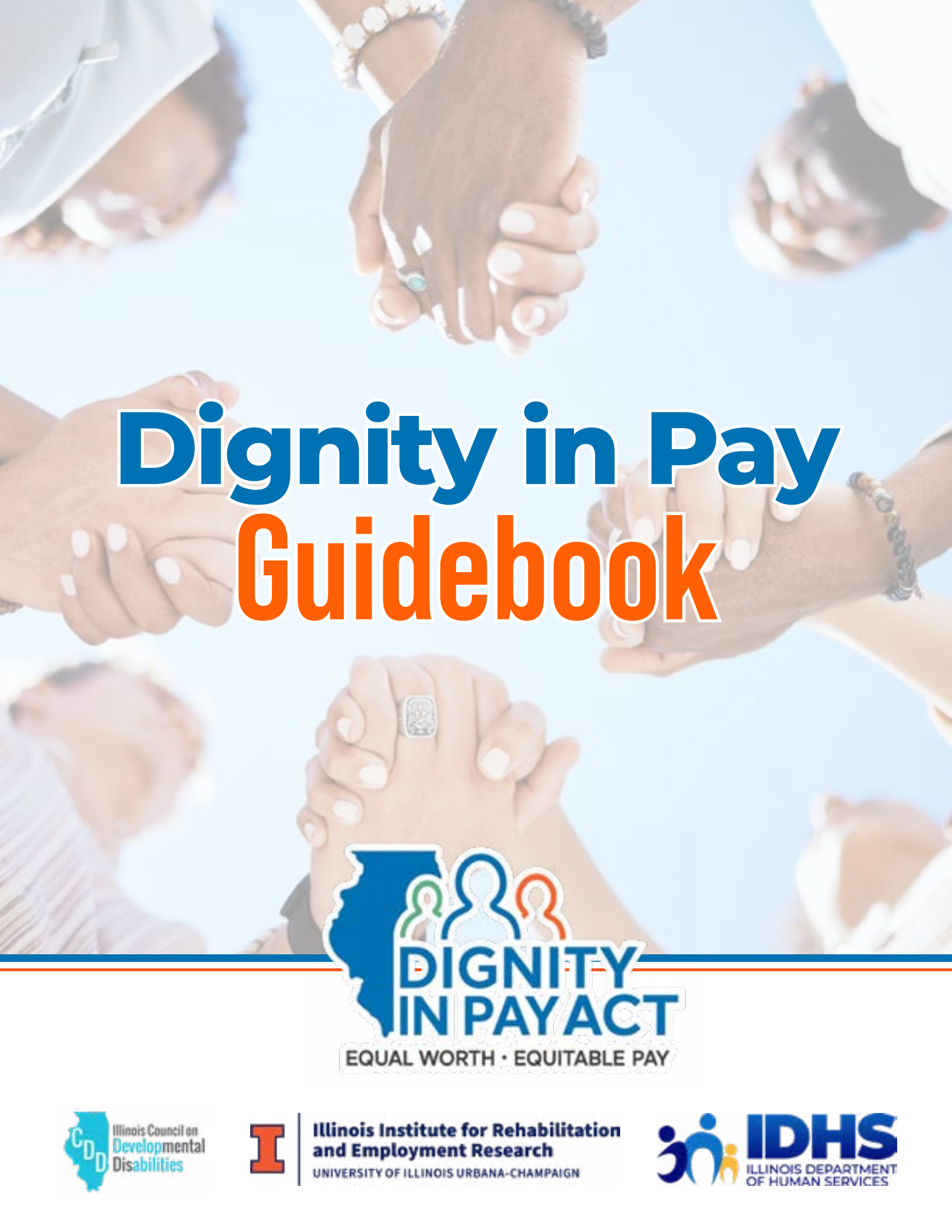




Dignity in Pay Guidebook



Published March 2026

Disclaimer

This project was supported by funding from Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (IDHS-DDD). Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDHS-DDD.





Introduction

The Dignity in Pay (DiP) Handbook is a hands-on tool to help leaders, managers, and staff as they sunset 14(c) subminimum wage activities as required by the Illinois Dignity in Pay Act. These changes mean providers must think in new ways about their services, jobs, and workplaces. The goal is to support **fair pay, community jobs, and meaningful day activities**.

How to Use this Guide

The DiP Handbook helps providers make changes to necessary to sunset 14c, subminimum wage work, and expand meaningful work opportunities for the individuals they serve. The handbook provides clear **strategies, tools, and decision-making frameworks** and explains that real change takes planning, teamwork, and action—not just good intentions or small changes.

The guide is made for different roles:

- **Leaders** will learn how to match their mission and goals with Dignity in Pay and community integrated activities, including work.
- **Managers and supervisors** will find tools to help staff through change and set new expectations.
- **Direct support and field staff** will get clear, practical ideas for their daily work. These ideas show how their work helps individuals earn fair pay, be part of the community, and find jobs.

The handbook also understands that change looks different in different places. Rural, suburban, and urban areas have different jobs, transportation options, and community supports. The DiP Handbook helps providers think about what will work best where they live while stressing clear and accessible communication, working together, celebrating small successes, and being honest about challenges.

The DiP Handbook is not meant to sit on a shelf. It is **meant to be used, revisited, and adapted** as providers move through the Dignity in Pay transition. The guide helps build systems that value individuals with disabilities, support strong communities, and lead to long-term success in community jobs and meaningful participation.

Guiding Concepts

Work and Well-Being

As humans, we all want to move about this world feeling **fulfilled, happy, and important**. Many factors contribute to our sense of worth, such as our relationships, holding a valued role (often through work), rituals and routines (both personal and cultural), pace of life (not too fast or with too many challenges, not too slow and not enough challenge), things to do and places to go, and things to have. Many of these human factors can be fostered and developed through **meaningful work**.

Work is any activity that requires effort and skill, which can be **paid or unpaid**.

While **all employment is work, not all work is employment**.

No Work

- Decreased mental and physical health
- Increased mortality
- Long lasting physical and psychological effects
- Negative impacts on family

With Work

- Improved health
- Autonomy
- Personal growth
- Positive relationships
- Purpose in life
- Self-acceptance

We know **those who do not engage in meaningful work experience decreased mental and physical health**, they die sooner, they experience long-lasting effects, and their families feel negative impacts (financial strain, unstable relationships). We also know that individuals who work experience improved health (less illness, more compliant with treatment of medical conditions, **more likely to engage in wellness**—diet, exercise, and are safer). Individuals who work have a sense of autonomy (being their own person), **experience personal growth and positive relationships, and feel an overall purpose in life**.

Presumed Competence

Presumed competence means we believe a person can learn, contribute, communicate, and work even if we cannot see these skills right away. Presumed competence starts with believing that a person can learn, contribute, communicate, and regardless of their label, test scores, or past struggles. Presumed competence is an ethical stance, one that sets high expectations for individuals and understands when given appropriate supports, growth and success is possible.

Presumed competence does not assume success without time to learn or adapt. We focus on how to help someone succeed, not on whether they can. Work becomes something we expect and support, not something only a few individuals are allowed to try.

Why this matters: Presumed competence is important because it opens doors. When we believe in individuals, we give them chances instead of leaving them out.





DIGNITY IN PAY ACT

The Dignity in Pay Act (P.A. 103-1060) requires the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities (ICDD), and the Illinois Department of Labor to lead a responsible and gradual 5-year process to expand employment options for people with disabilities and phase out 14(c) subminimum wage authorizations in Illinois, with the goal of eliminating the practice entirely by the end of 2029.



In addition to ending subminimum wage, the legislation provides supportive measures such as transition funding, technical assistance, and initiatives to expand competitive integrated employment (CIE). Together, these efforts aim to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to meaningful employment and receive full, equitable compensation for their work.





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Table of Contents

Field Staff Guide

Person-Centered Planning (PCP)	1
--------------------------------	---

Assessment Strategies	10
-----------------------	----

Community Mapping	18
-------------------	----

Individual Training & Skill Development	27
---	----

Employer Engagement	35
---------------------	----

Appendix	45
----------	----

Table of Contents

Sections



Key Concepts



Impacts and Challenges



Addressing Challenges



Geographic Considerations



How to Implement



Roles and Responsibilities



Data Driven Decision



Resources

Additional resources are listed in the appendix and can be accessed on the Dignity in Pay website
<https://icdd.illinois.gov/dignity-in-pay-act.html>.

Key Acronyms

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act

CARF: Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities

CMS: Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services

DiP: Dignity in Pay

DoL: Department of Labor

DCEO: Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

DDD: Division on Developmental Disabilities

DHS: Department of Health Services

DRS: Division of Rehabilitation Services

ES: Employment Specialist

HCBS: Home and Community-Based Services

ICDD: Illinois Council for Developmental Disabilities

IIRER: Illinois Institute for Rehabilitation and Employment Research

ISBE: Illinois State Board of Education

SOP: Standard Operating Procedure



Person-Centered Planning (PCP)

Person-centered planning (PCP) helps empower individuals with disabilities to make their own choices and take control of their lives. Person-centered planning is grounded in the belief that all individuals have strengths, preferences, and the capacity to grow when provided appropriate opportunities and supports.

