

Essential Resources for Transitioning to Competitive Integrated Employment

A Guide for Families and Individuals

As a person with a disability exploring new employment opportunities, you and your family need information. If you live in Indiana or are a family member supporting an Indiana worker or a job seeker with a disability, this guide is for you. It can also be a valuable tool for individuals with disabilities who are transitioning from sheltered workshop employment to competitive integrated employment.

Let's start there. Throughout this guide, you'll see the term "competitive integrated employment." It may sound a little intimidating, so let's clear that up:

Competitive integrated employment is a term we use to describe jobs, usually in your local community, paying wages at or above the minimum wage, in workplaces that include people with disabilities as well as people who don't have disabilities.

Within this guide, you'll find essential resources on:

- **competitive integrated employment and its advantages,**
- **strength-based employment services,**
- **person-centered planning, and**
- **what to expect from service providers.**



Understanding Your Rights and the Advantages of Competitive Integrated Employment

Indiana is dedicated to helping people with disabilities find jobs. In 2017, the state passed the Employment First Act, which focuses on making sure individuals with disabilities have opportunities to work. The aim is to:

- make changes that help people with disabilities obtain inclusive jobs, where they work alongside people with and without disabilities.
- ensure that people with disabilities earn at least the minimum wage for their work.

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Integrated, community employment (often referred to as competitive integrated employment) involves careful evaluation, support for and from service providers, and significant changes statewide.

The resources below can provide you with information on the legislation and agencies advocating for competitive integrated employment, highlighting its benefits for individuals and families.

- The [U.S. Department of Labor's CIE Hub](#) provides resources for individuals and their families who are transitioning to competitive integrated employment. These resources also benefit service providers, state agencies, and employers.
- The [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) has information on federal laws and regulations relating to disability employment. Selecting “Other Resources” on this page opens a list of helpful federal employment resources for people with disabilities.
- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA):** Passed in 2014, WIOA aims to improve access to employment, education, training, and support services for individuals with disabilities. It emphasizes competitive integrated employment as the primary outcome for individuals with disabilities and supports various programs and initiatives to achieve this goal. (See also, information from the [Department of Labor on WIOA.](#))
- **Indiana's Employment First Act:** In 2017, Indiana passed legislation to promote competitive integrated employment opportunities. It established the principle that employment in the Indiana general workforce should be the preferred outcome for individuals with disabilities, rather than placement in segregated or sheltered settings.
- **Community Integration:** Laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) make sure that people with disabilities aren't kept away from their communities. That's because the Supreme Court, in 1999, said this separation was wrong. Instead of only providing help in big institutions, states must now provide support at home or in the community. Community-based services, paid for by the government, help with everyday things like nursing, personal care, mental health, and housing. These services help people with disabilities be part of their communities, letting them hang out, work, and do things they like to do. Segregated places, on the other hand, don't let people interact much with the community and can be restrictive. Keep in mind, though, that community-based services work best when they match a person's needs.
- **Phasing out subminimum wages:** Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act allows employers to pay workers with disabilities less than the regular minimum wage. However, efforts are underway to phase out the practice of subminimum

wage, which many people believe is unfair. Some states and cities have already taken steps to stop using Section 14(c). The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has recommended phasing out Section 14(c) to ensure that people with disabilities have equal opportunities and are not unfairly exploited by businesses.



Emphasizing Your Strengths

You have unique strengths you can offer an employer. You, your family, and your employment service providers should emphasize those strengths when you decide on specific employment services. It is also important to emphasize your strengths and positive personal characteristics when you reach out to potential employers.

You'll need access to comprehensive information to understand and advocate for appropriate services. Here are some valuable resources and practices about competitive integrated employment and employment services that you should know:

Expectations for Service Providers

The [Universal Employment Competencies](#), from the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), is a list of best practices and expectations for employment service providers who support workers and job seekers with disabilities. Reading through these competencies will help you know what you should expect and can help you advocate for appropriate services.

Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation

Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) offers employment services for students, aged 14-22, and adults with disabilities. VR has a variety of resources and services available to job seekers.

- [Work with Indiana VR](#) - This video explains the VR process, eligibility, and available services to support individuals who are seeking employment or starting a career.
- To apply for VR services, see this [list of Vocational Rehabilitation Area Offices](#) to refer yourself or, if you are a family member or caregiver, refer a loved one to VR. Your local VR office can help you complete an application.

Customized Employment

Customized employment is a strength-based approach to obtaining employment. A customized employment arrangement should benefit both the employer and the employee with disabilities. The process uses different techniques such as creating a specific job, carving a job out of other work tasks, individualized negotiation, and self-

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employment. The resources below offer guidance on customized employment processes, including Discovery and self-employment.

