

Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program (EFSLMP)

PROVIDER TRANSFORMATION MANUAL

**Module 5: Individualized Planning and Services (Consumer Focus)**

Pilot Version

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# Introduction

This manual has been created to capture learning from, and support the continued success of, the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program (EFSLMP), an initiative of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).[1](#_bookmark2) The EFSLMP is a cross-disability, cross-systems change initiative providing a platform for multi-disciplinary state teams to focus on implementing ***Employment First***[***2***](#_bookmark3)with fidelity through the alignment of policies, coordination of resources, and updating of service delivery models to facilitate increased integrated employment options for people with the most significant disabilities.

ODEP recognizes ***Employment First*** as a national movement providing a framework for systems change that is centered on the premise that all citizens, including individuals with complex disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life. ODEP defines ***Employment First*** as the expectation that public systems align policies, practices, and reimbursement structures to foster competitive integrated employment as the priority option in publicly-financed day and employment services for youth and adults with significant disabilities.

ODEP recognizes that the achievement of ***Employment First*** requires transformation of both public systems and service providers. To guide this two-pronged approach to Systems Change, ODEP has adopted the National Baldrige Model’s Criteria for Performance Excellence [see Exhibit 1] which includes seven key elements: Leadership; Strategic Planning; Customer Focus; Workforce Focus; Operations Focus; Results; and Ongoing Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge.

Exhibit 1. National Baldrige Model’s Criteria for Performance Excellence

Strategic

Planning

Workforce

Focus

Leadership

Results

Customer

Focus

Operations

Focus

Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

Source: <http://www.nist.gov/baldrige>

To facilitate provider transformation using the Baldrige approach, ODEP has developed a set of *Criteria for Performance Excellence in Employment First Provider Transformation* [see Exhibit 2]. This provider transformation manual builds on the criteria that have been developed, offering significant, detailed information, advice and examples based on best practices for provider transformation developed through the

1 This edition will be used as a pilot model. Our goal is to receive feedback over the course of the EFSLMP Community of Practice (CoP) webinar series throughout the rest of the year regarding the usefulness and applicability of the manual.

2 <https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/EmploymentFirst.htm>

EFSLMP and derived from the experience and expertise of EFSLMP subject matter experts working on transformation with providers around the country.

Exhibit 2. Criteria in Performance Excellence in Employment First – Provider Transformation[3](#_bookmark5)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Leadership | * Promote ongoing professional development and mentoring of leaders within provider networks to cultivate a cadre of strong leadership capable and committed to the development of competitive, integrated employment outcomes and socioeconomic advancement for people with disabilities. * Build in incentives for supporting, retaining, and rewarding “early adopters” of effective practices among staff. |
| Strategic Planning | * Infuse & embed the State’s *Employment First* vision, goals, guiding principles, & conceptual framework within the strategic planning processes, consistent with similar efforts undertaken across relevant State government agencies. * Develop, disseminate, and make readily available the provision of effective practices that lead to competitive, integrated employment for individuals with disabilities, as well as benefits planning, financial capability, and economic advancement strategies for all clients. * Develop operational agreements across various state publicly-financed systems and provider networks resulting in the alignment of policy, practice, and funding strategies to allow for a consistent focus on performance-based results. |
| Customer Focus | * Survey customers & stakeholders regularly to understand level of satisfaction & determine the areas of improvement needed. * Review service coordination processes to determine whether key steps in the process could be strengthened in terms of being more focused on person-centered, individual strategies, and experiential informed choice. * Expand and improve upon existing assessment processes to ensure a rich collection of data on the individual’s strengths, gifts, and preferences that can be used to leverage multiple options. |
| Workforce Focus: | * Realign organizational structure and standard operating procedures (SOPs) to allow the time, flexibility, and incentives required to develop professional staff in key areas critical to successful transformation. * Ensure ongoing professional development, mentoring, coaching, and staff support promoting continued strengthening of skill sets critical for expanded business models. * Optimize service time and ratio deployment for provision of long-term supports, crisis interventions, and new job starts within provider network. * Consider incentives for staff to facilitate clear measurable performance outcomes for competitive, integrated employment and to effectively address individual and cultural resistance to change. |
| Operations Focus | * Diversify funding streams to optimize available support for competitive, integrated employment services. * Expand the provision of services to include a stronger focus on the dissemination of effective practices that result in competitive, integrated employment outcomes. * Promote the modernization of operational processes including IT//electronic record-keeping and decentralized staffing models to successfully meet growing demand for the provision of competitive, integrated employment strategies. * Consider reconfiguration of service management elements within provider organizations (including, but not limited to, communication, data collection, logistics, technology, transportation, billing systems, supervision, and customer satisfaction) and infusion of “lean management” techniques. |
| Results | * Grow percentage of competitive, integrated employment placements over baseline, and capture length of time from start of service to placement. * Coordinate employment efforts with other long-term supports (housing, transportation, natural supports) and benefits planning/work incentives. * Survey customers & stakeholders regularly to understand level of satisfaction & determine the areas of improvement needed. * Track staff development milestones, including training/TA received, credentials/certification completed, etc. * Track impact of applying effective practices to internal daily operations and service approaches. * Demonstrate cost-effectiveness of competitive, integrated employment supports through maximization of natural workplace supports, assistive technology, and job customization. * Align policies, operational procedures, and funding to reflect adoption of effective practices and competitive, integrated employment service delivery. |
| Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management | * Create shared performance-based outcomes & corresponding metrics across various divisions of the organization to incentivize effective coordination of human & technical resources & collective action around pursuance of organizational strategic goals. * Establish bench-marks from baseline data and collect high-impact, relevant data to help inform continued organizational restructuring, internal policy changes, operational practice updates, and development strategies. * Translate high-impact knowledge through continued commitment to training, technical assistance, professional development and communities of practice. |

3 [http://www.leadcenter.org/system/files/resource/downloadable\_version/Employment\_First\_Technical\_Brief 3\_0.pdf](http://www.leadcenter.org/system/files/resource/downloadable_version/Employment_First_Technical_Brief__3_0.pdf)

The reader will note that the manual has been organized with individual modules that each focus on one element of the Baldrige model. In addition, modules on two other critical topics for success – bringing provider transformation to scale and being a mentor to other providers – are also included to round out this comprehensive manual. Readers can opt to use the manual as a comprehensive resource or to pull-out specific modules as they are needed during the process of transformation.

## More on the EFSLMP Approach to Provider Transformation

The EFSLMP has developed a unique approach to supporting provider transformation in a comprehensive way. The approach brings together the collective experiences of over thirty Subject Matter Experts from around the country, all of whom are either disability employment service providers themselves – who have shepherded

their organizations through a process of transformation - or integrated employment and community supports experts who have provided support, technical assistance and training to disability employment and day service providers from around the country who have been actively engaged in organizational transformation. ODEP’s EFSLMP Subject Matter Experts are both, by definition and by design, an eclectic group of people with tremendous breadth of experiences and knowledge. This is particularly valuable in supporting provider transformation on a national scale because:



**Transformation:**

It takes the desire to change, the determination to start, and the dedication to continue.

* Ben Timmis

**Transformation:**

It isn’t about improving, it’s about re- thinking.

* Malcolm Gladwell
  + - No two providers’ transformation process and circumstances are the same, even if providers may operate in the same state or locality;
    - The nature of provider transformation has changed over time, both within particular states and nationally;
    - Core best practices for successful provider transformation – practices that are considered “tried and true” among those who make this topic their life’s work – can be implemented in many subtly different ways depending on a particular provider’s circumstances and challenges;
    - Effective mentoring relationships cannot be forced, and rely most heavily on “smart” matching of leaders and organizations who will “gel” in truly impactful ways;
    - Communities of practice that bring together Subject Matter Experts and diverse providers on the path of organizational transformation can enhance learning, information exchange, mutual support structures and translation of knowledge.