Through the PCP process, a plan is developed that supports the person with disabilities' vision for their future and their personal goals. Holding PCP meetings allows for the improvement in social networks of individuals with disabilities, such as a higher involvement in group activities and with family or friends, potentially resulting in as high as a 40% increase in contact with friends or family.



Key Concepts

The core principles of person-centered planning are self-determination and informed choice, strength-based focus, whole person focus, community inclusion, individualized supports, dignity and presumed competence, partnership and collaboration, and ongoing living process.

1 Self-Determination and Informed Choice

Self-determination is the power to **set your own goals** and **make your own choices**, deciding the path of your own future. Informed choice means that a person is given clear, understandable information and the support they need to make decisions about their own life.

2 Strengths-Based Focus

Strengths-based focus is an approach that emphasizes what the person can do, what the person enjoys, and **what the person contributes** - rather than their deficits, diagnosis, or limitations.

3 Whole Person Focus

Having a whole-person focus helps account for **where a person has been, where they are now, and where they want to go** in the future, keeping in mind that goals evolve over time. Employment is part of a broader life context, not an isolated service outcome.

4 Community Inclusion

Prioritizes **full participation** in typical community settings, not just physical presence. Includes access to the workplace **alongside individuals without disabilities**, opportunities for social interaction and contribution, and roles that are valued by the community.

5 Individualized Supports

Rejects a one-size-fits-all approach to programming. Instead, having **individualized supports** allows the supports to be **tailored to the individual** and can be **adapted as needs change**. Some examples of individualized supports include a job coach, assistive technology, modified tasks/schedules, and more.

6 Dignity of Risk

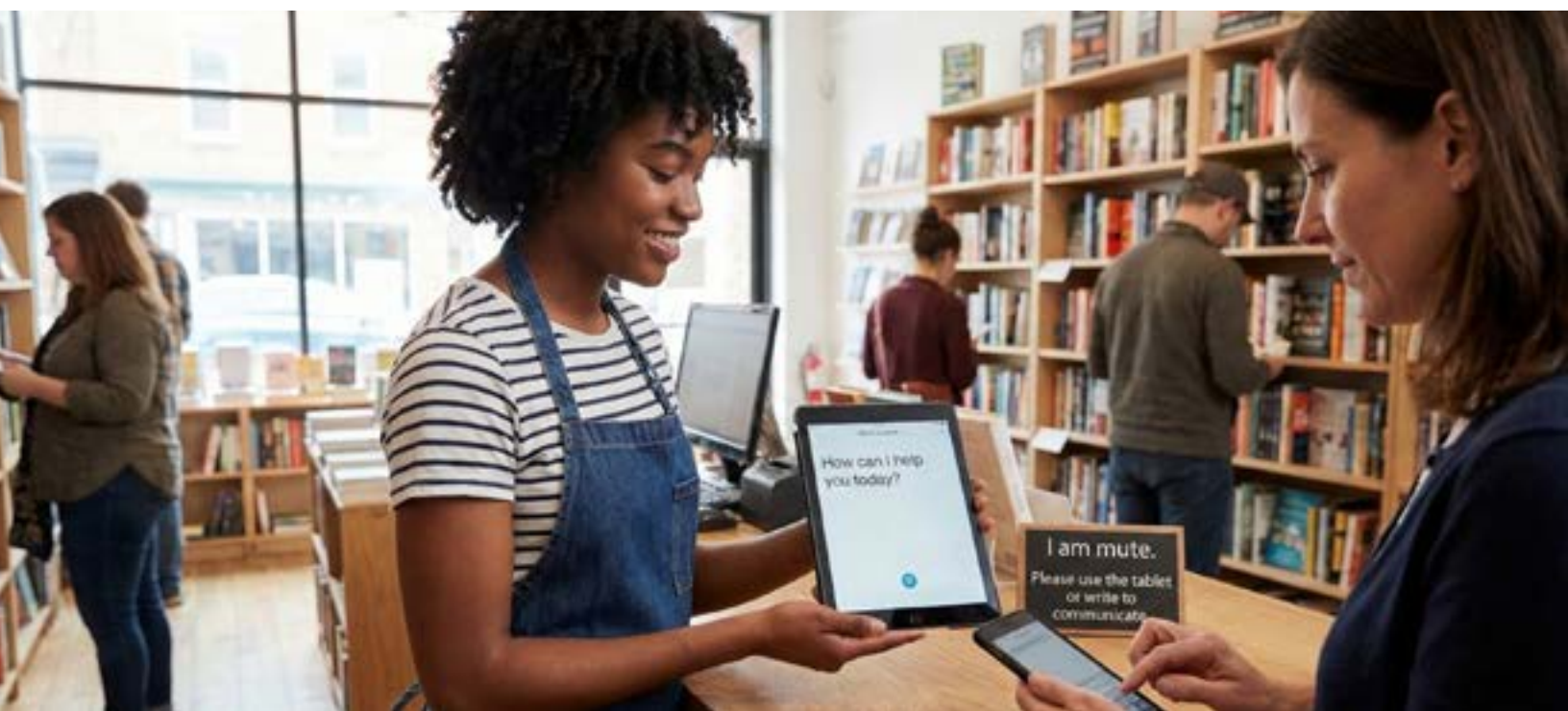
Growth requires **opportunity**, and opportunity **includes risk**. This includes allowing individuals to **try new roles**, while supporting them and informing them about risk-taking. This helps reinforce that we can learn from our mistakes, rather than prevent them.

7 Partnership and Collaboration

Ensures that planning is **coordinated**, **responsive**, and **aligned** across systems. This helps reduce fragmentation and duplication of services.

8 Ongoing Living Process

The plan is not a one-time document, but a **dynamic guide that grows and changes with the person**. It reflects the individual's evolving goals, preferences, strengths, and support needs over time.





Impact and Challenges

There are many benefits to engaging in Person-centered planning. One known benefit of PCP is the insight it provides into vocational interest, values, and other aspects of a person's vocational identity, as well as increased tenure and overall satisfaction in employment. Challenges can include making sure PCP is not driven by funding, staffing, or legacy services, and managing a process that can sometimes feel lengthy or paperwork-heavy.



Impacts

- **Centers** the individual's values, preferences, and goals
- **Supports** meaningful, person-driven employment planning
- **Promotes** choice, autonomy, and self-determination

Challenges

- Avoiding program-, funding-, or staffing-driven decisions
- Shifting away from legacy service models
- Managing a process that can be time- and paperwork-heavy



Addressing Challenges: Real Solutions

Person-centered planning works best when systems adapt to individuals, not the other way around. Practical strategies help teams stay focused on individual goals while reducing burden and maintaining compliance.

Challenge	★ Practical Solutions ★
Avoiding program-, funding-, or staffing-driven decisions	• Start planning with the person's goals before discussing services • Train staff to ask "What does the person want?" before "What do we offer?" • Document goals first and align funding afterward
Shifting away from legacy service models	• Provide staff training on Employment First and presumed competence • Use peer mentoring and success stories • Pilot new approaches with a small group before scaling
Managing a time intensive and paperwork heavy process	• Use simple planning tools and visual supports • Focus documentation on decisions and next steps rather than long narratives • Split planning into shorter conversations instead of one long meeting





Geographical Considerations

Area	Key Barriers
Rural	• Limited employers and job variety • Transportation distance • Fewer support services
Suburban	• Transportation gaps between housing and jobs • Employer misconceptions • Fragmented services
Urban	• High competition for jobs • Complex transit systems • Larger caseloads
Facility-Based	• Segregation from community • Limited skill transfer • Low expectations • Funding tied to attendance
Community-Based	• Staff coordination challenges • Safety and logistics concerns • Variable schedules

Key Opportunities	Engagement Strategies
• Strong community relationships • Stable local employers • Personalized employer engagement	• Build relationships with small businesses • Leverage flexible job carving • Coordinate transportation solutions • Use community champions
• Diverse employers • Growing service and retail sectors • Access to regional transit	• Partner with chambers of commerce • Target clusters of employers • Align schedules with transit options • Educate employers on supports
• Wide range of employers • Strong public transportation • Access to training resources	• Focus on niche job matches • Leverage transit training • Partner with workforce systems and large employers
• Predictable routines • Opportunity for skill discovery and transition planning	• Use facility time for discovery and planning • Shift activities into the community • Retrain staff for community-based roles
• Real-world learning • Stronger employment outcomes • HCBS compliance	• Use discovery and work-based learning • Build employer partnerships • Individualize supports and schedules

How to Implement Person-Centered Planning



1. Start with Shared Values and Expectations

Purpose	To create a common understanding that person-centered planning is about honoring individual choice, presumed competence, and meaningful outcomes —especially employment and community inclusion.
Strategies	• Provide brief training on PCP and Employment First values • Use real examples and success stories to show person-centered outcomes • Set clear expectations that planning starts with the person, not services • Model person-centered language in meetings and documentation
Guiding Questions	• What does being “person-centered” look like in our daily practice? • Are we starting with the person’s goals before discussing services? • How are we reinforcing presumed competence in our decisions?

