Employment specialists use the least intrusive prompts based on the needs of the worker with disabilities to ensure that the worker performs the task correctly. Employment specialists also need to pay close attention to the existing strategies typically used by the company to train and orient all new employees.

**Employment specialists identify compensatory strategies and discuss them with the worker with disabilities and the supervisor/coworkers to facilitate job acquisition.** Compensatory strategies are a way to compensate for a skill that the worker does not have. They can reduce or eliminate the need for training from the employment specialist. They can also eliminate dependence on the employment specialist. The strategies selected are individualized with input from the worker as well as the supervisor and coworkers. Materials are "age-appropriate," do not stigmatize the worker with disabilities, and if possible consist of the typical materials that workers without disabilities use. These strategies should always be approved by the business before use.

**Employment specialists consider how workplace accommodations, information technology (IT), and assistive technology (AT) may facilitate skill acquisition, fading of supports, and workplace inclusion.** This includes considering universal design and other technology, such as smart phones, tablets, and readily available devices before fabricating or purchasing specialized devices. When specialized accommodations are needed, a team of professionals, such as a rehabilitation engineer or occupational and physical therapists, is included in the design and selection of workplace accommodations. Modifications made to the workplace are discussed with and approved by the employer and the worker with disabilities. Under the ADA, employers are required to make reasonable accommodations for qualified employees with disabilities, including allowing the employee to determine their own personal technology for communication, mobility, and manipulation access, unless doing so would pose an undue hardship.

**Employment specialists assist workers with disabilities in learning to self-manage their work performance.** Workers with disabilities may have difficulty recognizing if their work performance meets the quality and/or productivity standards of the workplace. In other words, they may not be able to self-evaluate if they are completing their job duties correctly, on time, and at the production rate negotiated with the employer. Self-management usually includes supporting the worker with disabilities to learn how to use natural cues, external cues and prompts, compensatory strategies, and universally available technology, such as smart phones and tablets. Employment specialists discuss the available strategies with the worker and the business to design a plan that will assist workers in monitoring their own work performance.

**Employment specialists assist workers with disabilities in developing relationships and social networks that facilitate the person's inclusion in the workplace.** This may include modeling for coworkers how to support the worker during breaks and other workplace activities. For example, the employment specialist assists the worker in participating in naturally occurring support groups, such as a workplace mentor program or social activities.

**Employment specialists support the worker in developing a plan to learn and manage work-related activities.** This may include learning how to access and use transportation services, scheduling appointments, managing medication, maintaining personal hygiene, obtaining and caring for work attire, and so forth. Employment specialists support the individual in identifying family and other supports necessary to ensure that these skills are learned and maintained.

**On-going evaluation of the employer's satisfaction with the worker's performance is scheduled and completed.** The employment specialist sets a schedule with the supervisor to discuss satisfaction with the worker's performance. This also includes on-going evaluation of the worker's job duties, wages, benefits, social integration in the workplace, and opportunities for advancement within the business. Information is used to evaluate and make modifications to the assistance provided by the employment specialist and natural supports of the workplace, as needed.

**Employment specialists fade their supports and training in the workplace.** A well-designed fading plan is critical to the success of job site support. Waiting until the employee has learned their job before thinking about fading substantially increases the likelihood that the employment specialist will have difficulty fading from the job site. An efficient employment specialist has a plan for fading from the first day of work. This includes making fading decisions based on data of the employee's performance in collaboration with the supervisor and coworkers. The plan also specifies how supports will be transferred from the employment specialist to the natural supports of the workplace (e.g., employer, supervisor, and coworkers).

When intensive skills training and support are completed and the new employee is stable on the job, the VR counselor, worker with disabilities, and CRP or VR placement staff should agree on a transition to extended services. Issues to consider include the following.

- Has the individual reached a maximum level of work performance in a competitive integrated employment setting?
- Has the agreed-upon hourly work goal been reached?
- Has job coaching and other follow along services decreased to a level necessary to maintain the individual in employment?

Once the transition to extended services has taken place, the VR case starts moving toward a successful closure (usually after at least 90 days of stable employment). The maximum time that VR may cover Supported employment Services is 24 months unless extenuating circumstances

occur and the individual and VR counselor agree to extend this period. For youth, supported employment services may occur for up to 48 months or until the individual turns 25.

## 5. EXTENDED SERVICES/ONGOING SUPPORTS

Ongoing supports, also referred to as long-term supports or extended services, are a unique feature of supported employment. These supports continue to be available to workers with disabilities for the duration of their employment. Supported employment agencies identify available funding sources for ongoing supports and ensure that each worker being supported has access to these services, if needed. This includes understanding eligibility for services and the requirements for receiving funding to support specific workers with disabilities.