The EFSLMP Provider Transformation Initiative brings together many experts with a deep historical perspective on provider transformation. This has greatly enhanced the project’s ability to build on and further expand the historical knowledge base for provider transformation. In addition, one of the most important contributions of the EFSLMP Provider Transformation initiative has been to modernize, and recast as necessary, long-standing best practices into strategies that are geared toward the ***current realities- both challenges and opportunities*** facing traditional employment and day service providers across the country.

## The Case for Organizational Transformation: Why Do It and Why Now?

This manual’s publication date is 2017—twenty-seven years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. A quarter of a century ago, a very small number of community rehabilitation providers across the country, including some facility-based day service providers were engaged in organizational transformation. At the same time, federal supported employment capacity building grants were beginning to make a positive impact in many states, demonstrating



… in the past five years (2011-2016), an evolution in thinking has taken place across the field of disabilities that has set the stage for competitive integrated employment and integrated community supports to become the primary service models for transition-age youth and working-age adults with disabilities in every state.

the valuable outcomes that supported employment could bring to individuals with significant disabilities. Yet overall, there was not any sense that a major evolution in employment and daytime support services for people with disabilities was just around the corner.

And while it’s true that the intervening years leading up to 2011 did not bring to scale, to the extent many had anticipated, the systemic momentum and best practices built in the early years of supported employment, it is hard for anyone to deny that in the past five years (2011-2016), an evolution in thinking has taken place across the field of disabilities that has

set the stage for competitive integrated employment and integrated community supports to become the primary service models for transition-age youth and working-age adults with disabilities in every state. This broad-based evolution of thinking has been ushered in through a variety of different, but coinciding federal policy initiatives, state-level reforms, legal actions, and media coverage that collectively have begun to reshape public opinion. Among the most influential developments of the past five years are the following:

* + - The June 2011 Statement of the ***Department of Justice*** on Enforcement of the Integration Mandate of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and *Olmstead v. L.C.* This Statement[4](#_bookmark8) established for the first time, an expectation that compliance with the ADA and *Olmstead* required states to have an effective working plan to address “individuals spending their days in sheltered workshops or segregated day programs” and which “must have demonstrated success in actually moving individuals to integrated settings in accordance with the plan.” Most of the *Olmstead* lawsuits and settlement agreements that came after this Statement have had a strong focus (and in the cases of Oregon and Rhode Island, an exclusive focus) on transitioning publicly funded state systems away from segregated employment and day services to individualized supported employment and integrated community supports.[5](#_bookmark9)

4 See [https://www.ada.gov/olmstead/q&a\_olmstead.htm](https://www.ada.gov/olmstead/q%26a_olmstead.htm)

5 See U.S. Department of Justice settlement agreements with the states of Georgia, Delaware, North Carolina, and Virginia, as well as the settlement agreement with the state of Oregon and the consent decree with the state of Rhode Island. See <https://www.ada.gov/olmstead/>for more information.

* + - The September 2011 Informational Bulletin[6](#_bookmark10) released by the ***Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)*** which provided strong guidance regarding employment and employment-related services in Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Waivers.[7](#_bookmark11) This guidance underscores CMS’s commitment to the importance of competitive integrated employment and self-employment opportunities for waiver participants. The guidance is now part of the Technical Guide states must follow in creating, renewing or amending HCBS Waivers, and it contains a strong expectation from CMS that states will use HCBS Waivers to increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and meaningful community integration for HCBS Waiver participants with disabilities.
    - The August 2012 report by the ***National Council on Disability***, a federal agency, calling for a phase out of sub-minimum wage.[8](#_bookmark12) This report both preceded and followed local, state and national media coverage of the use of sub-minimum wage in the employment of people with disabilities. Meanwhile, legislation to phase out and end the use of Section 14(c) special minimum wage has been introduced multiple times in ***Congress***, first in October of 2011, then in February of 2013 and most recently, in January of 2015. The current House bill (HR 188) has 69 co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle, as of June, 2016, and the Senate companion (S. 2001) is bipartisan as well. Additionally, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), passed in July of 2014, established an ***Advisory Committee to the U.S. Department of Labor*** charged in part with making recommendations regarding the future of Section 14(c). WIOA also introduced restrictions on the ability of employers to pay youth a sub-minimum wage and new requirements for state vocational rehabilitation agencies to conduct annual outreach to all state residents with disabilities being paid sub-minimum wage to offer services that would allow these individuals to obtain competitive integrated employment paying at least minimum wage. And most recently, in March of 2016, the ***AbilityOne Commission*** issued a Declaration in support of minimum wage for all people who are blind or have significant disabilities.[9](#_bookmark13)
    - The September 2013 promulgation of a new rule, by the ***U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs***, governing the implementation of Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act which prohibits federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating in employment against individuals with disabilities and requires these employers to take affirmative action to recruit, hire, promote, and retain individuals with disabilities. The rule strengthens the affirmative action provisions of the regulations, requiring increased efforts by contractors to recruit and hire people with disabilities, and improve job opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
    - The February 2014 Executive Order 13658, signed by ***President Barack Obama***, “Establishing a Minimum Wage for Contractors,” to raise the minimum wage to $10.10 for all workers on Federal construction and service contracts, including all workers with disabilities whether covered under the Section 14(c) special minimum wage certificate program or not.

6 See <https://downloads.cms.gov/cmsgov/archived-downloads/CMCSBulletins/downloads/CIB-9-16-11.pdf>

7 Medicaid HCBS Waivers first became available in 1983 when Congress added section 1915(c) to the Social Security Act, giving States the option to receive a waiver of Medicaid rules governing institutional care. Medicaid HCBS Waivers allow a state to offer services and supports to people with disabilities, otherwise qualified for institutional care, in the community.

8 <https://www.ncd.gov/publications/2012/August232012>

9 <http://www.abilityone.gov/commission/documents/US%20AbilityOne%20Commission%20Declaration%2018March2016%20Final.pdf>

* + - The March 2014 promulgation of the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Settings Rule by the ***Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)*** which requires all HCBS settings eligible for Medicaid funding to provide opportunities for individuals to pursue employment, work in competitive integrated settings, and engage in community life. The rule further requires all HCBS settings eligible for Medicaid funding to be integrated in, and support full access to, the greater community. And finally, the rule establishes a requirement that states must offer HCBS participants an opportunity to receive HCBS services in non-disability-specific settings, thus requiring states to develop and offer integrated prevocational and day habilitation service models if the state had only facility-based prevocational and day habilitation service options prior to the implementation of the rule.[10](#_bookmark14)
    - The July 2014 passage into law of the ***Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)***, raising expectations across state workforce and vocational rehabilitation systems that competitive integrated employment be the prioritized investment and outcome for transition-age youth and adults with disabilities. WIOA ushered in the expectation that state workforce system programs achieve true programmatic accessibility for individuals with disabilities, while also introducing new requirements for state vocational rehabilitation agencies to provide pre-employment transition services to youth with disabilities enrolled in secondary education.
    - The May 2016 promulgation of new Medicaid Managed Care Rules by the ***Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)*** which requires states and managed care organizations to ensure access to, and supports for, competitive integrated employment in Medicaid Managed Long-Term Services and Supports programs that serve persons with disabilities. Prior to the issuance of these rules, numerous states moving to Medicaid Managed Care had built in expectations for increasing competitive integrated employment outcomes for enrollees with



… a number of federally funded grant and technical assistance initiatives include a focus on supporting provider transformation, extending mentoring, training, technical assistance and other key support strategies to a growing number of disability service providers across the country that are seeking such supports to evolve their organization’s services to align with changing expectations and opportunities.

disabilities.