2. Build Staff Capacity for Person-Centered Facilitation

Purpose	To ensure staff have the skills to listen, support communication, and facilitate planning that reflects the individual’s voice.
Strategies	• Train staff in active listening and open-ended questioning • Teach supported decision-making techniques • Provide coaching and feedback during planning meetings • Offer tools such as visual supports or plain-language prompts
Guiding Questions	• How does this person prefer to communicate their ideas? • What supports will help the person participate fully? • Am I listening more than I am talking?

3. Use Discovery to Learn about the Person

Purpose	To understand the person's strengths, interests, routines , and support needs through real-life observation and conversation.
Strategies	• Observe the person in home, community, or work-like settings • Talk with the person and individuals who know them well • Explore what makes a “good day” and a “bad day” • Document patterns that show conditions for success
Guiding Questions	• What activities does the person enjoy and engage in? • What strengths show up in everyday life? • What environments or supports help the person succeed?

4. Translate Discovery into Clear, Person-Driven Goals

Purpose	To turn what is learned into goals that reflect what is meaningful to the person and guide action.
Strategies	• Write goals in plain, positive language • Connect goals directly to strengths and interests • Focus on outcomes, not services • Break goals into achievable short-term steps
Guiding Questions	• Does this goal reflect what the person wants? • Is the goal understandable to the person and their team? • How does this goal move the person toward employment or community inclusion?

5. Design Individualized Supports and Next Steps

Purpose	To ensure the plan leads to action by identifying supports, responsibilities, and timelines .
Strategies	• Identify specific supports and accommodations needed • Assign clear roles to staff, family, and partners • Plan real-world experiences to try next steps • Schedule regular check-ins to review and adjust the plan
Guiding Questions	• What supports will help the person succeed right now? • Who is responsible for each next step? • When and how will we review progress and make changes?



Data Driven Decisions

Focusing on these six PCP measures helps providers deliver person-centered services more efficiently, improve employment outcomes, and strengthen long-term organizational sustainability.

Data Collected	Insight	Business and Operational Impact
Individual Strengths, Interests, and Goals	What motivates individuals and where services should focus	Better job matches, higher participation, improved outcomes
Functional & Capital Skills	What individuals can do now	Faster movement to employment and reduced service time
Support Needs & Accommodations	What supports actually work	More efficient staffing and better cost control
Learning Style & Pace	Individuals, families, employers, & Community	Increased staff efficiency and reduced retraining
Progress & Outcomes	How supports should be delivered	Data-driven improvements and stronger performance reporting
Satisfaction & Capital Choice Feedback	Whether services are effective	Higher satisfaction, stronger reputation, and funder confidence



Assessment Strategies

Assessment strategies are important tools that help support individuals with disabilities as they prepare for adult life and work. These tools help **identify a person's preferences, support needs, and skill levels**. They also show which strategies have worked well in the past. It is important to remember that an assessment shows only how a person is doing at one point in time. To get a full picture, **results should be combined with ongoing observation** and understanding. This helps create a more accurate and personalized plan for learning and growth.

Assessment IS

- ✓ Tool for learning and discovery
- ✓ Explores supports needed
- ✓ Defines conditions for success
- ✓ Results used to open pathways



Assessment IS NOT

- ✗ Predicting if someone can work
- ✗ A screening tool for eligibility
- ✗ A tool for exclusion
- ✗ Identifying what a person cannot do



Key Concepts

Vocational Assessments

The six core principles of a person-centered vocational assessment help us understand **how an individual can succeed at work**. These principles show that an assessment is not just one test, but a process that looks at **what a person enjoys, what they are good at, how they learn, and what help they need**. Together, they help connect individuals to jobs that fit their skills, goals, and place in the community.

Discovery-Based Assessment

is a person-centered approach to understanding an **individual's strengths, interests, skills, and support needs** through observation and exploration in **real-life contexts** rather than standardized testing alone. Discovery-based assessments captures how individuals perform in natural environments, how they learn, what motivates them, and what supports are effective, revealing conditions for success.

Functional and Transferable Skills refer to the **practical abilities and experiences** that individuals use to navigate daily life; things that can be applied across a wide range of work settings. **Functional skills** include **observable, real-world abilities** such as completing tasks, following routines, communicating needs, managing time, problem-solving, and interacting with others. **Transferable skills** are those gained through **everyday activities**—such as household responsibilities, school, volunteering, hobbies, or community involvement—that can be adapted to different jobs and roles.

Strength-Based Assessments

focus on what an individual **can do, what they enjoy doing, and how they can contribute**, rather than focusing on their perceived limitations or deficits. This approach **recognizes skills and capacities** that may be demonstrated through everyday activities, interests, relationships, and lived experiences—not only through formal work history or testing.

Support Needs and Accommodations

are essential components of assessment and planning, focused on **identifying what enables an individual to succeed in work and community settings**. Rather than viewing supports as signs of limitation, this approach recognizes accommodations as tools that remove barriers and create equitable access to opportunity.

Data-Driven Decision-Making ensures that assessments and planning are grounded in **clear, actionable information** rather than assumptions or convenience. Data are then used to **guide next steps**, including career direction, job development strategies, employer outreach, and support planning, while also considering local labor market trends and business needs.

Career Development and Community Contribution emphasize that employment is an evolving process **centered on growth, purpose, and belonging**, not a one-time job placement. Career development supports individuals to explore interests, build skills, and pursue opportunities that align with their strengths and long-term goals, allowing for change and advancement over time.



Impacts and Challenges

Assessments can help by showing what a person is good at and what kind of help they might need. They can also help **match individual with jobs that fit their skills and interests** and guide learning and planning for the future. Some challenges are making sure assessments work for everyone, training staff to use them well, and choosing the right kind of assessment for each person.

Impacts	• Shows an individual’s strengths and where they need support. • Connects individuals with jobs that match their skills and interests. • Guides learning, skill-building, transition and career planning.
Challenges	• Accessible assessments for everyone, including individuals who need extra support. • Training staff to give the assessments and understand the results. • Choosing the right type of assessment for each person or situation. • Teaching how to use the results to plan lessons and supports.



Addressing Challenges: Real Solutions

Addressing common challenges in assessment requires moving **beyond compliance** and **toward practical, person-centered solutions**. To work well, assessments need the right tools, training, and supports in place. Assessment results matter most when they are **used to make decisions**. When strengths, interests, and support needs clearly guide goals, supports, and next steps, individualized plans become **meaningful tools that lead to real progress and opportunity**.

Challenge	★ Practical Solutions ★
Accessible Assessments	• Use pictures, simple language, hands-on activities, performance-based measures, and extra time as needed. • Use preferred communication such as sign language and/or assistive technology.
Training Staff	• Provide ongoing training, coaching, and time to practice.
Choosing the Right Assessment	• Develop a choice matrix to describe the types of assessments available in your agency and describe when to use, why to use, and how to use. • Match the assessment to the individual's strengths, personal needs, and interests.
Implementing the Results	• Use what the person does well to develop goals. • Connect assessment findings to real activities or jobs. • Clearly list what supports are needed and how it will be provided.



Geographical Considerations

Assessment works best when strategies are **adapted to the setting**. Understanding geographic and service-context differences helps teams gather more **accurate information, reduce barriers, and create** better **pathways to meaningful work and community participation**. Effective practice requires **leveraging the strengths** of each context while intentionally addressing their limitations to ensure individuals have meaningful, varied opportunities to demonstrate skills, interests, and support needs.

Region	Barriers	Opportunities	Strategies
Rural	• Limited number of employerslong travel distances • Fewer assessment options	• Strong community relationships • Flexible job roles • Virtual job shadowing • Remote work	• Use community and daily routines as assessment • Build relationships with small employers • Combine assessment with work-based learning
Suburban	• Transportation gaps • Spread-out employers • Mixed expectations across systems	• Variety of employers • Access to regional transit • Community colleges and training sites	• Conduct assessments near transit hubs • Partner with employer clusters • Use situational assessments to clarify job fit
Urban	• Large caseloads • Competitive job market • Complex environments	• Wide range of employers • Public transportation • Many community settings	• Use real workplaces for situational assessments • Incorporate transit training into assessment • Focus on job matches
Facility-Based Programs	• Limited real-world relevance • Risk of low expectations • Skills may not transfer	• Predictable setting • Opportunity to observe learning styles and interests	• Tools such as PAES labs or skills tests may provide structured entry points • Use facility time for discovery and planning, not decision-making
Community-Based Programs	• Scheduling and logistics challenges • Staff coordination • Safety concerns	• High ecological validity • Clearer understanding of real skills and supports	• Use observation during everyday activities • Embed assessment into work-based learning and community participation

How to Implement Assessment Core Principals



1. Clarify the Purpose of Assessment

Purpose	To ensure assessment is used to learn about the person and plan next steps , not to decide if someone can work.
Strategies	• Frame assessment as discovery and exploration • Connect assessment directly to employment or life goals • Share the purpose with the individual in simple language
Guiding Questions	• What do we want to learn from this assessment? • How will this information help plan supports or next steps? • Does the person understand why we are doing this?