After the worker transitions to ongoing supports, the employment specialist continues to remain involved in the workplace, building on relationships with the business and providing supports to the worker with disabilities as needed. The employment specialist provides on-going supports to the worker as changes occur in the work situation. Some of these changes may include changes in management, job duties, or coworker supports. They also might include changes in living situations, transportation arrangements, health conditions, etc., which may negatively impact the worker's performance. These changes can result in job loss if the employment specialist is unaware of them and the worker with disabilities is unsupported.

Ongoing supports also include negotiating changes to the job, including but not limited to adding or modifying the worker's job description, increasing wages, and negotiating additional hours and benefits. As the new employee adjusts to the job, he or she may be ready to assume additional job duties. This may occur naturally for workers without disabilities but not necessarily for those with disabilities. The employment specialist assists workers with disabilities in self-advocacy for changes to the job and advocates with the business on their behalf, if requested and needed. These discussions should be included as part of the on-going contacts that are conducted with the worker and the business.

In some cases, workers with disabilities (e.g., workers with mental health conditions and other non-visible disabilities) may choose not to disclose their disability to the business. Ongoing supports for these individuals are negotiated between the worker and the supported employment agency. Each of the quality features that follow should be modified to take into account how supports will be provided if the worker has not disclosed his or her disability to the business.

### FEATURES OF QUALITY ONGOING SUPPORTS

**The employment specialist develops an ongoing support plan in collaboration with the supervisor, coworkers, and worker with disabilities.** The plan specifies the natural supports available in the workplace, including how, when, and who will provide the supports. It also specifies the role of the supported employment agency, including the frequency and nature of contacts with the business and the worker. This ensures that the business understands its

supervisory responsibilities for the worker, and the worker and business know what to expect from the supported employment agency. The ongoing support plan also focuses on contacts between the worker and the supported employment agency, and on how supports will be provided.

**An employment specialist maintains regular contacts with the worker who is receiving supported employment services.** Communication strategies may include 1) video conferencing, 2) email, 3) telephone, 4) text, and 5) face-to-face meetings at or away from the job. The method(s) and frequency of the contacts are determined based on the preferences and needs of the worker with disabilities. Discussions may include job satisfaction, wages and benefits, career advancement, job site support needs, training on new job duties, changes in coworker supports and so forth.

**Regular contacts are maintained with the business where the worker with disabilities is employed.** Employment specialists assigned to provide ongoing supports to workers with disabilities schedule regular contacts with the business, specifying how the contacts will be made with supervisors and coworkers. In the early stages, more regularly scheduled contacts may be provided, gradually fading to the naturally occurring evaluations that occur for any employee without disabilities. The only exception is when the worker with disabilities has not disclosed his or her disability to the business. If there has been no disclosure, the employment specialist and worker need to develop a support plan that does not inadvertently disclose that the worker has a disability.

A feedback system is established between the supported employment agency, the worker, and the business to proactively respond to any workplace issues. Changes in the workplace, such as the loss of a supervisor or coworkers who were providing natural supports, can negatively impact the individual's work performance. Negotiations with the business may be needed to support job retention, including training new coworkers/supervisors, identifying natural supports, and/or training the worker on new job duties that have been added to his or her responsibilities. A proactive communication system can identify support needs before they become issues on the job site.

**In-person meetings occur on-the-job at the request of the worker and/or the business.** Unobtrusive observations of the worker may be the only way to determine if the job duties continue to be performed independently and to the satisfaction of the business. This information may not be reported to the supported employment agency until changes in work performance are causing concern by the employer or supervisor. On-the-job observations can help identify any on-going support needs, preventing job dissatisfaction by the worker as well as the business.



## GLOSSARY

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY:** Assistive technology was first defined in the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 (The Tech Act). An assistive technology device is any device, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially or off the shelf, modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Assistive technology service can be defined as any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.

**CHAMBER OF COMMERCE:** A chamber of commerce is a voluntary association whose membership includes companies, civic leaders, and individual business people. Members promote the interests of business, typically in a broad-based way. In addition, there are Hispanic and Black Chambers of Commerce that build bridges between the Hispanic or Black business community and the business community-at-large in order to create, promote, and enhance business. Chambers of commerce exist on municipal, state, regional, national, and international levels.

**COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT:** The term ‘competitive integrated employment’ means work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis (including self-employment)

(A) for which an individual— “(i) is compensated at a rate that:

(I) shall be not less than the higher of the rate specified in section 6(a)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (29 U.S.C. 206(a)(1)) or the rate specified in the applicable State or local minimum wage law; and is not less than the customary rate paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by other employees who are not individuals with disabilities, and who are similarly situated in similar occupations by the same employer and who have similar training, experience, and skills; OR

(II) in the case of an individual who is self- employed, yields an income that is comparable to the income received by other individuals who are not individuals with disabilities, and who are self-employed in similar occupations or on similar tasks and who have similar training, experience, and skills; and “(ii) is eligible for the level of benefits provided to other employees;

(B) that is at a location where the employee interacts with other persons who are not individuals with disabilities (not including supervisory personnel or individuals who are providing services to such employee) to the same extent that individuals who are not individuals with disabilities and who are in comparable positions interact with other persons; and

(C) that, as appropriate, presents opportunities for advancement that are similar to those for other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who have similar positions.