Throughout this time, the country has also seen an array of federally funded grant and technical assistance initiatives aimed at increasing competitive integrated employment opportunities for transition-age youth and adults with disabilities, including an emphasis on facilitating systems change and implementing policies consistent with ***Employment First***. In addition to EFSLMP, a number of other federally funded grant and technical assistance initiatives include a focus on supporting provider transformation by extending mentoring,

training, technical assistance and other key support strategies to a growing number of disability service providers across the country that are seeking such supports to evolve their organization’s services to align with changing expectations and opportunities.

10 https:[//w](http://www.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Fact-sheets/2014-Fact-sheets-items/2014-01-10-2.html)ww[.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Fact-sheets/2014-Fact-sheets-items/2014-01-10-2.html](http://www.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Fact-sheets/2014-Fact-sheets-items/2014-01-10-2.html)

At the same time, our nation’s economy is beginning to recover from one of the most serious and long- standing recessions in history. Coupled with this is the stark reality that our workforce is fundamentally changing. With baby boomers now retiring in record



Yet at the end of the day, what appears to be moving more and more disability service provider organizations to embrace sustained organizational transformation is the recognition of the benefits and possibilities that transformation brings to the people with disabilities each of these organizations serves.

numbers, most every industry and economic sector is projecting major workforce shortages in the decades to come. And there is a recognition that American workers are changing as well, with the millennials ushering in expectations for a better work-life balance and greater workplace flexibility. As employers of all kinds respond to these trends, there is a groundswell of interest in non-traditional labor pools and groups that are untapped and/or underrepresented in the current labor

market, with individuals with disabilities being a key part of these groups. Further, there is growing interest in

progressive and innovative approaches to human resource (talent) management, including Customized Employment[11](#_bookmark15) and the concept of a Teachable Fit[12](#_bookmark16) to bridge the divide between employers and the new face of America’s modern workforce. These approaches not only make room for workers with disabilities but endorse fundamental strategies that pave the way for increased hiring of workers with all kinds of disabilities into competitive integrated employment situations.

For several decades, we have seen the emergence of a research and evidence base for competitive integrated employment services, thus enabling disability service providers to fill their toolboxes with a variety of innovative and “proven to work” strategies for facilitating competitive integrated employment outcomes for individuals with various types of significant disabilities. In the last decade, research addressing the connection between competitive integrated employment and positive health and mental health outcomes has increased, as has research demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of public investments in supported employment.

As federal and state funders of disability services increase emphasis on integrated service provision and competitive integrated employment services in particular, providers of more traditional employment and day services are no doubt feeling the pressure to participate in this evolution and bring their organizations and practices into full alignment with the many developments discussed above that have come about in rapid succession in recent years. Yet at the end of the day, what appears to be moving more and more traditional employment and day service provider organizations to embrace sustained organizational transformation is the recognition of the benefits and possibilities that transformation brings to the people with disabilities each of these organizations serves. What’s more, organizations embracing transformation are also finding that staff at all levels of the organization are similarly positively affected, finding new energy, passion and satisfaction in doing new work that is changing their roles and their impact on the people with disabilities they support and

11 [https://www.accenture.com/t20150824T010002 w /us-en/\_acnmedia/Accenture/Conversion-](https://www.accenture.com/t20150824T010002__w__/us-en/_acnmedia/Accenture/Conversion-Assets/DotCom/Documents/Global/PDF/Strategy_7/Accenture-Trends-Reshaping-HR-Workforce-One.pdf) [Assets/DotCom/Documents/Global/PDF/Strategy\_7/Accenture-Trends-Reshaping-HR-Workforce-One.pdf](https://www.accenture.com/t20150824T010002__w__/us-en/_acnmedia/Accenture/Conversion-Assets/DotCom/Documents/Global/PDF/Strategy_7/Accenture-Trends-Reshaping-HR-Workforce-One.pdf) and <https://www.dol.gov/odep/documents/vignette_v3_blue_508_final.pdf> For more information on Customized Employment, also see: <https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/CustomizedEmployment.htm>and

<http://www.leadcenter.org/customized-employment>

12 <https://www.manpowergroup.com.au/documents/White-Papers/2010_Teachable-Fit-Framework.pdf>

their communities. As one thirty five-year veteran manager of employment services from a community rehabilitation provider in Wisconsin put it:

“When you have staff achieve an employment goal with someone, and you see the joy that they experience with that individual…and you have someone come into your office and say ‘Yes! I’m a working man now. I’m going to be a working man now!’ it really brings home to you why you are putting all of this effort into this.”[13](#_bookmark17)

And finally, it seems clear that organizations engaged in transformation are recognizing the positive benefits of this work on their reputation and standing in the wider community. They are finding support is increasing from the local business community and their traditional community supporters. They are also finding significantly increased support from their funding sources that are equally invested in their success. And they are finding that peer organizations, both from within the state and from other states, are now looking to them for advice, mentoring and technical assistance.

If these outcomes are the kinds of outcomes that resonate with you and your organization, then transformation is the right next step. This manual brings together in one place, the best strategies, tips, lessons learned and perspectives on provider transformation to help you and your organization get started, or if you have already started, to help you and your organization continue your efforts and ultimately achieve the best possible success with transformation.

13 To view a video on organizational transformation efforts in Wisconsin and the perspective of this and other community rehabilitation provider directors and managers, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xd3qgUwLHbw>

**Module 5:**

**Individualized Planning and Services (Consumer Focus)**

**Key Terms**

*Competitive Placement Supported Employment Natural Supports Customized Employment Group Discovery Discovery*

*Medicaid Buy In Work Incentives*

*Self-Guided Discovery PASS Plan*

*1619(b)*

*Impairment Related Work Expenses*

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**MODULE 5: Individualized Planning and Services (Consumer Focus)**

One key to achieving successful transformation is choosing or creating the right strategies and tools for your agency to help people find and keep jobs and participate in community integrated activities. Using strategies that fit your needs and implementing those strategies with fidelity through effective training is a central part of your strategic and operational planning.

## Setting the Groundwork – Making Employment Part of the Intake and Planning Process

As you move your services toward competitive integrated employment and inclusive community engagement, it pays to think through with your staff what choice means for people who have had only limited choices and opportunities in the past. As we discuss in Module 3, the choices people make can be impacted by what they are used to, what makes them feel secure, and their fears and self- perspectives. Putting in place meaningful intake and individualized service plan processes will encourage people to think about competitive integrated employment as a choice that will improve their economic well-being and bring new meaning and opportunities to their lives.

*What is a meaningful intake process?*

Transformation means highlighting competitive integrated employment as a preferred and achievable option for people who come to you for services. A person and their family may come to you looking for a facility based program because they have heard from teachers, vocational counselors or friends that you are operating a good quality and secure program. Ideally, the intake process will educate people about the availability of competitive integrated employment and paint a picture for people through success stories based in their local community. The intake process should explore with job seekers their dreams, what they are good at, what kinds of volunteer or work experiences they had in high school or previously, and which of these they felt good about. This can empower people to expand their horizons into the mainstream workplace.

With an ***Employment First*** approach, people who come to you seeking services should get a clear and enthusiastic message from your organization that competitive integrated employment is your passion and right behind that is integrated community participation that allows people to fill valued social roles. If your agency gets a referral or authorization from a funding source for a service other than supported employment; but you find that the individual really would like to explore or pursue competitive integrated employment, its vitally important that your staff communicate with the funding source to try to get a revised authorization that allows your agency to address the person’s interest in or desire for competitive integrated employment. While this kind of communication may not have been typical in the past, it becomes essential for any agency engaged in transformation.