2. Gather Information in Real-Life Settings

Purpose	To understand how the person functions, learns, and engages in everyday environments.
Strategies	• Observe the person in home, community, or work-like settings • Use situational assessments and work-based learning • Talk with people who know the person well
Guiding Questions	• What does the person do well in real settings? • How does the environment affect success? • What conditions help or hinder participation?

3. Focus on Strengths, Interests, and Skills

Purpose	To identify what motivates the person and what skills can be built on.
Strategies	• Document strengths, interests, and motivators • Identify functional and transferable skills • Note how the person prefers to learn
Guiding Questions	• What activities does the person enjoy? • What skills show up across daily routines? • How does the person learn best?

4. Support Needs and Accommodations

Purpose	To determine what supports enable success in work and community activities.
Strategies	• Observe what supports are effective during activities • Explore accommodations and assistive technology • Identify natural supports in the environment
Guiding Questions	• What supports help the person succeed? • What barriers can be reduced or removed? • Who or what can provide support naturally?

5. Use Assessment Results to Plan Action

Purpose	To turn assessment information into clear, individualized next steps.
Strategies	• Summarize findings in plain language • Connect results to goals, supports, and activities • Adjust plans as new information is learned
Guiding Questions	• What did we learn that is most important? • How will this information shape the plan? • What are the next steps and who is responsible?



Data-Driven Decisions

Data from the assessment must be tracked, analyzed, and shared to guide instruction, support decisions about job matches and accommodations, and monitor progress towards competitive and integrated employment. Summaries of data should be accessible, with visuals and plain-language explanations.

Assessment Type	Data Collected	Impact on Individuals & Planning	Business Operational Impact
Formal Assessments (tests, standardized tools, records review)	• Baseline skills • Eligibility information • Documented needs	• Helps meet compliance requirements • Provides a starting point for planning when used carefully	• Supports authorization and compliance • Useful for documentation, but overuse can slow progress and increase costs
Informal Assessments (interviews, observations, conversations)	• Strengths • Interests • Preferences • Learning styles	• Improves person-centered goals and engagement • Helps plans reflect what matters to the person	• Reduces low-impact services • Improves service fit and staff efficiency
Situational Assessments (real-world tasks, work try-outs)	• Functional and transferable skills • Support needs • Factors for success	• Leads to more accurate job matching and clearer support strategies	• Faster movement to employment • Improved retention • Stronger employer partnerships and outcomes
Combined Use of All Three	Holistic, real-world learning of the person	• Plans are more accurate, flexible, and responsive	• Better outcomes with fewer service hours • Stronger performance metrics and sustainability



Community Mapping

Finding and keeping a job requires more than just an individual's skills or motivation, it also depends on **access to the right resources and supports**. Field staff, such as Employment Specialists (ESs) or job coaches, play a critical role in guiding individuals with disabilities along this path, especially those who face significant barriers to employment. Community resource mapping can be an important tool to **connect resources to opportunity**.

Community mapping is a way to keep track of places in the community like local employers, training programs, transportation options, support services, and other community assets. This information can help **connect job seekers to the exact resources and opportunities they desire**. This proactive strategy makes finding a job easier and builds strong supports, so individuals can keep jobs and improve their overall quality of life.



Key Concepts

Community Resource Mapping

Community mapping **helps staff find real jobs and opportunities** by focusing on **community strengths, personal interests, and relationships**. It looks at real places in the community and connects people to jobs that fit them. Because communities change, community mapping is an ongoing practice that supports long-term success at work.

Focus on Strengths

Community mapping looks at what a community *has*—jobs, businesses, people, and places—rather than what is missing.

Start with the Person

Mapping is guided by a person's interests, skills, and support needs so opportunities fit the individual, not the program.

Build Relationships

Strong connections with employers, business owners, and community members are key to finding real job opportunities.

Use Real Community Settings

The focus is on typical, integrated places where people live, work, and spend time in the community.

Keep It Ongoing

Community mapping is not done once. Communities change, so mapping is updated and used regularly to support long-term employment success.

What to Map

Mapping Options	Examples
Employment Opportunities	• Unemployment offices and American Job Centers • Division of Rehabilitation Services Offices • Corporations • Local Businesses • Public/Municipal Organizations
Education and Training Resources	• Trade Schools • Community Colleges (2-year colleges) • 4-year colleges • Apprenticeships/Internships
Transportation Infrastructure	• Public transportation • ADA/Paratransit services • Ride Sharing Options (Uber/Lyft)
Support Services	• Independent Service Coordination (ISC) agencies • Illinois Department of Human Services Office • Mental Health Counseling • Health Services • Land of Lincoln Legal Services • Centers for Independent Living
Recreation and Leisure	• Local park districts • Forest Preserves and State Parks • Special Rec and Special Olympics • Libraries • Festivals



Impact and Challenges

Giving staff time to do community mapping is very important because it helps them learn about their community and find jobs that are a good fit for the individuals they support. Community mapping **improves service quality** by helping staff find better job matches, manage their caseloads, save time, and build strong relationships with employers. It also **boosts staff confidence, professionalism, and morale**, which leads to **better outcomes for individuals**. However, it can be challenging because agencies must set aside staff time, provide training, choose the right tools, and make sure everyone uses the process the same way.

Impacts

- Better service quality and job matches.
- Improved individual outcomes and satisfaction.
- More efficient case load management and less travel time.
- Stronger employer relationships.
- Higher staff confidence, professionalism, morale, and retention.

Challenges

- Setting aside dedicated staff time.
- Training staff to do community mapping well.
- Choosing the right tools for the agency.
- Making sure the process is used consistently across all staff.





Addressing Challenges: Real Solutions

Community mapping is an important part of moving from facility-based services to community-based employment, but it does come with challenges. Providers can overcome these challenges by planning ahead, supporting staff with clear guidance, and using practical tools that fit their organization. The table below shows common challenges and simple, realistic solutions providers can use. Together, these strategies help providers reduce barriers, support staff confidence, and make community mapping a sustainable part of everyday practice.

Challenge	★ Practical Solutions ★
Finding dedicated time for community mapping	• Build community mapping into staff schedules • Treat community mapping as a core job duty, not extra work • Connect mapping time to billable CIE activities when possible
Developing and delivering staff training	• Provide short, hands-on trainings • Use real community examples • Offer coaching and refreshers instead of one-time training sessions
Choosing the right community mapping tool	• Start with simple tools (spreadsheets, shared documents, or basic databases) • Choose tools staff already know • Avoid overcomplicated systems
Using the tool consistently across the agency	• Create clear steps and expectations • Assign a lead to support consistency • Review use during team meetings and supervision



Geographical Considerations

Communities look different depending on where people live, and community mapping must match those differences. Rural areas may have fewer jobs and longer travel, suburban areas change often and are spread out, and urban areas have more jobs but more competition and access challenges. Understanding these differences helps staff focus community mapping on real, accessible job opportunities that support Competitive Integrated Employment.

Region	Barriers	Opportunities	Strategies
Rural	• Fewer jobs, fewer transportation options, and places are far apart	• Staff often know the community well and many businesses are locally owned	• Decide what you are mapping, • Talk with local leaders, • Use trusted relationships • Focus on nearby employers
Suburban	• Communities are spread out • Boundaries change • Transportation can be limited, unreliable, or have boundary limits	• New business leads to new and diverse job opportunities	• Keep maps and contact lists updated • Watch for new employers • Follow up when new jobs appear
Urban	• Many people are looking for jobs • More competition • Higher need for relationship building. • Inaccessible public transportation options	• There are many employers, job types, and transportation options	• Build strong employer relationships • Track information carefully • Ensure places are safe and accessible • Address transportation gaps
Facility-Based Programs	• Work happens inside the building • Fewer real job options • Little contact with employers	• Staff know the individuals well and can start planning next steps	• Shift time out of the building • Use interests to guide community mapping • Begin connecting to real workplaces
Community-Based Programs	• More travel • New routines • Learning how to work in many places	• Real jobs, real pay, and more chances to belong in the community	• Spend time in the community • Build employer relationships • Match jobs to individual strengths

How to Implement Community Resource Mapping



1. Prepare to Map	
Purpose	Identify who and what resources are needed to map the resources in your community
Guiding Questions	• What do you want to map? • Where do you want to map (consider your radius)? • What is the purpose of the map (e.g., Employment opportunities, recreation/leisure, governmental assistance)? • What technology will you use to map? Who can help with the map?

2. Identify Community Resources

Purpose	Identify what community resources you'd like to tap into.
Strategies	• Abstract (on foot) and concrete mapping (using an online tool) • Scanning the environment • Asset mapping
Guiding Questions	• What resources/contacts do you already have in your community? • What new resources/contacts can you make? • What are they scanning the environment for? • What should they identify as assets

3. Connect with Resources

Purpose	Identify resources and contact information. Begin to develop relationships. Look and see what overlapping services there are, and what gaps exist.
Strategies	• Questionnaires • In-person visits • Interviews • Virtual methods (e.g., Zoom/Teams calls)
Guiding Questions	• How will you communicate with the resources? • How can you learn more about the resources and the supports they offer? • How will you organize the information? How will you analyze the results? • How will you put together an action plan to connect with resources and fill gaps?

