



Disability & Employment: Key Terms & Definitions for Businesses to Know

There are some important terms that a business who hires a worker with a disability should know. Knowing these terms can help businesses understand the types of supports that are useful for individuals with disabilities to be successful on-the-job.

Employment Outcome Terms

An *employment outcome* or *employment goal* references what a job seeker with a disability is working to secure in terms of a job. Rather than working in volunteer positions, segregated settings with only other people with disabilities, or for pay that is below the U.S. federal minimum wage, service providers encourage people with disabilities to pursue the same types of jobs as people without disabilities! This is called competitive integrated employment.

- **Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE):** CIE is a job that pays at least the U.S. federal minimum wage, is in a community setting among other workers without disabilities, and includes comparable pay and benefits as those offered to workers without disabilities who are performing similar.

Employment Intervention Terms

Employment interventions outline specific steps for helping an individual with a disability find and keep a job. During these interventions, assistance is provided by a trained professional (often called a Job Coach or an Employment Specialist). Two common employment models are described below and both have an employment goal of CIE.

- **Supported Employment (SE):** SE is a four-phase employment intervention which includes Assessment, Job Development, On-the-Job Training, and On-Going Support. During the first phase, an Employment Specialist will meet with a job seeker to better understand their employment interests, their work abilities, and some areas of support they may need on-the-job. This information is used by the Employment Specialist to determine potential jobs in the community that would be a good fit for the job seeker. Then, the Employment Specialist helps the job seeker with a disability apply and interview for potential jobs. Once the individual is hired, the Employment Specialist will accompany the individual with a disability on-the-job during the beginning of their employment experience. The Employment Specialist will help teach them their new job tasks and help the employer and other employees understand the best way to teach and support that individual. The purpose of the Employment Specialist is to teach the employee with a disability to be independent and they will eventually fade from the job allowing the worker with a disability to work as any other employee would within the

business. The Employment Specialist will continue to check-in with both the employee and the business.

- **Customized Employment (CE):** CE is very similar to SE and also includes four phases, which are Discovery, Job Negotiation, On-the-Job Training, and Follow-Along. It also begins with activities to help clarify a job seeker's work interests, strengths, preferences, and support needs. Rather than applying for open job positions in the community, an Employment Specialist will work with an employer to determine a more individualized job description that could be effectively performed by the job seeker and also benefit the business. Then, the Employment Specialist helps train the individual on their new job and continues to check-in after the individual becomes independent in order make sure the employment position continues to go smoothly.

Employment Support Terms

Within the employment support models identified (i.e., SE, CE, IPS), there are process-specific terms that represent important concepts necessary for supporting individuals with disabilities in CIE.

- **Person-Centered Planning:** This is a process by which employment support providers and other key individuals such as family, educators, and sometimes even an employer help put the person with a disability at the center of their employment experience. Unfortunately, people with disabilities have a long history of being left out of decisions that impact them. In person-centered planning, the individual is encouraged to be actively involved in making their own job goals whether that be finding a job, keeping a job, changing jobs, or pursuing a promotion.
- **Job Match:** It is important for service providers to have a good understanding of a job seeker's personal strengths, vocational interests, individualized preferences, and areas of support needs when they help them find a job. A good job match represents a strong alignment between the characteristics of the individual (e.g., what they are good at, what they like to do, the kind of environment they want to work in, etc.) and the characteristics of the job (e.g., job tasks, type of work, work culture or social environment, etc.)
- **Compensatory Strategies:** An individual with a disability may need some extra help remembering how, when, or what to do in certain situations on-the-job. Compensatory strategies are educational tools and reminders that can help them perform their job accurately and independently. These strategies will be developed by an Employment Specialist who then teaches the employee how to use them in various situations. Examples include visual cues, communication notebooks or assistive devices, checklists, schedules, modifications to the environment or the adaptation of tasks.
- **Alternate Resumes:** Many individuals with disabilities may not have enough of a work history to complete a traditional resume. Instead, they may bring a resume that highlights some of their functional skills rather than a chronological work or educational history. Alternatively, they may bring a sample video of them working, pictures, or a portfolio that demonstrates their work skills instead of submitting a traditional resume.

- **Working Interviews:** Traditional interviews may be difficult for some job seekers with disabilities who have anxiety, communication challenges, or other difficulties in social situations. A working interview is a nice alternative and it includes an opportunity for the individual to show their abilities by performing some of the tasks in the job they want to apply for instead of having them sit down and answer questions during a standard interview.
- **Natural Supports:** Supervisors, co-workers, and other members of a business will eventually help the new employee with a disability learn new tasks or by answering questions in the same way they do for other coworkers or supervisees without disabilities. These valuable resources exist in nearly every work environment and they are referred to as natural supports.
- **Fading:** Eventually, the employment specialist will have trained the employee with a disability how to do their job on their own. Once this happens, the employment specialist will gradually reduce their level of support and physical presence on-the-job. However, they will continue to periodically check in with the employee and the business, and reengage if support is needed.

Employment Support Service Providers

People with disabilities who need assistance with finding, getting, or keeping a job can turn to an employment support agency for services.

- **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR):** State VR agencies exist in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. These agencies provide a vast array of employment support services to people with disabilities. Such services may include job placement support, assessments or vocational evaluations, employment interventions, job coaching or employment specialist services, transportation or personal assistance services, job training, advanced skill training or education, and short-and long-term job support.
- **Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP):** CRPs are local organizations, usually non-profit, that provide services to adults which include employment support. State VR agencies sometimes purchase services like job coaching or employment specialist support through a local CRP.

Who to Ask Questions

If you have questions about disability employment terms, you can visit your state VR agency's website or contact their office for more information.

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