*Including Competitive Integrated Employment in the development of the Individualized Service Plan (ISP), Individual Education Plan (IEP), or Member-Centered Plan*

Anyone receiving Medicaid Waiver services will have an ISP. If your agency provides pre-vocational or day services to an individual, you will be invited to attend, or give input into the ISP annual planning

meeting with the individual, family and friends, and other providers. Even if an individual is not ready to include competitive integrated employment as a current goal, continuing to bring up integrated employment as an option in a way that connects with the person’s interests, skills and personality is a good way to encourage everyone involved in developing a plan to think about competitive integrated employment as a next step for this individual. For example, if someone has enjoyed planting in a community garden, you might suggest developing a paid work experience with a local plant nursery. If someone takes care of a pet at home, but is reluctant to look for a job, you might suggest dog walking for neighbor or volunteering with an animal shelter as a first step toward working with pets in a pet store or grooming business. As a provider, you can play a similar role if you are involved in the development of a student’s IEP, or a member centered plan (if the person is enrolled in managed care). These suggestions can lead to plans that include competitive integrated employment as a goal or open the door to career exploration and planning services as a first step.

## Competitive Integrated Employment

### Learning about the Job Seeker

Your agency may want to engage in an assessment process before a person enters job development. This maximizes the chance that the job pursued by the person, with the help of a job developer or employment specialist, is a good fit. The discovery process utilized in customized employment is an ideal way of identifying a person’s strongest transferable skills and interests connected to employment and the capacities of people who, for a variety of reasons, may not perform well in a test or structured assessment, or who have interests and skills that will not be captured in standard employment and career testing. Discovery is a way of getting to know people’s skills, strengths, and interests through their activities of everyday life and in the places where they are most comfortable and by talking with people who know them the best. Alternatives to facilitated one-to-one discovery include self-guided discovery with a user-friendly tool and guidance from a trained facilitator, or a group discovery in which people support each other in the discovery process through a series of group meetings, also with the assistance of a group facilitator. See resources at:

* <http://www.leadcenter.org/customized-employment/discovery>(A fuller description of discovery and these alternatives is provided in the section on customized employment below.)
* [http://www.leadcenter.org/news/promoting-employment-outcomes-through-partnerships-and- self-guided-discovery](http://www.leadcenter.org/news/promoting-employment-outcomes-through-partnerships-and-self-guided-discovery)
* [http://www.leadcenter.org/system/files/resource/downloadable\_version/CE-and-Group- Discovery-FAQs.pdf](http://www.leadcenter.org/system/files/resource/downloadable_version/CE-and-Group-Discovery-FAQs.pdf)

Some agencies use situational assessments or vocational testing to learn more about individual’s skills and interests. These approaches are often less useful for people with more complex disabilities, especially if not combined with a discovery-type process.

### Strategies to Help People Find and Keep Jobs

There are three basic strategies we use to help people find and maintain jobs – ***Competitive Placement***

and ***Customized Employment*** are two alternative strategies for helping people find employment

opportunities. ***Supported Employment*** is a strategy for assisting people who need ongoing support to maintain their jobs, whether job development is accomplished through ***Competitive Placement*** or ***Customized Employment*.**

### Competitive Placement

Competitive Placement is the hiring of an individual with a disability by a business for an existing job opening through traditional hiring and recruitment processes. A provider might help a job seeker with a disability draft a resume, search for appropriate job openings, fill out an application, prepare for an interview and after being hired, request accommodations. (See Employment First Technical Brief #3, <http://www.leadcenter.org/resource-center/publication/employment-first-technical-briefs>).

Some people who find jobs through competitive placement will also need follow-along job coaching on a short-term or ongoing basis. If staff anticipates that someone they are working with will need follow- along coaching beyond the short-term, they will want to put into place ***Supported Employment*** for that person. See description of ***Supported Employment*** below.

### Customized Employment

Some people you work with may have difficulty achieving employment through competitive placement into an already existing job opening or may have interests and abilities that do not match already existing jobs. For those people, customized employment is a highly effective individualized approach to developing a well-matched job. While customized employment has been particularly effective for people with complex needs, who also may need support to maintain a job after the job has been developed, it also is a useful approach for people with a range of capacities and needs. Some people need no support in a job that is customized to their strengths and needs. Others will need ongoing support. For those who need ongoing support, you will want to put ***Supported Employment*** in place for them (described below). It is worth noting that some people who have been competitively placed into an open job that is not a good fit with their strengths and needs may end up needing ongoing support because the job match was not good, whereas if a customized job can be developed for them, they could work without ongoing supports.

Customized Employment refers to services and supports that are provided to an individual with a disability in accordance with flexible, individualized strategies leading to a negotiated relationship with an employer that focuses on unmet needs and other specific value-added benefits to employers rather than existing open job positions. Customized employment involves a highly-individualized process of job seeker exploration, discovery, development of descriptive profile documents, customized employment planning, innovative representation methods, employer needs analysis, and representation by a job developer. For those people who need long term supports, customized employment services dovetail with supported employment services at the point of successful job negotiation with an employer and thus may evolve into services and supports provided directly at the job location, including, if necessary, ongoing supports and services. (Definition from Employment First Technical Brief #3, <http://www.leadcenter.org/resource-center/publication/employment-first-technical-briefs>).

*Who are ideal candidates for customized employment?*

Customized employment approaches can be used with anyone. Many people without disabilities customize their own jobs. However, customized employment is particularly useful for people who have been identified as having barriers to employment. People who can particularly benefit from customized employment include:

* People with limited or no work history in mainstream employment
* People whose past work experiences have been negative and/or poor matches
* People who have difficulty fitting standardized job descriptions
* People who have difficulty with the traditional application or interviewing process
* People who have been considered unable to work in competitive integrated employment and therefore unable to benefit from employment services provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation system.

*What does Customized Employment look like?*

All customized employment approaches have the following four steps in common:

* A discovery process through which staff learn about the individual in the settings in which they are most comfortable doing the daily tasks and activities of their own lives, and talking to the people who know them the best.
* Capturing information in a written document that can be shared with the person, job development staff, and people in the person’s life.
* An analysis of employer’s needs. These needs can fall into a number of categories. They can be tasks that other employees do not have time to do, tasks that other employees cannot do during particular busy parts of the day, tasks that higher paid employees are doing that would be better accomplished by the individual you are representing, or tasks now performed by someone who doesn’t have the expertise or interest in doing the task and would be better taken off that person’s plate. A job can be customized from just one task or bundled together with a number of tasks.
* An individual negotiation with potential employers based on the person's capacities and needs as pinpointed through the discovery process and an analysis/understanding of the employer’s needs

*We’ve heard the term “discovery” a lot. What is it? How is discovery different from assessment?*

Discovery is a process for getting to know a person, with a vocational lens, that utilizes already-existing information rather than information developed through formal or contrived assessment methods. The information developed through discovery guides the employment representative in customizing a job with an employer. This process takes into account the applicant's life experiences rather than single instances of performance. Discovery aims to see where the individual is at their best as a guide to customizing a position where the individual will succeed in employment. See:

* <http://www.marcgold.com/Publications/White%20Papers/Discovery%20is.pdf>

Usually discovery starts with an intake, and then a home visit with the individual and the family. The purpose of the home visit is to understand the routines of the person’s life and the daily activities which will reveal the person’s interests, skills, abilities and some of the conditions for employment. Following the home visit, employment staff will schedule time to observe and participate in typical activities in which the person engages. This might include volunteer work, recreational activities, chores and responsibilities, sports, or school activities, for example. Employment staff also will interview people who know the person well. These interviews might include family, neighbors, friends, teachers, and relevant professionals. From all of these interactions and interviews, employment staff can identify interests, skills and conditions for employment.