4. Match Resources to Individuals

Purpose	Identify relevant resources that align with customers' strengths, interests, and needs.
Strategies	• Pre-Matching strategies (e.g., reviewing IEPs, identifying strengths/interests, etc.) • Match resources relevant to the customer • Post-match by identifying available supports and sharing them with families
Guiding Questions	• What are the customer's strengths? • What are the customer's interests? • What are the customer's needs? • What resources align with the customer's strengths, interests, and needs?



Data Driven Decisions

Collect data that helps **connect individuals to meaningful employment and community opportunities**, while also guiding staff on how to use resources effectively. Create a database of local resources for staff to access and ensure the data is updated frequently.

Data Collected	What you Learn
Employer & Labor Market Data	• Identify businesses • Local job opportunities and hiring trends • Business needs
Education and Training Resources	• Identify education and training opportunities in the community • Identify professional development opportunities
Transportation and Accessibility Data	• Identify transportation options that exist in the community (e.g., public transportation ADA paratransit ride share options, carpooling, etc.)
Community and Support Services	• Identify Centers for Independent Living • Department of Human Services • Advocacy groups • Disability specific organizations • Social Security office
Social and Civic Opportunities	• Identify opportunities to engage with others both socially and civically (e.g. faith-based, volunteering, rotary club, etc.)



Potential Impact

- **Target** identified businesses for business outreach, job development, and relationship building.
- **Create** a database of education and training opportunities in the community.
- **Identify** gaps in education and training opportunities.
- Stay **up to date** on professional development opportunities.
- **Develop and maintain** a database of available transportation and accessibility information (e.g., cost, point-of-contact, booking process, boundaries, hours of operation, etc.).
- **Ensure** this information is **updated** quarterly.
- Develop and **maintain a database** of available resources with contact information, description of services provided and potential funding options.
- **Develop and maintain** a database of opportunities in the community.
- Include contact information and description, and targeted audience.



Individual Training and Skill Development

As providers transition from 14(c) and facility-based models, participant training must shift from production-focused tasks to **community-relevant, employment-driven skill development**. This approach strengthens employment outcomes, supports funding compliance, improves participant satisfaction, and aligns organizational practices with Employment First principles and DiP expectations.

Research shows that learning in real-world community settings helps individuals with disabilities build strong job skills and improves their chances of getting and keeping a job. These experiences teach important skills like communication, problem-solving, and how to behave professionally at work. This hands-on approach is based on best practices related to adult learning through doing. Real-world learning helps build confidence and independence.



Key Concepts

Employment-Driven, Outcome Focused

Participant training is designed to support Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) and career growth. Skill development is **directly tied to job exploration, placement, retention, and advancement**—not facility-based productivity or time-filling activities.

Individualized, Person-Centered, and Dignity in Risk

Training is **tailored to each individual's strengths, interests, culture, and support needs** through person-centered planning and discovery. Community-based, experiential learning **empowers individuals** to pursue meaningful goals, promotes independence, and challenges stereotypes, consistent with the ADA, Olmstead Ruling, and Illinois Dignity in Pay Act.

Dignity of Risk supports informed choice, growth, and resilience by encouraging individuals to try new experiences that lead to successful CIE and increased independent living skills.

Community-Based, Experiential Skill Building

Skills are developed in **community and workplace settings** where participants learn in context and build functional, transferable skills. Training is embedded in daily routines and community activities, uses appropriate assistive technology, and includes job coaching with planned fading of supports to promote independence.

Supportive, Accessible, and Collaborative Practices

Training combines instruction, coaching, accommodations, assistive technology, and natural supports.

Data-informed, collaborative approaches are used to **reduce barriers** and **support long-term success** in integrated employment and community settings.



Impact and Challenges

Community-based, person-centered, employment-driven training offers significant benefits for participants, providers, and communities, but it also presents implementation challenges. Understanding both the impact of these approaches and the barriers that may arise, along with proactive strategies to address them, helps ensure services remain effective, inclusive, and aligned with Competitive Integrated Employment and Employment First practices.

Impacts

- Stronger employment outcomes develop functional and transferable skills.
- Skills learned in real community settings easily transfer to work
- Increased individual confidence and independence.
- Training aligns with individual strengths, interests, & work goals.
- Reduced stigma and greater community inclusion.

Challenges

- Insufficient funding to support training (transportation, AT, supports).
- Staffing shortages & caseloads.
- Staff resistance.
- Employer misconceptions.
- Participant centered barriers, including transportation
- Difficulty aligning community-based activities with billable services



Addressing Challenges: Real Solutions

CHALLENGE	★ Practical Solutions ★
Insufficient or fragmented funding for training (transportation, assistive technology, and coordinated supports)	• Develop partnerships with: VR, schools, transportation providers, and community agencies to braid and/or leverage multiple funding sources • Establish clear, simple ways to make referrals and communicate so everyone knows who to contact and how services are coordinated
Staffing shortages and high caseloads limit individualized, community-based instruction	• Use peer support, volunteers, employer mentors, and staff trained in multiple roles to keep services running when staffing is short • Adjust caseloads and use flexible scheduling to manage travel needs and busy service times
Staff must shift from supervision to coaching, which can cause uncertainty or resistance	• Provide training during discovery, job coaching, and facilitation strategies through mentoring and coaching models • Focus on community-based activities, setting clear expectations for results, and recognize and celebrate successes
Participant-centered barriers, including Transportation Barriers	• Build confidence, self-advocacy, and social skills through real-world activities, and give clear, timely feedback • Involve families early so everyone understands the customer's employment goals and how to support success • Plan transportation early as part of job matching, • Partner with transit providers, offer travel training, and use ride-share or nearby job options when available
Employer misconceptions about disability and accommodations	• Offer employer education on disability inclusion, share real success stories, and explain easy or low-cost accommodations • Provide hands-on, on-site support during work-experiences and the early stages of employment
Difficulty aligning community-based activities with billable services and measurable outcomes	• Improve and update data systems, clearly define what activities can be billed, and train staff on documentation and tracking results • Use data regularly to monitor outcomes, identify gaps, and make ongoing improvements to services



Geographical Considerations

Geographic context shapes how participant training and skill development are planned and delivered. Differences across rural, suburban, and urban areas affect access to transportation, employers, and community resources, influencing where and how skills are taught while maintaining a focus on Competitive Integrated Employment and community inclusion.

Region	Barriers	Opportunities	Strategies
Rural	• Limited job diversity • Little or no public transportation • Limited services and broadband	• Strong community relationships • Flexible small businesses • Schools, libraries, and faith groups as hubs	• Build direct employer relationships • Coordinate transportation solutions • Use community hubs for resources • Provide mobile or satellite services
Suburban	• Irregular transportation • Services spread over large areas • Hidden poverty and needs	• Access to schools, community colleges, training sites • Internships and apprenticeships	• Organize outreach by business corridors • Use community mapping • Partner with schools and colleges for Pre-ETS and training
Urban	• Accessibility barriers • Inaccessible transit stops • Competitive job markets	• Wide range of industries • Expanded transit options • Large employers with formal hiring processes	• Develop industry pipelines • Conduct accessibility walk-throughs • Align schedules with transit • Partner with workforce boards
Community-Based Programs	• Requires coordination, transportation planning, and staff capacity	• Real-world skill generalization • Confidence and independence • Direct path to CIE	• Prioritize experiential learning • Use discovery and person-centered planning • Coach staff in facilitation collect data in real settings
Facility-Based Programs	• Limited exposure to workplaces • Poor skill transfer • Risk of segregation	• Controlled environment for short-term skill practice	• Use as temporary training hub only • Embed community outings and employer visits • Shift from production to skill-building • Plan clear transitions to CIE

How to Implement Individual skill development



1. Clarify the Employment Goal

Purpose	Establish a clear, shared employment direction so all activities intentionally move the individual toward Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE), greater independence, and consistent team decision-making.
Strategies	Conduct in-depth Discovery activities: • Assess the customer's strengths, values, and interests • Conduct interest inventories • Conduct community mapping and business development to identify employment and community-based learning opportunities
Guiding Questions	• What work is meaningful to the individual? • What strengths and interests should guide job matching and skill development?

2. Train in Real Community Settings

Purpose	Build functional, transferable skills in natural environments where they will be used for work and community participation.
Strategies	• Embed skill development into everyday community activities (e.g. practicing all phases of retail skills during shopping, identifying price using price tags, etc.) • Reinforce learning and generalize skills through repetition in varied settings • Provide immediate, supportive feedback • Identify and use natural and assistive supports (i.e., encourage peer and community interactions such as seeking assistance from an employee vs employment specialist, reading retail signage such as departments, aisle identifiers, etc.) • Encourage autonomy and self-advocacy
Guiding Questions	• How does this setting support the employment goal? • Which skills practiced here will transfer directly to work? • What cues, prompts, or accommodations are needed in this environment? • Which natural supports are available in this setting?