(Authority: Sections 7(5) and 12(c) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; 29 U.S.C. 705(5) and 709(c))

**CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT:** The term ‘customized employment’ means competitive integrated employment, for an individual with a significant disability, that is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual with a significant disability, is designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer, and is carried out through flexible strategies, such as:

- (A) job exploration by the individual;
- (B) working with an employer to facilitate placement, including:
  - (i) customizing a job description based on current employer needs or on previously unidentified and unmet employer needs;
  - (ii) developing a set of job duties, a work schedule and job arrangement, and specifics of supervision (including performance evaluation and review), and determining a job location;
  - (iii) representation by a professional chosen by the individual, or self-representation of the individual, in working with an employer to facilitate placement; and
  - (iv) providing services and supports at the job location.

(Authority: Sections 7(7) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended)

**DISABILITY:IN:** Disability:IN, formerly the Business Leadership Network, is the leading nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion. Disability:IN promotes disability inclusion by heightening awareness, advising corporations and sharing proven strategies for including people with disabilities in the workplace, supply chain, and marketplace. Its mission is to expand opportunities for people with disabilities by helping companies invigorate their disability initiatives, explore best practices, incorporate culture changes, and realize positive business outcomes. [<https://disabilityin.org/>]

**ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT:** *Customized Employment Essential Elements & Recommendations for Customized Employment Practices* were developed to define and elaborate customized employment service delivery. The Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) and the Youth Technical Assistance Center (Y-TAC) are national technical assistance centers funded by the Department of Education’s Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). WINTAC and Y-TAC entered into a partnership with Griffin-Hammis Associates, TransCen, Inc., Marc Gold & Associates, and Virginia Commonwealth University to develop this document to identify the essential elements of customized employment (CE) as a guide for the universal application of these elements across service

delivery and training providers. It is available at: [<http://wintac-s3.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/topic-areas/Essential-Elements-of-Customized-Employment-for-Universal-Application%20%28005%29-FInal.pdf>].

**EMPLOYMENT SPECIALIST**: Employment specialists assist people with disabilities in finding and maintaining competitive integrated employment that match their abilities and the requirements of the businesses. They typically are employed by Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs), social service agencies, or other nonprofit organizations. Other terms that are synonymous with employment specialist include job developer, job placement specialist, job coach, and job trainer. The roles of an employment specialist vary depending on the needs of the individuals who are receiving services, and may include consultant, coordinator, facilitator, job developer, technical assistance provider, and trainer.

**EXTENDED SERVICES (or on-going supports)**: Extended services means ongoing support services and other appropriate services that are needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability in supported employment. They are provided by a non-VR resource\* after an individual with a most significant disability has made the transition from support provided by VR. \*NOTE: Youth may receive extended services from VR for up to 48 months or until the age of 25, whichever comes first.

**FADING**: Fading, as it applies to delivering supported employment services, is the gradual reduction of supports provided by the employment specialist or service provider. The employment specialist gradually decreases supports as the worker with a disability becomes more proficient in performing the assigned job duties. Fading also includes ensuring that coworkers without disabilities are identified to provide support and supervision to the worker with disabilities just like support is provided to all employees of the business. Once the worker with disabilities is performing to the standards of the workplace, the employment specialist “fades” from the business and makes only periodic ongoing visits to ensure that the worker continues to be successful.

**FIELD OPERATIONS HANDBOOK**: The Department of Labor Field Operations Handbook (FOH) is an operations manual that provides Wage and Hour Division (WHD) investigators and staff with interpretations of statutory provisions, procedures for conducting investigations, and general administrative guidance. The FOH was developed by the WHD under the general authority to administer laws that the agency is charged with enforcing. The FOH reflects policies established through changes in legislation, regulations, significant court decisions, and the decisions and opinions of the WHD Administrator. It is not used as a device for establishing interpretative policy [<https://www.dol.gov/whd/FOH/index.htm>].

Chapters 10 and 64 of the Wage and Hour’s Field Operations Handbook provides guidance on wages pertaining to non-paid and subminimum wages for individuals with disabilities. Chapter 10 provides information on the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) including what is an employment relationship, statutory exclusions, and geographical limits. Chapter 64 addresses

the issues around employment of workers with disabilities at special minimum wages under Section 14(c) of the FLSA.

**INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW:** An informational interview is a business term that is used to describe a process for seeking information about a potential job/career, and is commonly used by job seekers with and without disabilities. An individual who wants to learn more about a chosen field identifies people who are willing to talk about their careers or jobs. This may help the job seeker (and the employment specialist) to learn more about how well the person's interests, skills, and experience match the demands of the job/career.

**JOB SHADOWING:** Job shadowing is a way to learn about a particular job or career of interest. Individuals can "shadow" employees or a mentor as a short-term opportunity to spend time in a business. The business typically partners with an agency to provide the experience for the job seeker with a disability to learn what it is to perform a certain type of work by accompanying an experienced worker as they perform the targeted job. In addition, it is an opportunity for the person to determine if their skills and interests match opportunities in a specific type of business.

**NATURAL SUPPORTS:** Natural Supports are personal connections that develop in the community, including the workplace. Natural supports can occur spontaneously but may be facilitated in the workplace to ensure that the worker with disabilities has the same kind of support that is afforded to all workers with or without disabilities. The U.S. Department of Labor's One-Stop Toolkit site describes natural supports as "supports provided to an employee with a disability from supervisors and co-workers, such as mentoring, friendship, socializing at breaks or after work, providing feedback on job performance or learning a new skill together. These natural supports are particularly effective as they enhance the social integration of the employee with a disability with their co-workers and supervisor. In addition, natural supports are more permanent, part of the workplace, and more readily available than paid job coaches, thereby facilitating long-term job retention."

**PERSON CENTERED PLANNING:** Person Centered Planning is an ongoing problem-solving process used to help people with disabilities plan for their futures. In person centered planning, teams of people assist the individual develop future goals. This "person-centered" team meets to identify opportunities for the person to develop relationships, participate in the community, increase control over their own lives, and develop the skills and abilities needed to achieve these goals. Person Centered Planning depends on the commitment of a team of individuals who care about the person. The teams are typically made up primarily of individuals in the person's network that are not paid to support the individual. Team members make sure that the strategies discussed in planning meetings are implemented [<https://www.pacer.org/transition/learning-center/independent-community-living/person-centered.asp>]

**SHRM:** The Society for Human Resource Management is a professional human resources membership association headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia. SHRM promotes the role of HR as a profession and provides education, certification, and networking to its members, while

lobbying Congress on issues pertinent to labor management. It is the world's largest HR professional society, representing 300,000 members in more than 165 countries. For nearly seven decades, the Society has been the leading provider of resources serving the needs of HR professionals and advancing the practice of human resource management. SHRM has more than 575 affiliated chapters within the United States and subsidiary offices in China, India and United Arab Emirates [<https://www.shrm.org/pages/default.aspx>].

**SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT:** Situational assessments are brief functional assessments that take place in businesses. Typically, they last for 2-4 hours and provide an opportunity for the job seeker to complete work tasks that represent the individual's interests and skills. Assessments are arranged with businesses and can be paid or unpaid. They are not used to exclude job seekers from employment but to identify the best match between the job seeker, a type of job, and work environment. Situational assessments also offer the job seeker an opportunity to have brief experiences in different job types to determine if the person is interested in the job type or potential career.

**SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT:** Supported employment services are for individuals with disabilities, including youth with disabilities, who have significant barriers to employment and who have been unsuccessful in obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment outcomes. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) defines supported employment as: (38) “competitive integrated employment, including customized employment; or employment in an integrated work setting in which an individual with a most significant disability is working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment; and employment that is individualized and customized, consistent with the individual's unique strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice, of the individuals involved.”

**TASK ANALYSIS:** A task analysis is a step-by-step outline for a skill or job duty that the worker with disabilities will be performing. The purpose is to break the skill down into smaller, more manageable components or actions. The optimum way to develop a task analysis is to observe the worker who typically does the job duties that will be performed by the worker with disabilities. If this is not possible, the employment specialist can complete the job duty and develop the task analysis as it is performed. The resulting step-by-step procedure should be shown to the business to ensure that the tasks are performed to the company standards and supervisor satisfaction. Once a task analysis is complete, it can be used to systematically teach the job duty to the worker with disabilities.

**WORK-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES:** Federal legislation references work-based learning (WBL) in the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV), the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA). Section 422 of WIOA amends the description of pre-employment services for individuals with disabilities to include WBL as: “(2) work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, or experience outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that is provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible.” WBL includes connecting classroom (agency) learning in the workplace;

application of academic, technical, and employability skills in a work setting; and support from classroom (agency) or workplace mentors. Work-based learning can be from a few hours to weeks such as in an apprenticeships or internship. It may be paid or unpaid but should be representative of a specific career or job of interest of the individual with a disability.

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*The contents of this publication were developed by the WINTAC under grant from the Department of Education (#H264G150005 and #H264H150006). However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.*