For people who do not need or want one-to-one discovery facilitated by vocational staff, there are several interesting alternatives. In self-guided discovery, people use forms and templates, and the occasional guidance of a facilitator, to move through the discovery steps on their own or with the help of their family. The Lead Center has partnered with American Job Centers (AJC’s) to offer self-guided discovery to users of the workforce system, under the guidance of AJC staff. See:

* [http://www.leadcenter.org/news/promoting-employment-outcomes-through-partnerships-and- self-guided-discovery](http://www.leadcenter.org/news/promoting-employment-outcomes-through-partnerships-and-self-guided-discovery)
* [http://www.leadcenter.org/news/lead-center-and-griffin-hammis-associates-launch-new- training-self-guided-discovery](http://www.leadcenter.org/news/lead-center-and-griffin-hammis-associates-launch-new-training-self-guided-discovery)
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Group discovery is another alternative through which small groups of job seekers are guided through a discovery process by a facilitator through a series of meetings. Typically, in group discovery, individuals engage in discovery activities on their own, with the support of a network of friends or family they have identified, and then meet together in group sessions to review what they have learned about themselves and plan for the next discovery step. Group discovery offers job seekers peer support which can help job seekers stay motivated during their job search, provides networking opportunities, and alleviates the loneliness of the job search process. Group discovery also is a useful alternative when the workforce system or a community provider does not have the resources to provide one-to-one facilitated discovery. More information about group discovery generally, and its use in American Job Centers specifically, can be found at:

* [http://www.leadcenter.org/system/files/resource/downloadable\_version/CE-and-Group- Discovery-FAQs.pdf](http://www.leadcenter.org/system/files/resource/downloadable_version/CE-and-Group-Discovery-FAQs.pdf)

*Where can we learn more about customized employment?*

You can learn more about customized employment on the ODEP and Lead Center websites.

* [http://www.leadcenter.org/customized-employment/ce-overview-principles-processes-and- practices](http://www.leadcenter.org/customized-employment/ce-overview-principles-processes-and-practices)
* <https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/customizedemployment.htm>

There are three models of customized employment being used around the United States. Here, in alphabetical order, are links to the three organizations that have developed these models. You might want to read more about each of these to see which seems to fit your organization the best.

* Griffin Hammis Associates: <http://www.griffinhammis.com/>
* Marc Gold and Associates: <http://www.marcgold.com/>
* TransCen: <http://www.transcen.org/>

### Examples of Customized Jobs

Customized jobs are always jobs that meet employer business needs and match the abilities and conditions of employment for a particular individual. These jobs can be customized in almost any business that has a need for an employee to perform a job made up of tasks that could be effectively performed by an individual you represent. Here are examples from a range of businesses and locations.

**Customized Jobs Example 1-Colin:** Through discovery, Colin’s employment specialist observed his particular skill and interest in organizing clothing and personal items. While he could not read, he could organize items by number and color. In his planning meeting, he confirmed that he wanted to work in a retail store near his home. His team came up with a task list that included sorting clothing inventory, sorting items by size and color, and matching misplaced items. After an initial meeting with a nearby retail clothing store, Marie, his employment specialist, found that the store’s shoe department was disorganized; shoes were in the wrong boxes or not returned to the shelves after customers tired them on. The storage room was a mess. The sales staff had difficulty finding time to organize and re- organize the shoe stock. Marie worked with the manager to negotiate a customized “sales associate assistant” position in the shoe department with specific tasks reassigned from the sales associates to Colin. These tasks included: receiving and unpacking shoe shipments, sorting shoes into size categories, putting sensors and tags on shoes, delivering shoes to the proper rack, and retrieving returned shoes. As the store manager said, “Nothing beats showing me how you can make my life easier!” Colin’s employment specialist helped him negotiate a starting wage consistent with the starting hourly wage of the store’s sales clerks, and hours that met the store’s need and Colin’s availability.

*Source*[*: https://www.dol.gov/odep/documents/3a71dce9\_0f04\_4e80\_8533\_aeda57aa48b0.pdf*](https://www.dol.gov/odep/documents/3a71dce9_0f04_4e80_8533_aeda57aa48b0.pdf)

**Customized Jobs Example 3-Nathan:** Nathan grew up in Zumbrota, Minnesota, a small town outside of Rochester. He began his working years bouncing around between workshops and enclaves, as there wasn’t much else available to him. Nathan knew he could do far more than that. Nathan moved to the Twin Cities in Minnesota and began to work with an employment team who introduced him to customized employment. Through a discovery process, his team learned that Nathan has strong skills in planning and organizing. He is also a strong leader and loves to teach and delegate tasks. He runs his own meetings, plans parties for his family, and writes his own speeches, which he has given to crowds in excess of 500 people. Nathan is an active member of several disability activism groups and is also an avid participant in the Special Olympics. He is also a true performer and a few of his biggest passions are dance and cheerleading.

**Customized Jobs Example 2-Brad:** Brad was a young man who had a college degree in business information systems but intense anxiety and challenges in communicating with fellow workers. In discovery, he and his team recognized that he needed to work in a structured environment with specific tasks that used his organizational ability and knowledge of office systems. His employment team met with a partner in a small law firm that had recently merged with another firm. The partner and support staff, immediately saw that Brad could be helpful to them in managing the increased document workload. In particular, the law firm was having trouble keeping up with the need to file original documents and create digitalized copies of all important documents. Brad’s employment team worked with the law firm staff to develop a full-time customized job that included creating digitalized client files, scanning documents, categorizing documents into the proper folders within client files, taking inventory of office supplies, and messengering important documents.

*Source: Job developed by Job Path Inc., New York City*

Three themes emerged from discovery with Nathan. Planning and Organizing, Public Speaking and Instruction, and Performance Arts and Music. Nathan went on approximately 20 different informational interviews with a wide variety of local businesses. Eventually, Nathan went on his final informational interview. It was with Heather Patton, a Youth Development Specialist at the Southeast Area YMCA in Woodbury. The YMCA customized a job that used Nathan’s considerable talents.

Nathan was hired as a Youth Development Staff, teaching adaptive sports and cheerleading classes to children between the ages of three and twelve. Nathan is also leading a pilot program that is a partnership between the Special Olympics and the YMCA. The Young Athletes Program is for children between the ages of two and seven and is a cooperative learning experience for children both with and without disabilities. Since its launch, this program has been very successful, largely because of Nathan. *Source: Minnesota Customized Employment,* <http://mntat.org/stories/nathan.asp>

**Customized Jobs Example 4-Drew:** When his employment team began to work with Drew, they knew from his family and support team that he was unable to focus for more than a few minutes on any one task. During Discovery his team observed that his focus improved dramatically when he was engaged in something new and different. He was fascinated by a table of magnets and spent over a half hour exploring the magnets. This proved to his team that if interested enough, Drew could focus his attention. His team also learned that he was drawn to peaceful outdoor environments. He had enjoyed living on a farm for a number of years, loved to sit outside, particularly near water, and enjoyed masculine activities and machinery. Based on this information, his employment team reached out to a family run tractor business to explore tasks that might be a good match for Drew. The employer had need for someone to stock equipment in a store room in their facility. Drew tried out this task. Despite his interest in the equipment, Drew could not tolerate the closed in environment. As discussions continued, the employer noted that the family also operated a small farm. When Drew visited the farm, he was attracted by the animals on the farm, just as he had been fascinated by the magnets during discovery. The employer identified the task of feeding the chickens as a need that Drew could fill. Over time Drew increased his work to 10 hours a week, and has expanded his work to feeding other animals on the farm.