3. Identify and Prioritize Skills

Purpose	Ensure skill development is intentional, person-centered, data-informed, and aligned with employment readiness, independence, and employer expectations.
Strategies	• Target functional, transferable skills tied to employment goals; • Address executive functioning, accommodations, and support needs; • Use assessment and data to guide priorities.
Guiding Questions	• Which skills are critical for immediate and long-term employment success? • What supports or accommodations are needed to maximize independence and performance?

4. Coach using supports and accommodations

Purpose	Remove barriers and support successful, independent participation through effective, inclusive supports.
Strategies	• Identify least- intrusive supports based on discovery, observation and ongoing assessment • Use environmental and task accommodations (i.e., modify the lighting in an environment, adjust pacing, use of visual cues, prompting, and feedback • Use of assistive technology and tools • Promote natural workplace interactions rather than job coach • Teach individuals how to request accommodations effectively
Guiding Questions	• What barriers exist, and how can they be addressed without lowering expectations? • Which supports promote independence?

5. Document progress and plan next steps

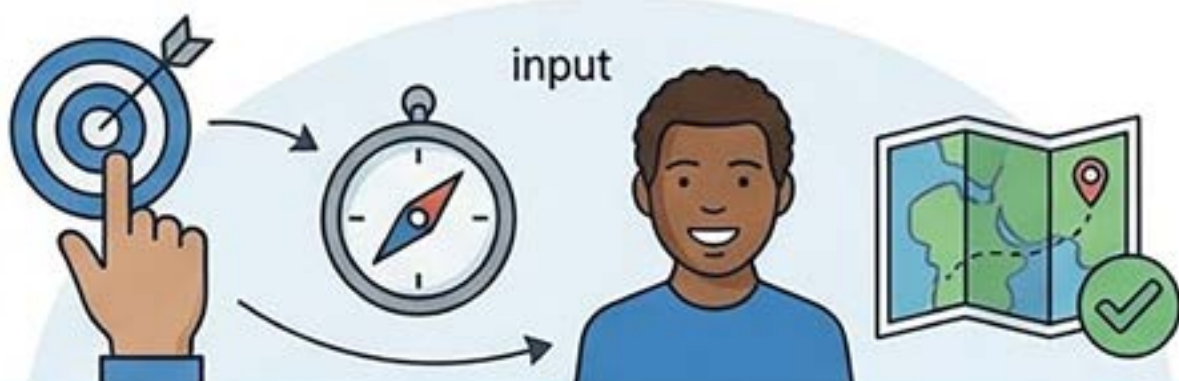
Purpose	Ensures services remain person-centered, data-informed, and responsive to the individual's evolving goals and employment outcome.
Strategies	• Document observations using clear, measurable language • Record skill performance, support use, and levels of independence • Integrate documentation into community-based activities • Link data to next steps in training, job development, or placement
Guiding Questions	• What skills are emerging, developed, or require continued practice? • What progress is occurring, what remains challenging? • What is the next step toward employment, retention, or advancement?



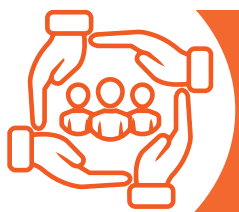
Data-Driven Decisions

Collecting information during hands-on learning and community-based job training helps us understand **how a person is doing, how well our services are working, and what next steps will support their success.** Together, these data types **enable continuous improvement and ensure services are responsive** to individual participants' needs, desires, personal goals, and dreams.

Data to Collect	What you Learn
Job goal and interests (from Discovery/PCP)	If training matches the job the person wants
Skills practiced (by session)	What functional & transferable skills the person is learning
Setting of Training (community vs. facility)	If skills are learned in real places
Level and type of support	What help works and when help can be reduced
Tools, AT, and accommodations used	Which tools or accommodations reduce barriers
Skill performance and independence level	How much progress is being made over time
Individual choice, feedback, and self-advocacy	How the person feels about training
Feedback from employers or community	If the job or setting is a good fit
Barriers (like rides or schedules)	What problems slow progress
Type of service provided	If work matches funding rules
Job outcomes (job, pay, hours)	If training leads to real work



Impact: The Person	Impact: The Organization
Training feels important and motivating	Keeps services person-centered & focused on real jobs
Shows progress toward job readiness and independence	Improves service fidelity and alignment with CIE outcomes
Skills are generalized to use at work and in the community	Shows services follow Employment First
Builds confidence and independence	Supports efficient staff deployment & service planning
Improved performance and access	Informs AT investment and accommodation practices
Helps move toward a getting/keeping a job or more hours	Data supports outcome reporting & improvement
Builds self-confidence and decision-making	Strengthens person-centered services
Better job matches and success at work	Strengthens employer partnerships and placement quality
Faster problem-solving	Identifies gaps for resource allocation and partnerships
Keeps services going without gaps	Supports correct billing and funding
Stable competitive integrated employment	Shows program impact and ROI



Employer Engagement

An employer's understanding of disability can shape who they hire and whether employees stay on the job. Work closely with employers helps reduce unfair beliefs and show what individuals with disabilities can do at work. **When employers feel supported and understand their business needs, they are more open to community jobs with fair pay and do not need to be disability experts to succeed.**

Reaching new employers can be challenging, especially when they feel unsure or have had past negative experiences, but field staff play an important role by building trust, offering support, and helping solve problems. **Employer engagement is about building strong relationships with businesses**—not just finding job openings—and providing steady support to help turn first conversations into lasting job partnerships.



Key Concepts

Employers are Customers, Not Placement Sites

Employers should **be treated as business partners**, not just places to “put” or “place” individuals for jobs. Field staff should learn what matters most to the employer—like getting work done, having reliable staff, and reducing turnover—and offer support that helps meet those needs. This approach **builds trust and long-term partnerships.**

Start with Business Needs, Not Job Openings

Good employer engagement **starts with listening.** Instead of asking if a business is hiring, staff should ask about challenges, tasks that are hard to cover, or work that falls behind. This helps find better job matches and **creates roles that truly help the business.**

Reduce Risk and Effort for Employers

Employers are more open when hiring feels easy and low risk. Field staff should clearly explain the supports available, such as job coaching, onboarding help, and regular follow-up. **The goal is to make hiring someone with a disability feel simpler, not harder.**

Relationships Matter More than Transactions

Employer engagement does not stop after one hire. Staying in touch, checking in, and recognizing success helps keep relationships strong. Over time, this turns first-time employers into repeated **partners who are confident and willing to hire again.**



Impacts and Challenges

Strong employer partnerships can lead to many good changes, but they can also be hard to build. **When things go well, individuals with disabilities get jobs they enjoy, businesses get the help they need, and everyone feels more included.** At the same time, staff may face challenges like finding employers, clearing up misunderstandings, and helping individuals feel comfortable trying something new.

Impacts	• Employees matched to jobs suited to their skills and interests • Higher retention rates of employees with disabilities • Increased business return • Enriched social and economic inclusion
Challenges	• Identifying potential employers • Lack of knowledge, experience, and awareness • Past negative experience with employees with disabilities • Risk aversion from employers and employees with disabilities