- **General information on customized employment:** This [website from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office on Disability Employment Policy](#) (ODEP) offers webinars, videos, briefs, and guides covering various aspects of customized employment, such as funding strategies, youth transition, employer perspectives, and self-employment options. ODEP also offers specialized resources on Discovery, a foundational process for customized employment.
- **Success Stories:** [ThinkWork](#) is a valuable resource that includes stories from people with disabilities who are employed. Some of these individuals used customized employment during their job searching process.
- **Discovery:** The first step in customized employment is [a process known as Discovery](#). If you are looking for employment, Discovery can help you explore your strengths, interests, and preferences to identify suitable job opportunities where you can excel and experience success.
- **Making Resumes Visual:** Video resumes can showcase a job seeker’s unique skills and interests, which is important when you’re seeking customized employment. This [webcast on creating compelling video resumes](#), explores structural elements, style considerations, planning, and editing.
- **Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship:** For individuals and families exploring self-employment:
 - ODEP also offers [self-employment resources](#), including guidance from the Small Business Administration, tailored entrepreneurship education, mentorship, and business startup insights.
 - For more information on self-employment, scroll through the resources on the webpage [Taking the Road to Self-Employment](#), from the Center on Community Living and Careers. In addition to providing information to those considering starting a business, selling a product, or offering a service in Indiana, you’ll find guidance on business planning, marketing, and management, as well as information on how self-employment can impact health care or Social Security benefits.

Employment Services for People with Mental Illness

The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment emphasizes competitive employment, services, and processes for individuals diagnosed with severe mental illness. These resources include best practices for implementing the IPS model.

- [What Is the Individual Placement and Support \(IPS\) Model?](#)
- [Evidence for the Effectiveness of Individual Placement and Support Model of Supported Employment](#)

Person-Centered Planning Tools and Processes

Person-centered planning is crucial for ensuring that you and others who support you are actively involved in your life decisions. It ensures that every aspect of your work, living arrangements, social connections, and community involvement, is tailored to your strengths, interests, preferences, and needs. **When selecting an employment services agency, prioritize those that use person-centered planning.**

To support this process:

- **Define an employment vision:** By working with your support team to identify your vision for employment, you can be sure that your customized employment plan is in sync with your person-centered goals.
- **Create an ideal weekly schedule:** Reflect on your activities, both work-related and personal, to create an ideal weekly schedule. Documenting these thoughts can facilitate better support from agency staff and case managers.
- **Use a strength-based approach:** Engage in a strength-based process to help develop your career goals, enhance social network connections, and explore employment possibilities. This approach provides clarity and direction for your future path.

Charting the LifeCourse Framework

According to Missouri Family to Family, LifeCourse is a tool to help people with disabilities “develop a vision for a good life, think about what they need to know and do, identify how to find or develop supports, and discover what it takes to live the lives they want to live.”

Use person-centered planning and the LifeCourse framework to tailor employment goals to your strengths and preferences. By using a process known as **tailoring employment goals**, you and your employment service provider can use person-centered plans combined with other customized employment strategies to ensure that your employment goals are based on your strengths, preferences, and needs.

- [An Introduction to Charting the LifeCourse:](#) This presentation from the Arc of Indiana describes how you can use the LifeCourse process to set and reach life goals, including employment.
- [LifeCourse Nexus: Daily Life and Employment:](#) Begin with the [Getting Started](#) documents and engage with the first three tools: the Integrated Support Star, Trajectory for Exploring Employment, and Trajectory for Employment Planning.

- **[Charting the LifeCourse: Daily Life & Employment:](#)** Use these resources and tools with your support team as you create your employment goals and service plans. [LifeCourse offers a variety of blank forms](#) that can be useful when you're developing your plan and goals. In some cases, there are versions for you and your family to complete. These include the Life Trajectory Worksheet, Tool for Developing a Vision, Integrated Long-Term Support Needs worksheet, and more.

Self-Assessment and Inventory of Assets

Identifying your strengths, skills, and interests is a key part of planning for employment and community involvement. Using tools like those from the LifeCourse framework (see above) or a positive personal profile (below) can assist in this process. Families play a crucial role in exploring work opportunities within their loved one's networks, enhancing the chances of finding suitable employment.

Take an inventory of your assets: Begin by conducting a thorough self-assessment to identify your strengths, skills, preferences, and interests. This introspective process reveals opportunities to enrich both your community and potential employers, leading to a more fulfilling life.

- Start by [reading this article about creating a positive personal profile](#) and then complete your own positive personal profile using available examples for guidance. You can find a [completed example here](#).
- Next, compile a list of personal and professional connections, noting their relationships to you. Sharing this list with agency staff and your case manager can uncover potential employment opportunities.