*Source: Benchmark, New Mexico*

### Supported Employment

Supported Employment is the hiring of an individual with a disability by a business where a supported employment provider assists both the business and the individual with a disability in the early stages of the employment relationship through support during employee training, combined with as-needed coaching and consultation as the employment relationship continues. The ongoing supported employment supports necessary to maintain an individual with a disability in an integrated employment job are based on the supported employee’s individualized needs and the needs of the employer.

Supported employment services are intended to maximize integration of the individual within the workplace, with emphasis on facilitating the use of existing natural supports (e.g., co-workers, supervisors) supplemented only as necessary with supported employment staff paid for through public funding programs (e.g. VR, Medicaid). See Employment First Technical Brief #3, [http://www.leadcenter.org/resource-center/publication/employment-first-technical-briefs.](http://www.leadcenter.org/resource-center/publication/employment-first-technical-briefs)

Effective supported employment begins with a person-centered planning process designed to learn the individual’s employment goals, strengths and needs. Often employment staff can further their knowledge through a discovery process and/or situational assessment in a community based work setting. See descriptions of individualized assessments and discovery above. Meetings with family members, teachers, and other service providers assist in the planning process. For many people, individualized job development, based on thoughtful planning, is key to a successful long term job. Job developers can work creatively with employers to “job carve” or to customize a job by combining a set of tasks into a unique position within the business, as described above. The goal of supported

employment should be to fade support to the extent possible while helping the person maintain his/her job. As you develop employment opportunities, you will want to be looking for jobs from which you can fade support. In those circumstances where people are capable of doing employment tasks, but need one to one or frequent support regardless of the job match, you may want to work with your funders to find what level of support is available. For example, a workplace personal assistant may be more appropriate than a job coach.

One strategy for providing frequent support throughout a work shift by a staff member for individuals with high support needs is to use a ***dispersed cluster approach*** to job placements, if possible. That is, individualized job placements are sought in businesses that are geographically proximal to each other (e.g., in a downtown area). A one person-one job match approach is still used, but the proximity of the job placements allows a job coach to rotate among the sites to provide regular, ongoing support.

Your state may allow and provide funding to pay the employer so that co-workers can provide supports. This is especially useful for people who require just intermittent support during their shift. See Dane County Partners with Business: [http://www.letsgettoworkwi.org/wp-](http://www.letsgettoworkwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Partners-With-Business-PowerPoint.pdf) [content/uploads/2013/06/Partners-With-Business-PowerPoint.pdf](http://www.letsgettoworkwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Partners-With-Business-PowerPoint.pdf)

**Note to Reader:** While mobile crews and enclaves fall within the supported employment umbrella, this type of employment is not considered competitive integrated employment. As public policy and funding streams become exclusively focused on competitive integrated employment, it is not recommended that providers invest in developing mobile crews or enclaves. Mobile crew and enclaves are rarely a good match for every person, they typically require continuous on-site supervision by a staff member from the agency, they interfere with the development of natural supports, and they congregate and segregate the workers. In the end, it takes more time and effort to find individual jobs for each person that was placed in an enclave or work crew. The preferred method to get individuals into the community is by placing them in competitive integrated employment through the one person, one job approach.

### Building Natural Supports - Defining the Job Coach Role

A key skill for your employment staff will be the art of facilitating ***natural supports***, which begins from the moment staff negotiate a job with an employer. Natural supports include (but are not limited to) receiving cues and support from coworkers without disabilities. In essence, coworkers without disabilities start taking the place of job coaches naturally over time. This is similar to the idea of coworkers on the same team meeting or talking throughout the day to brainstorm, motivate and keep each other on task. If a person is going to become an integrated part of the workforce, the employer needs to see the person as her/his employee, who s/he and other employees are responsible for supporting, with additional Employment Specialist support, as needed. Natural supports are more likely if Employment Specialists serve as a resource to the employer but do not in any way replace the employer, managers and co-workers.

Visual materials and technology are great ways to build the independence of supported employees, and thus reduce the need for job coach or co-worker support. Adaptations, modifications, and technology supports might include work task checklists, pictures of tasks in the order they need to be accomplished,

labeled bins for finished and unfinished work, an iPhone set with times that certain tasks should be started, and apps developed to help people move through tasks.

### Career Advancement

In our very mobile society, few people stay in the same job all of their lives. Many people want variety, new experiences, and new challenges. As you transform your organization, think ahead so you can structure services that will support people to continue to grow.

As part of long term supports and ongoing assessment activities, your team can be checking in with people to see how they feel about their current jobs. Do they need or want to make more money? Is the job still satisfying? Do they want to develop new skills and take on more challenges? Can they accomplish those things in their current work place or do they need to look for a new or additional job? You may need to work with your funding sources to advocate for funding to help the person receive renewed job training or find a new or additional job. Keep in mind that Vocational Rehabilitation can serve people with disabilities who desire career advancement, even if they already hold a competitive integrated job. Medicaid HCBS funding for supported employment can also be used to support people to achieve career advancement, if a state adopts a definition for supported employment services that includes career advancement.

### Self-employment

For some people self-employment is a good option. For self-employment to be successful, it is important to determine a need in the community and help develop a business plan. Self-employment may be a good option when:

* A person lives in a community with few employers.
* The individual has a particular marketable skill for which there is an unmet need in the business community.
* The person has or can acquire funds to purchase equipment that is valuable to other businesses or people in the community.
* The person has many conditions for employment but can offer something of value either through skills, equipment, or ability to learn valuable tasks.
* The person has a very engaged and supportive family that is interested in assisting their family member to develop and sustain self-employment.

Self-employment can be an exciting path to fulfilling dreams and achieving independence. As your team helps people explore this option, they will want to keep in mind a number of considerations and pull in a number of resources. Questions to consider include:

* Does the individual have the wherewithal to manage the business by themselves? If not, who will assist? Just like other self-employed individuals, many individuals with disabilities will need support in navigating the small business and tax reporting requirements and some people will need help with business finances and management, and organizing the work flow and tasks. If the small business generates enough income, these supports can be purchased. If not, business partners, family or support staff will likely need to assist.
* Can you bring in a benefits counselor to help maximize the resources available for the business through incentives offered by the Social Security Administration?
* What equipment or start-up costs are there, and what are the grants available for equipment and start up?
* What are the person’s transportation needs and what resources and funding are available? There can be a big difference in people’s transportation needs, for example a person operating their own delivery service and a person doing data entry from home have very different transportation needs.

You can help people pursue a goal of self-employment with or without supported employment, and with or without customized employment, depending on the individual’s needs. For more information about customized self-employment, see: <http://www.griffinhammis.com/selfemployment.html>

### Having a Process in Place if People Lose Their Jobs

A major concern for people, their families, and professionals who support individuals who are thinking about employment is the very practical question about what will happen if and when the person loses their job. The recent ups and downs in the economy only underscore the need to think about job replacement when structuring your services, and to advocate with your funders to respond to this concern.

People who can manage their days independently will be concerned about the financial aspects of losing their job and about finding a new job as quickly as possible. You will want to think about moving them to the top of your waiting list if VR job development services are the best way to help them find a new job. In some places, job development for people who have lost their jobs will be funded by HCBS services. In that case, if they have been receiving support services you may want to ensure that they are re-assigned to staff with job development responsibilities.