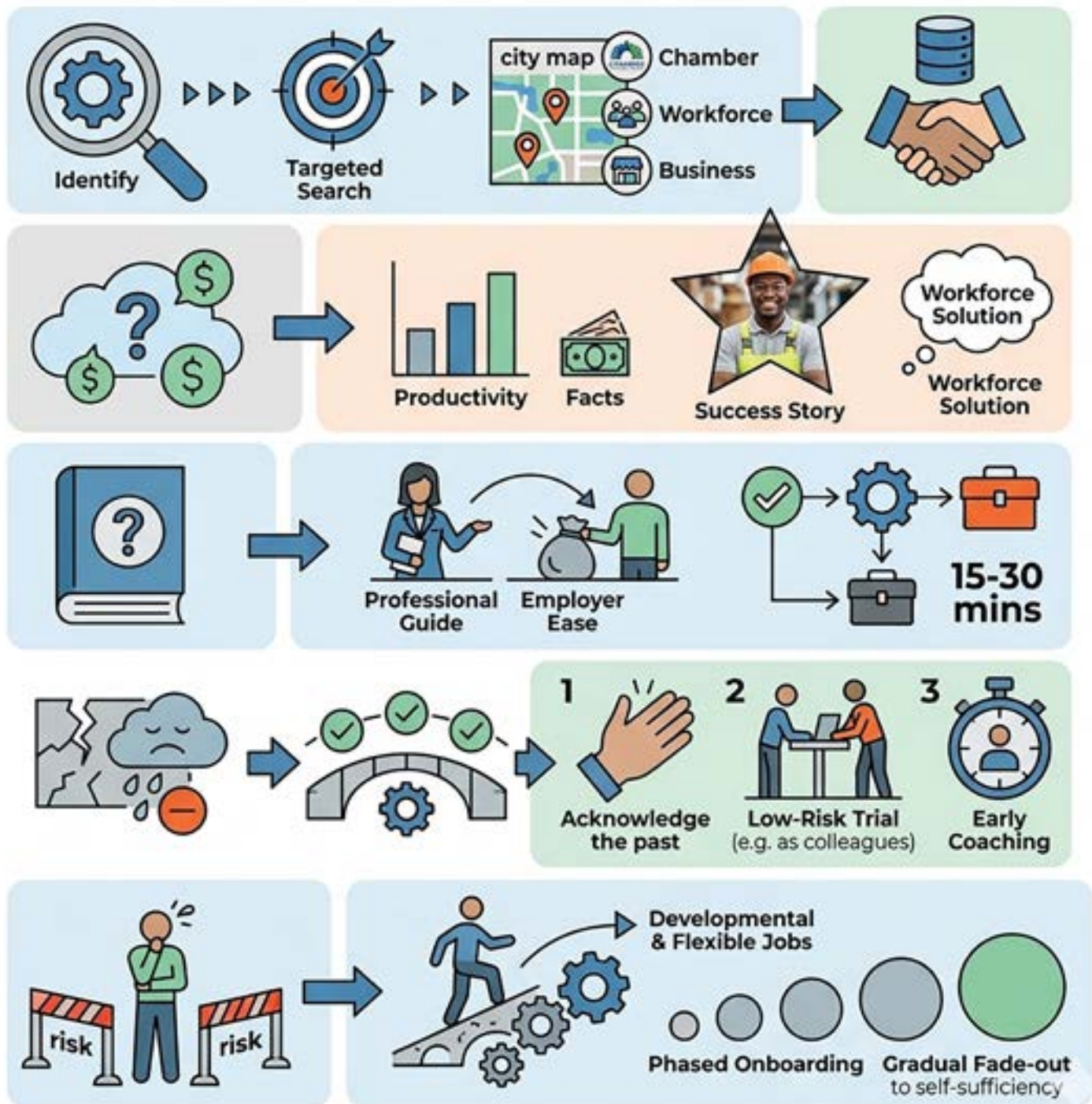


Addressing Challenges: **Real Solutions**

Employer engagement can come with real challenges, but each challenge has practical ways to move forward. By using simple, proven strategies, field staff can help **employers feel more confident and supported**. These solutions are designed to turn hesitation into trust and create job opportunities that last.

Challenge	★ Practical Solutions ★
Identifying potential employers	• Target employers with labor shortages or high turnover • Use community mapping (chambers, workforce boards, local business lists) • Ask current employer partners for referrals
Myths about hiring individuals with disabilities	• Share simple facts about productivity and accommodation costs • Use local employer success stories • Frame hiring as a workforce solution, not charity
Lack of knowledge, experience, and awareness	• Explain field staff services provider role as reducing employer effort and risk • Break inclusive hiring into clear, simple steps • Offer brief supervisor or team trainings (15–30 minutes)
Past negative experiences with employees with disabilities	• Acknowledge past challenges and ask what didn't work • Start with a low-risk option (job trial or internship) • Increase early job coaching and check-ins
Risk aversion (individuals with disabilities)	• Frame first jobs as developmental and flexible • Use trial periods or phased onboarding • Clearly explain ongoing supports and gradual fade-out

Simple Strategies for Employer Engagement





Geographical Considerations

Employers in rural, suburban, and urban areas have unique needs. Many factors may influence the approach field staff service providers take to engage employers.

Region	Barriers
Rural	• Fewer jobs and types of work • Few transportation choices • Long travel times • Limited internet
Suburban	• Moderate transportation access • High competition for entry level positions • Less personal connections
Urban	• High employer competition • Employers with slower decision cycles • Perception of liability and risk
Community-Based Programs	• Hard to reach busy employers • Lack of existing relationships • Employer's fear or uncertainty, past negative experiences
Facility-Based Programs	• Employers cannot "see" facility work as real work experience • Limited time or willingness for employers to visit

Opportunities	Strategies
• Strong personal & community networks • High trust and loyalty	• Visit employers in person • Highlight success stories: Neighbors hiring neighbors • Offer mobile or hybrid job coaching & transportation supports
• Many types of businesses • Open to innovation • Access to workforce boards, chambers, and councils	• Attend job fairs, chamber and workforce events • Create internships or work-based learning pipelines • Promote employer recognition and peer networks
• Diverse industries & job opportunities • Transportation and accessible systems	• Work with HR teams and business groups • Focus on diversity and inclusion goals • Highlight return on investment and corporate reputation benefits • Use data to demonstrate impact
• Real work settings build confidence • Peer influence from other employers • Better job matches • More job choices	• Worksite visits • Informational interviews, situational assessments • Embedded community presence • Job shadows; on-site check-ins
• Safe, low-pressure entry point for employers • Space to educate employers • Hub for training and support	• Employer tours and open houses • Skill demonstration tied to real jobs • Mock workstations • On-site training opportunities • Employer recognition

How to Implement Employer Engagement



When transforming from facility-based work to competitive integrated employment, there are several steps and key activities required to effectively engage employers.

1. Build Employer Partnerships

Purpose	Field Staff Service providers must identify and connect with employers whose business needs can be met through hiring individuals with disabilities.
Strategies	• Map local industries and review labor market needs • Focus on inclusive sectors (hospitality, healthcare, manufacturing, IT, retail) • Engage small businesses and entrepreneurs • Use chambers of commerce, workforce boards, and economic development groups • Partner with VR/DRS to identify employers ready to hire
Guiding Questions	• How do I move from job placement to long-term partnership? • How can I help solve this employer's workforce needs? • How do I build trust through consistent follow-up? • Where can I regularly connect with employers (events, councils, tours, recognition)?

2. Employer Awareness and Education

Purpose	Educating employers reduces myths and concerns about cost, risk, and performance.
Strategies	Show Value • Share data on retention, reliability, and reduced turnover • Connect inclusive hiring to workforce shortages and DEI goals • Use success stories and real examples Dispel Myths • Explain low accommodation costs and available tax credits • Clarify safety and liability protections • Position providers as partners who support training and coaching Build Capacity • Offer short disability awareness trainings • Use peer employer testimonials • Provide simple materials on incentives and support
Guiding Questions	• What concern is holding this employer back? • What support or education would help them feel more confident?

3. Co-Design Employment Pathways

Purpose	Employers are more engaged when employment solutions match real business needs. Listen to the employers' challenges. Tailor employment solutions to add value.
Strategies	• Match skills of individuals with disabilities to employer tasks • Use job carving or create new roles • Offer job trials, internships, or apprenticeships • Support career growth through training and advancement
Guiding Questions	• Which problems is the employer trying to solve? • Do they want to start small or customize right away?

4. Communication and Relationship Management

Purpose	Clear, business-focused communication builds trust and long-term engagement.
Strategies	• Use business language focused on productivity and reliability • Maintain regular check-ins with a single point of contact • Collect employer feedback and adjust supports • Share success stories and highlight employer impact
Guiding Questions	How does this employer prefer to communicate? What information helps them stay engaged and informed?

5. Incentives and Supports for Employers

Purpose	Employers are more likely to participate when risk is reduced and supports are clear.
Strategies	• Explain tax credits, wage reimbursements, and grants • Provide job coaching and accommodation support • Offer recognition and peer networking opportunities • Support retention through ongoing follow-up
Guiding Questions	• Does the employer understand available incentives and supports? • What challenge threatens long-term success? • What support would make this partnership sustainable?



Data-Driven Decisions

Collecting employer engagement data can be turned into actionable business change.

Data to Collect	What you Learn
Number of employers contacted by industry and region	Identifies which sectors and regions are most responsive or under-engaged.
Employer satisfaction survey results	Reveals strengths and weaknesses in field staff provider communication, job matching, and support.
Placement and retention data	Shows which employers sustain hires and which struggle with retention.
Accommodation cost and frequency	Demonstrates that most accommodations are low-cost and effective.
Employer ROI examples (productivity, turnover, morale)	Quantifies business benefits of inclusive hiring.
Provider staff time allocation and cost per engagement	Identifies cost-effectiveness of engagement strategies.
Employer recognition and visibility metrics	Measures success of branding and community awareness.

Potential Impact

- Prioritize outreach in high-response sectors.
 - Redesign engagement strategy for low-response areas (e.g., rural small business outreach).
-
- Adjust staff training and service protocols.
 - Create “Employer Engagement Standards.”
-
- Re-engage struggling employers with added job coaching.
 - Share retention success practices with others.
-
- Use data in marketing materials and outreach to reduce employer hesitation.
 - Highlight return on investment.
-
- Include in presentations and reports to attract new employers and sponsors.
 - Strengthen corporate responsibility alignment.
-
- Reallocate resources to the most productive outreach methods.
 - Justify internal reinvestment.
-
- Increase public recognition campaigns; use success stories for grant proposals and community buy-in.

Appendix

Resources



Person-Centered Planning (PCP)

Facilitators require training, structured methods, and appropriate assessment tools/supports to guide PCP meetings effectively.

