



Pathways to Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)

What is CIE?

Competitive Integrated Employment means getting a job in the community for wages (at least minimum wage) that compare to those received by persons without disabilities doing similar work and who have similar experience and training. CIE also includes earning benefits and having the same potential to advance within a business as people without disabilities. According to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, passed in 2014, CIE can be either part-time or full-time, depending on the job seeker's preferences (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023).

What is Not CIE?

There are work options available for individuals with disabilities that are not considered CIE. These options include any segregated location where individuals with disabilities are only among other individuals with disabilities, instances where pay is below the federal minimum, or in cases where a person is performing volunteer work for free when other individuals performing the work would be compensated.

What Services and Supports Help Individuals with Disabilities Become Competitively Employed?

Research has identified several interventions, services, and supports that act as effective pathways to CIE for individuals with a wide range of support needs, including those with more significant disabilities. These pathways include:

- Supported Employment
- Customized Employment
- Internship Programs
- Postsecondary Education
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Supported Employment

Supported Employment (SE) refers to a set of individualized supports used throughout the employment process to help a person with a disability find and keep a job. Rather than focusing on time to prepare a job seeker to be ready for employment, SE uses a rapid placement approach by immediately helping a person get a job that reflects their work interests, and then offering training and support to help them learn and keep the job. SE uses a four-phase process which includes getting to know the job seeker (i.e., assessments), job development, on-the-job training,

and job retention services (Wehman et al., 2018). During the assessment phase, an employment specialist will identify the job seeker's interests, preferences, strengths, and support needs related to employment. This information will be used when working with businesses to find a position that matches the job seeker's employment interests. Once hired, an employment specialist will come to the business and assist while the individual with a disability learns the demands of their new position. Finally, the employment specialist will fade support as the individual learns the job and becomes more independent. The employment specialist will check in periodically with the individual and the business to ensure everything is going smoothly.

Customized Employment

Customized Employment (CE) is a flexible approach that begins with a "Discovery" process (Riesen et al., 2021). During Discovery, a job coach or employment specialist will meet with a job seeker and other key individuals (e.g., family or caretakers) to ask them questions about their interests, preferences, and strengths. The job coach will also participate in community activities with the job seeker in both familiar and new environments to gain an understanding of how they respond to different situations. This information is then used to develop vocational themes that will guide the job coach in working with an employer to negotiate a position that fits both the job seeker's and the business's needs. Once a position is negotiated, on-the-job support and follow-up services are provided to assist the individual with a disability in keeping the job.

Internship Programs

A strong predictor of CIE after exiting high school is participating in work opportunities during high school. An internship is a great way to get this experience (Avellone et al., 2023). Internship programs, such as Project SEARCH and Start on Success, offer students a chance to work in community businesses, discover their employment interests and strengths, learn marketable work skills, build a resume, gain employment references, and network to make future employment contacts. Internship programs typically involve both classrooms and applied work hours, so learning and support occur through interactions with educators and mentors within the business. Internships provide youth and young adults with a way to establish a work history that better prepares them for post-school work.

Postsecondary Education

After school, many students may choose to go to a community college, 4-year university, or certification program. Advanced training beyond high school is a well-known way to increase the odds of employment. Individuals with disabilities may need unique types of support during postsecondary education (PSE). This may include modifications or accommodations provided through the university's disability supports office. There are also specialized programs specifically for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the United States that offer postsecondary training, employment-focused coursework, and internship opportunities in a personalized area of study to better prepare them for employment (Think College, 2023).

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies can provide different services to eligible adults with disabilities depending on their personal needs. These services may include but are not limited to, vocational counseling and guidance, referrals, rehabilitation technology, physical restoration services, assessments, assistance with college or certifications, on-the-job training, supported employment, transportation services, and follow-up services for job retention. For eligible youth with disabilities, VR provides Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) as needed to help students move from high school to competitive employment. These services include vocational counseling on postsecondary education opportunities, self-advocacy, and social skills training, worked-based learning experiences such as internships or job shadowing, job exploration counseling, and workplace readiness training.

Summary

There are many effective pathways leading to CIE for individuals with disabilities. The pathways discussed here all account for individual preferences, interests, and needs, and then personalize a system of services and supports to help that individual be successful on the job. Each job seeker has unique employment support needs which can be met using evidenced-based techniques by trained professionals.

References

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