People who are less independent or less able to organize their lives may need a way to structure their days if they lose their job. As an agency, have a plan in place for if/when jobs are lost. Once again, individuals should move to the head of the line for job replacement services rather than return to the workshop or stay home. The ideal might be to have a wrap-around community based vocational program that will help the person develop additional experience, skills and contacts in the community and serve as a supplementary program for people who are working part-time. If you don’t have funding for a community vocational or community based day program, you may want to advocate with your government funders to help you create such a program for people who are working part time or have lost their jobs.

## Paid internships and work try outs

Paid internships, paid work experiences and work try outs can help people gain skills, confidence, make connections, and build their resume. In many cases, the work experience itself leads to a job. In other cases, the internship can lay the ground work for a job with another business. These paid work experiences may be part of your employment program and/or your prevocational program. Funding for work try outs may be available through your State VR agency, ID/ DD agency, MH agency, or other State

agencies. Providers can also work with private donors, foundations or corporations to develop a paid internship program.

Examples of internships as a pathway to employment are included below.

**Internship Example 1-Darryl:** Darryl is a 24-year-old man who lives with his mother and father in New Jersey. In discovery, his team learned that he had developed many artistic skills and interests. He volunteered at an art gallery, enjoyed origami, and had a workshop in his basement where he had learned to use a grinder to sharpen scissors, and used a variety of other tools. Two major themes emerged from discovery – art and the use of machinery. His team based development of a paid internship on these themes. They located a machine shop that used powder coding technology to spray paint metal products. The machine shop developed a paid internship through which Darryl could learn this skill, using on the job training funds provided by VR. The paid internship has turned into a full time paid position. Darryl strips the paint off old parts and sets the powder coding machine to spray new color on the part.

*Source: The Arc, Camden, New Jersey*

**Internship Example 2-Amy:** From Not-for-Profit Internship to Paid Job at a Realty Management Firm—Amy was looking for a job for over four years. She wanted to do clerical work in a market where clerical jobs are hard to come by. Amy interned at a not-for profit that worked side by side with her provider agency to find tasks that would give Amy the opportunity to develop skills. She impressed her supervisors, who gave her a glowing recommendation. Amy was paid through VR work experience funds. She received job coaching for the first several weeks of this internship. With this addition to her resume, Amy obtained a job working 30 hours a week for a realty management firm and has now been in that job for over two years.

*Source: Job Path, New York City*

## Volunteering and unpaid internships

Volunteering and unpaid internships help everyone build skills, make connections, and build a resume. Providers should encourage business and not-for-profit partners to use the same federal and state laws, regulations and guidelines that apply to all individuals for their consumers with disabilities. Your city or town may also have local rules and ordinances for volunteering and unpaid internships. Government agencies that can provide guidance are: U.S. Department of Labor: <http://webapps.dol.gov/elaws/whd/flsa/docs/volunteers.asp>

Also, check with your State Departments of Labor.

## Beneficial Employment Related Activities for Job Seekers

We recommend that you develop new services or reorganize current services to help people who are seeking jobs, or people who have obtained part-time jobs, to engage in community activities that will enhance their skills, build confidence, further develop interests, and give them additional opportunities to develop relationships with other members of the community.

Employment related activities can range from utilization of the resources at the local American Job Center, informational interviews with employers to short-term job shadowing, volunteering, unpaid internships, participation in community interest groups, and recreational activities that build confidence, independence and connections in the community. The goal of developing opportunities in the community is finding places and activities where people have a chance to develop their own skills and interests and their own individual interactions and relationships with community members. There is a big difference between being a “regular” versus a visitor in the community. It is not good enough to arrange for a group of people, even a relatively small group, to make isolated visits to community settings. Instead, individualized approaches must be made to match people’s interests and desires with opportunities in the community, and to facilitate engagement, membership, and natural supports.

Person-centered planning is the starting point for this work. You may want to engage in a discovery process, such as the process used for customized employment, to uncover the best way a person can make a valued contribution in the community. But remember that planning is only a first step. Putting the plan into action is what really counts. Also remember that employment related activities do not take the place of a real job, and should not be the ultimate, end-goal but rather a means to competitive integrated employment or to augment employment that may not be full-time. You will want to ensure that competitive integrated employment remains the goal for each person engaged in these employment related community based activities.

Once you have located opportunities, it is important for your staff to keep an eye out for ways that you can build natural supports and fade staff support. This increases the likelihood that people will develop professional relationships that will be helpful to them in finding a job or advancing a career. Training staff to learn how to fade supports will be a major component of any community vocational and day program. Knowing when to step back is the difference between being a bridge to the community and creating an artificial wall between the individual and the community.

How supports for these employment related community based activities look in your agency will depend on staffing, funding, potential community partnerships, and your own ingenuity. Some important elements to consider in providing such programs are:

***Learn about people’s interests*** – As part of the discovery process, team members can identify possible volunteer, social and recreational activities.

***Matching individuals into pairs or small groups based on interests, geography and support needs*** *-* If you do not have funding for one-to-one support, you will need to work with small groupings of individuals (e.g., 2-3 people) based on interests, level of support needs, and geographic location. Avoid taking larger groups out in the community, as doing so reinforces stigma and stereotypes and impedes natural interactions with community members. It will be important to develop a thoughtful approach to

matching individuals based on compatible personalities, interests and schedules. It is also beneficial to reach critical mass, in terms of numbers of individuals served, as soon as feasible in order to increase the options for matching individuals and thus improve the quality of the matches that are made. Remember that individuals do not have to be matched with the same people at all times. They can be matched with different individuals on different days, depending on the specific activities they will be involved in at any given time.

***Community mapping*** – Scope out the people, organizations and resources in the community that you may tap into. Think about which staff live in particular neighborhoods, partnerships you already have in particular geographic areas, and new partnerships you may want to explore. Develop a way to catalogue information for future use. A searchable database can be a great resource to avoid staff duplicating prior mapping efforts. Sometimes, an agency will identify a member of staff (or volunteer) to act as a temporary or permanent community mapper, researching all of the neighborhoods, cities, towns and villages where the agency supports people.

***Creative Scheduling*** - You will want organized, committed staff members to bring individual interests and needs together with community mapping to develop a schedule for each person, or if necessary, a schedule for small groups of individuals supported by staff. The success of this effort will determine whether your agency’s services help individuals further develop their interests, build connections, and enhance their work experiences. Often, agencies will need to reassign an existing staff person (e.g. a program manager or assistant; a transportation coordinator, etc.) to handle scheduling as the number of people served grows.

***Ensuring sufficient oversight and supervision for direct support staff*** *-* Direct support staff will benefit from supervision and support to locate community resources and activities and meet the needs and interests of all the individuals they support.