Circles of Support & Circle of Friends: This is a tool that involves building a 'circle' around the individual with disabilities in an effort to improve their quality of life and connections. Learn more here: <https://www.circlesofsupport.org/>

Essential Life Planning: This is a tool that explores an individual with disabilities' goals and quality of life, and helps make those goals happen. Learn more here: <https://inclusion.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/SHS.Partners-in-Policymaking.Essential-Lifestyle-planning.pdf>

Group Action Planning (GAP): Group Action Planning is a process that engages a team in a 'group planning session' to help the individual achieve their dreams. Learn more about it here: <https://cadreworks.org/media/4277/download?attachment>

Making Action Plans (MAPS): This tool asks individuals 8 questions that inform the planning process. A team works together with the individuals to develop and define their dream and put the plan to action. Learn more here: <https://e93n72yruom.exactdn.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Everyone-Belongs-with-MAPS.Forest.Lusthaus.1990.pdf>

Personal Futures Planning (PFP): This tool includes developed tasks designed to help develop goal setting capacity and identify supports and services in individuals with disabilities. Learn more here: <https://www.bethmount.org/person-centered-planning>.

Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH): This is a tool that starts by looking at the overall outcome and then processes down, looking at dreams, preferences, etc. Learn more here: <https://inclusive-solutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PATH-Guide-for-Participants.pdf>

State of Illinois PCP Resources (<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=146107>):

1. Person Centered Planning Process For Medicaid Waiver Services:
<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=96986>
 - Implementation Strategies Form
 - Personal Plan Form
 - Discovery Tool
2. Person Centered Planning Policy and Guidelines for DD:
<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=100040>
3. Person-Centered Service Planning in HCBS: Requirements and Best Practices:
<https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/home-community-based-services/downloads/person-centrd-servc-plan-hcbs-req-best-pract.pdf>

Assessment Strategies

Formal Assessments		
Type of Assessment	Purpose	How to Use
Interest Inventories and Career Assessments	Identify preferences personality traits, and motivation for different work environments.	Administer paper or online surveys, clients can complete with or without support.
Aptitude Measures or Skills Tests	Measures potential and current skills related to job performance.	Pair with situational assessments to ensure a good fit in real world contexts.
Benefits and Financial Assessments	Identify financial implications of work including SSI/SSDI and benefits planning.	Conduct interview or review with benefits counselor.
Informal Assessments		
Type of Assessment	Purpose	How to Use
Functional Vocational Assessments	Identify real-world task performance and needed supports.	Observe the individual performing work-related or daily living tasks.
Situational Assessments (Community-Based)	Assess abilities, behavior and independence in authentic community settings.	Observes and collects data during community-based work or leisure experiences.
Career Behavior Rating Scales	Evaluate work habits, reliability and social behaviors.	Completed by support staff, job coaches or employers after observing work behaviors.
Transportation and Accessibility Assessments	Determine independent travel ability and access to work.	Observe travel routes, assess safety, and problem solve barriers.

Outputs	Examples and Additional Resources
Identifies interest areas and potential career clusters.	• O*NET Interest Profiler • Pictorial Interest Inventory • Personal Preference Indicators • CIS360
Provides scores compared to norms and career clusters.	• Career Ability Placement Survey (CAPS) • Brigance Employability Skills Inventory
Provides guidance on informed decision-making regarding finances.	• Assessment of Financial Skills and Abilities
Outputs	Examples and Additional Resources
Provides baseline data for instruction; identifies support needs.	• Work Performance Evaluation • Functional Vocational Assessment (ICTW)
Provides data on functional performance in real world settings.	• Work Study Evaluation Form Short • Work Performance Evaluation • How to conduct an Ecological and Situational Assessment ICTW
Provides structured feedback on work skills, soft-skills and employability.	• Employability Skills Rubric
Determines readiness and support needs for community access.	• Travel training checklist • Employment and Life Skills Assessment (ICTW) • Illinois Work Net

Employer Engagement

1. Employers and the ADA: Myths and Facts: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/ada/MythsandFacts>
2. Employers' Practical Guide to Reasonable Accommodation Under the ADA: <https://askjan.org/publications/employers/employers-guide.cfm>
3. Working Together: Ensuring People with Disabilities Feel Welcome and Included in the Workplace: <https://askearn.org/page/disability-etiquette>
4. Exploring Employer's Successful Hiring and Retention Practices of Individuals with Disabilities: <https://swtciellinois.ahs.illinois.edu/files/2024/06/2024-06-VRIDRS-Exploring-Employers-Successful-Hiring-and-Retention-Practices-of-Individuals-with-Disabilities.pdf>
5. Disability Inclusion Profiler Introduction - Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment: <https://tacqe.com/employers/dip-introduction/>
6. "Disability is Not Lack of Ability" EMPLOYER TOOLKIT: <https://www.scribd.com/document/514690597/No-Lack-of-Ability>

You can find these resources and more on the Dignity in Pay Act website: <https://icdd.illinois.gov/dignity-in-pay-act/general-resources.html>

Appendix

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Glossary

14(c): A section of the Fair Labor Standards Act that authorizes employers to pay subminimum wage to workers with disabilities – except in 16 states that have passed legislation to eliminate or phase out subminimum wage practices.

Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) Certification:

Employment Services credential with three levels of certification (Basic Employment Services, Customized Employment Services, and Professional Level Services).

Credentialed Employment Support Professional (CESP): Employment services credential through the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE).

Community Assets: Resources that are readily available within the community. This can include social services, businesses, public institutions, etc.

Community-Based Learning: An educational approach that connects learners with real-world experiences in their communities. (Ex. Reading community signs to navigate public transportation, reading price tags/shelf labels during an outing at a department store, etc.).

Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE): Full- or part-time work for individuals with disabilities that pays at or above minimum wage, provides benefits comparable to non-disabled peers, and occurs in integrated community settings

Corporate Social Responsibility: An organization's commitment to operate in an ethical, sustainable, and socially responsible manner – going beyond legal requirements to positively impact society, environment, and the economy.

Demand-Side Factors: Employer-related conditions, attitudes, practices, needs, preferences, and organizational characteristics that influence whether and how individuals with disabilities are hired, retained, and advanced in the workplace.

Dignity in Pay Act (DiP): Legislation passed in Illinois to expand employment opportunities for people with disabilities while phasing out subminimum wage.

Dignity in Risk: The right of individuals, particularly those with disabilities, to make their own informed choices and take reasonable risks to foster personal growth, self-esteem, and quality of life.

Direct Support Personnel (DSP): A paid professional who works directly with individuals with disabilities and possesses specific training in order to do so.

Employment First: A national initiative that enforces the idea that individuals with disabilities are capable of participating in employment.

Employment Specialist: A person who helps and supports individuals with disabilities to get and keep employment.

Experiential Learning: The process of learning through a hands-on approach; learning by doing. (Ex. Situational assessments, practicing first-aid and CPR skills through hands-on training, job shadowing, internship, work-based learning experiences, etc.).

Formal Assessment: Standardized tests that compare results to a larger group. These give objective scores on skills or abilities.

Functional, Transferable Skills: Skills that can be used across many different job settings such as communication, problem-solving, and workplace behaviors.

Geographic Information: Rural, urban, and/or suburban areas, which are reflective of available resources.

Generalization of Skills: The ability to apply learned knowledge or skills across different contexts, situations, and workspaces. (Ex. Making purchases and counting money in a variety of settings; grocery stores, restaurants, movie theaters, etc.)

Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS): Personalized Medicaid-funded programs that provide medical, social, and functional support to individuals with disabilities, chronic conditions, or aging-related limitations. These services allow individuals to remain in their homes or community settings rather than institutions like nursing homes.

Individualized and Person-Centered Services: Person's strengths, interests, and goals guide the training they receive.

Informal Assessment: Non-standardized, flexible methods such as interviews, checklists, or observations.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI): A quantifiable measure used to evaluate the success of an organization, employee, etc. in meeting objectives for performance.

Memorandums of Understanding (MoU): An agreement between two or more organizations that usually outlines shared responsibilities and goals.

Person Centered Planning: The collaborative and individualized approach to assist and support those with disabilities pursue their personal goals, preferences, and needs in areas such as employment, housing, health care, and community life.

Pre-ETS: Pre-Employment Transition Services; Pursuing federally mandated transition services designed for students with disabilities aged 14-22 transitioning from school to post-school life. Pre-ETS include Job exploration counseling, Work-based learning experiences, Workplace readiness training, Instruction in self-advocacy, Counseling on Post-Secondary Education

Return on Investment (ROI): Financial performance measure used to evaluate the efficiency or profitability of an investment. It expresses the amount of benefits gained from the investment relative to its cost.

Situational Assessment: A type of informal assessment done in real-world settings—like the community or workplace—to see how a person performs everyday tasks.

Social Capital: Using a personal network to your benefit.

Stakeholder: An individual/program/agency that has a shared goal and vision.

Subminimum Wage: A rate of pay that is under the federal minimum wage or state minimum wage, specifically for people with disabilities.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR): Federal and state programming specifically for individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment.



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