More Person-Centered Planning Resources

- **[PATH Plans:](#)** A structured, visual planning tool, PATH combines process and graphic facilitation to help individuals, families, teams, and organizations visualize promising futures. PATH can allow you to strategically plan backward from a desired vision or dream. Through storytelling, PATH guides the journey toward making that vision a reality.
- **[Person-Centered Training:](#)** This presentation outlines several types of person-centered planning including MAPS, PATH, Personal Profiles, Essential Lifestyle Planning, Portfolios, and more.
- **Person-Centered Planning Examples and Insights:** Presentations and videos from about person-centered planning and practices.
 - [Person-Centered Thinking and Planning for Everyone](#)
 - [Person-Centered Skills and Concepts: Video Series](#)



Understanding Benefits and Employment

Before you begin working, you and your family should ask your VR counselor about [Benefits Information Network \(BIN\) services](#). BIN offers benefits counseling and valuable insights into federal and state work incentives as well as disability resources that support employment. BIN liaisons, trained in disability benefits, provide guidance on navigating work while maintaining benefits.

Learn How Social Security Benefits Support and Impact Employment

- **Attend Informative Webinars About Disability Benefits and Employment:** Stay informed by participating in webinars discussing the impact of earned income. One example is [Indiana’s Family Employment Awareness Training](#) (also mentioned below in the “More Resources” section).
- **Explore Benefits Resources:** Familiarize yourself with up-to-date information from the Social Security Administration on [Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\) and Social Security Disability Benefits](#).
- **Watch [Understanding Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\) Resources](#):** Review this webinar from U.S. Senator Bob Casey’s Office and the Social Security Administration.
- **Attend in-person or online benefits trainings and webinars** for Indiana individuals and families, offered several times a year. From the [Benefits Information Training](#) page, scroll down to “Let’s Talk Benefits and Working.”
- **Learn about Social Security work incentives:**
 - Bookmark these [fact sheets on benefits and work incentives](#), which are updated annually.
 - Learn about Social Security redetermination, benefits, and work through [fact sheets tailored specifically for students and families](#).

Understand Medicaid and Home and Community-Based Services Waivers

In Indiana, Medicaid and Medicaid waivers enable people with disabilities to obtain coverage for health care as well as long-term services and supports. Things to know and be aware of:

- Indiana’s **Medicaid waiver services include varying employment-related supports** and can be used in combination with VR employment services.

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- If you haven't already done so or don't already receive it, **apply for Medicaid**. You'll need Medicaid if you want to obtain a Medicaid waiver. Find information on the necessary steps on the [FSSA website](#). If you don't have a [Medicaid HCBS Waiver](#), you can apply for one. Where you apply depends on the waiver you are applying for. See the description of each waiver for information on how to apply. Individuals currently attending a sheltered workshop may already have an Indiana HCBS Waiver.
- The Indiana Family and Social Services Administration office recommends that you apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) if you don't already receive it or if you don't receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). You do not need to receive SSI to obtain an Indiana waiver, but Medicaid will encourage you to apply for SSI, because having SSI makes the approval process for Medicaid simpler. You **do** need Medicaid to be approved for an Indiana waiver.
- Seek assistance from your provider service staff, case manager, or from your local [Indiana Bureau of Developmental Services](#) office when completing the application.
- Explore the "[Available Waiver Services](#)" section of each waiver for a list of the range of services offered in that program.



Developing Community Connections

It is important for you and your family or support team to understand the importance of making and developing connections in your community. Some individuals, especially those who have been working in sheltered work and who may have limited community involvement and connections, may need to strengthen, and develop stronger, natural support networks within their community. These resources can help.

- **[Friends: Connecting People with Disabilities and Community Members](#)**: This manual is primarily designed for agency staff, but it can also be useful for individuals with disabilities, parents, support coordinators, teachers, and others as they're facilitating community relationships. The lessons feature diverse individuals, including those with communication challenges or extreme behaviors, and reflect a collaborative effort involving agencies, staff, service recipients, and community members.
- **[Best Buddies](#)**: This non-profit volunteer organization can help adults with disabilities build one-on-one friendships in their communities.
- **[Peer MentoringWorks](#)**: Peer mentoring can be a successful way to create community connections and involvement and build natural supports.

More Resources



Finding State and Local Information and Resources

To locate services in a specific city or county, [search FINDER](#) to access the Indiana Disability Resource Finder. This comprehensive directory is tailored to the needs of the disability community, offering a wealth of services, programs, and informative articles. Navigate seamlessly through their step-by-step guide to pinpoint information.

Enhancing Employment Knowledge

Participate in Indiana [Family Employment Awareness Training \(FEAT\)](#), provided by the Center on Community Living and Careers, to learn about:

- creative ways to customize competitive employment.
- available state, federal, and community resources that support employment.

FEAT, which is free of charge, offers online and in-person trainings at various locations several times a year.

Addressing Transportation Needs

Talk about transportation with your providers, case manager, and VR counselor for comprehensive support. Keep in mind that you may need multiple transportation options depending on the time of day or days of the week that you're scheduled to work or when you're participating in community activities.

- Search “[paratransit](#)” and your county or city to find local adapted public transportation options.
- In addition to your preferred search tool, don't forget to search using FINDER (see above).



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