***Fading supports –*** Like employment supports, you will want to facilitate natural supports from day one and fade paid supports for individuals in community based activities. This will look different for each person. For example, it may mean assisting with transportation to get to activities, but relying on natural supports once s/he is there. Fading supports will give people opportunities for independence and to develop their own relationships in the community. In addition, fading supports will open up staff time to serve others. Examples of community-based supports include:

* Staff accompany an individual(s) to shadow particular types of workers on a job.
* Staff work with a person to develop questions for an informational interview, but the person goes to the informational interview on their own.
* An individual volunteers with one-to-one staff support, but after an initial period, the person continues to volunteer with natural supports.
* Staff accompany several individuals to a not-for profit setting where each person volunteering is involved in unique tasks in separate areas where they develop their own relationships.
* One or two individuals join a choir with support from a staff member, who then fades after they get acclimated to expectations.
* Two people who need support to go to the movies are able to go to the movies together and provide each other with the support they need

*Resources and events for gaining creative ideas about community inclusion:*

* TASH conference (www.tash.org)
* Toronto Summer Institute ([www.inclusion.com/workshops.html](http://www.inclusion.com/workshops.html))
* Hoff, D., De Biase, C., Sasnett, G. Ensuring Excellence in Community-Based Day Supports: A Guide for Service Providers and Staff, at <http://www.communityinclusion.org/>
* Walker, P. & Rogan, P. (2007). Make the day matter: Promoting typical lifestyles for
* Adults with significant disabilities. Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing Co.
* Messenger, G. & Mills, L. (2005). Sharing Community: Strategies, Tips and Lessons Learned from Experiences of Community Building at Options. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing. See:<http://inclusion.com/bksharingcommunity.html>or <http://www.optionsmadison.com/publications>

## Helping Individuals and Their Families Navigate Benefits and Employment

For people who receive SSI, SSDI, Medicaid or Medicare, effectively coordinating work earnings with their benefit eligibility is central to ensuring that they and their families maximize their incomes. Some people will be reluctant to start working unless they understand that they will do better economically. They will want to know that their benefits will still be there if they lose their jobs. The more people understand how the benefit system supports and encourages employment outcomes, the more likely it will be that they will be willing to pursue competitive integrated employment. The following suggestions can help people understand benefits:

* Develop an ongoing relationship with a work incentives benefits counselor. Look for a benefits counselor from your local or regional WIPA. State and not-for-profit agencies are funded as WIPA projects (Work Incentives Planning and Assistance). You can search for a local WIPA at<http://www.choosework.net/resource>
* Build staff knowledge about the relationship between benefits and work. Staff do not need to be work incentive benefits counselors to have a solid understanding of Social Security and Medicaid incentives. Good ways to build that knowledge include:
  + Start by having a work incentive benefits counselor come to talk to your staff.
  + Have your employment team and case managers (if you have case managers) read or review key sections of the Social Security Redbook. The Redbook is online at [https://ssa.gov/redbook/.](https://ssa.gov/redbook/) Sections to review include SSDI and SSI employment supports, SSDI only employment supports, SSI only employment supports, and Medicaid Buy-In.
  + Review web based resources about work incentives. For example, see the WISE webinar at site of Cornell Institute on Employment and Disability [http://www.edi.cornell.edu/m-cessi- webinars.cfm](http://www.edi.cornell.edu/m-cessi-webinars.cfm)
* Your team can go with people to meet work incentive benefits counselors so they can learn side by side, and help people ask questions and understand the information provided.

Virginia Commonwealth University’s National Training Center offers training and certification for Certified Work Incentives Counselors (CWICs). See: <http://www.vcuntc.org/training/initial.cfm>

Cornell’s Employment and Disability Institute offers courses in work incentive sand certification for Certified Work Incentives Counselors. See: <http://www.edionline.org/courses>

## An Overview of Some Work-Related Benefits Strategies

### 1619(b)

One of the biggest concerns that people have about going to work is that they will lose their Medicaid coverage, including the support services they get through Medicaid. The Social Security Act provides protection for people who have been receiving SSI and have begun to work. People can qualify for continued Medicaid coverage if they meet a number of basic requirements including:

* Have been eligible for an SSI cash payment for at least 1 month
* Still meet the disability requirement
* Still meet all other non-disability SSI requirements other than income
* Need Medicaid benefits to continue to work
* Have gross earnings that are insufficient to replace SSI, Medicaid and publicly funded attendant care services.

Each State has established a threshold income below which a person can qualify for Medicaid coverage even if their income is too high to receive SSI. If a person has gross earnings higher than this amount, the Social Security Administration can figure an individual threshold amount based on a number of considerations. For a full explanation of 1619(b), see: <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/1619b.htm>and The Redbook chapter on SSI Only Employment Supports.

### Medicaid Buy-In

In many States, through the Medicaid Buy-In Program, working individuals with disabilities can maintain their Medicaid even if their income is above the Medicaid income limits. The Social Security Redbook provides a summary of this opportunity. See the Redbook chapter on Health Care for Persons with Disabilities.

### Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS Plan)

A ***PASS Plan*** is a method by which a person with a disability can set aside money and things he or she owns to pay for items or services that he or she needs to achieve a work goal. These items include supplies to start a business, school expenses, equipment and tools, transportation, and job coaching supports. *The result is that the income set aside is not counted when calculating the amount a person receives in SSI and is not counted toward resources*. Benefits counselors, VR counselors and others experts can help people set up a PASS plan. If your staff are knowledgeable, they can help people set up a PASS Plan. Details about how to set up a PASS plan are included in the Redbook section on SSDI and SSI Employment Supports. Griffin Hammis is a consultant agency that has expertise in using PASS plans to support employment goals. See <http://www.griffinhammis.com/socialsecurity.html>

### Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE)

The Social Security Administration will deduct the cost of certain ***impairment related work expenses*** that people need in order to work from gross earnings when determining if they are earning over the substantial gainful activity level. This can enable people to maintain their SSDI while working or continue to receive a larger portion of their SSI when working. This gives them extra income to cover items and services they need to maintain their job. To be deductible the items and services must be: 1) required for the person to be able to work; 2) required because of a mental or physical disability; 3) not reimbursable by any other source; and 4) a reasonable cost. There is a wide range of items that can be deductible so staff should become familiar with this opportunity. Items can include transportation, personal care attendants, medication, and medical equipment. A table of the items can be found in the Redbook chapter on SSDI and SSI Employment Supports.

ABLE Act Accounts[*18*](#_bookmark137)

Be sure to check whether ABLE accounts are available in your state. ABLE Accounts are tax-advantaged savings accounts for individuals with disabilities and their families. ABLE Accounts were federally approved through the passage of the Stephen Beck Jr., Achieving a Better Life Experience Act of 2014, better known as the ABLE Act. The beneficiary of the account can be a person with a disability who acquired his/her disability before the age of 26. Income earned by the account will not be taxed.

Contributions to the account made by any person (the account beneficiary, family and friends) are made using post-taxed dollars and are typically not tax deductible, although some states may allow for state income tax deductions for contribution made to an ABLE account. For the first time, eligible individuals and their families are allowed to establish ABLE savings accounts ***that will not affect their eligibility for SSI, Medicaid and other public benefits***. The legislation explains further that an ABLE account will, with the private savings accrued in the account, "secure funding for disability-related expenses on behalf of designated beneficiaries with disabilities that will supplement, but not supplant, benefits provided through private insurance, Medicaid, SSI, the beneficiary's employment and other sources." This is an excellent vehicle for saving earned income while not jeopardizing the availability of critical support services available through Medicaid.

18 <http://www.ablenrc.org/>

# Conclusion

This manual reflects best practices that have been developed over the course of the past 40 years, with an emphasis on the most up-to-date and effective practices that are relevant in today’ environment where we see a tremendous acceleration toward competitive integrated employment and inclusive community supports. The manual is a synthesis of the knowledge and experience that the authors, their colleagues and numerous provider organizations across the country have gained in transforming organizations, and the public systems that fund them, so that individuals with disabilities, including those with complex support needs, can get and keep competitive integrated employment in their communities.

Clearly, there is no one way for organizations to implement a transformational change process, but we hope that the practices described in this manual – practices that are considered “tried and true” among those who make this topic their life’s work – will assist you in your efforts. Be sure to tap the many resources cited in this document, as well as experts and mentors who can provide guidance on your journey.

We urge you to advocate for and enact positive change with a sense of urgency. Be part of the exciting Employment First movement that is underway toward true systems change and full lives in the community for all individuals with disabilities. As Margaret Mead said, “Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world. For, indeed, that’s all who ever have.”