

BRINGING EMPLOYMENT FIRST TO SCALE

Assisting Job Seekers with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: A Guide for Employment Consultants

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Key Findings from the RRTC on Advancing Employment

Read this brief to learn about effective employment support practices for assisting job seekers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The literature about effective support practices for assisting job seekers with disabilities is extensive. However, employment consultants do not always implement these practices consistently. This suggests that there is a need for articulating these practices into a clearer, more easily communicated support guide. To meet this need, this brief provides a checklist of support activities, organized around five key elements (Figure 1):

1. **Building trust**
2. **Getting to know the job seeker**
3. **Addressing supports planning**
4. **Finding tasks/jobs**
5. **Providing support after hire**

Building trust with a job seeker is key for engaging the person and understanding his or her deep preferences, aspirations, and motivations. This is important for increasing the chances of better job

matches, job satisfaction, and job retention, and minimizing the need for support after hire.

Building trust with families is equally important. Families often provide support in several aspects of a job seeker's life, and can provide valuable logistic and emotional resources before and after hire.

While building trust occurs across all activities of the employment process, this element emphasizes being intentional about allocating time for relationship building from day one.

Employment consultants are professionals who assist job seekers with disabilities in finding employment. They are also called employment specialists, job developers, rehabilitation counselors, or employment support professionals.

Figure 1

Comprehensive model of employment support



RRTC on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

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ThinkWork!

at the Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston



Getting to know the job seeker informs the job search. Focusing on the positive, listening to and observing job seekers in various environments, and talking with people who know job seekers well can increase the chances of finding better job matches. This element results in a clear statement of job search criteria, including both negotiable and nonnegotiable factors.

Addressing supports planning by anticipating job needs means making job entry as smooth as possible through tangible preparation by building the supports and skills a person needs once employed. This might include planning for transportation options, benefits planning, addressing communication and technology supports, and assisting job seekers with building self-confidence and communication skills.

Finding tasks/jobs is a core element of the employment consultant's role. A focus on looking for tasks, rather than for jobs, helps expand the opportunities beyond available job openings, and encourages thinking outside the box. Listening to employers' needs and seeking a match to a job seeker's preferences and skills is important for better job matches.

Providing support after hire is a core part of supported and customized employment, and promotes both job retention and career advancement. Best practice focuses on facilitating natural supports from within and outside the workplace, and ensuring that the individual participates in the typical supports available to all employees, such as orientation and training processes, mentorship, supervision, and social activities. Supports may also include job aids such as task lists, technology prompts, and other accommodations and tools.

Professional job supports should be as unobtrusive as possible, and should strengthen existing workplace supports, with a plan for fading professional supports over time. Effective support increases the job seeker's sense of belonging in the workplace and job satisfaction, thus supporting retention.

Paid individual employment refers to a job that pays at least minimum wage, paid for by an employer, in a workplace where the majority of co-workers do not have disabilities. Ongoing support may or may not be provided.

A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYMENT CONSULTANTS

This guide is a checklist of the key elements and corresponding support activities described in the model. If you are an employment consultant, think about a job seeker whom you are about to support in finding paid individual employment. Review the support activities in the list below, and check the response items that best represent your priorities. Ideally, you should select "High priority" or "Essential" for most support activities. However, due to specific circumstances, certain support activities may require a lower priority. If a specific support activity does not apply, check "Not applicable" and note the reason why.

You can come back to the checklist periodically to reassess what worked, what did not work, and the best ways for you to assist the job seeker.

This list of support activities emerged from nationwide interviews with employment consultants, supervisors, job seekers, and family members who found paid individual employment through the consultants' support. These consultants were selected because they were recommended for their effectiveness.

Table 1. Guide for implementing key support activities

	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Not applicable
Building trust				
1. I treat the job seeker with respect (e.g., by establishing eye contact; speaking directly to him or her, not through someone else; using my ordinary tone of voice).				
2. I prioritize the job seeker’s personal aspirations over other players’ demands.				
3. I involve the job seeker in all major decisions including choose what strategies to use to find jobs.				
4. I reach out to the job seeker’s family members very early in the process (when applicable).				
5. I invite family members to meetings or social events (picnics, lunch appreciation, etc.).				
6. I include family members in all relevant correspondence.				
7. To check in with family members, I prioritize face-to-face or phone conversations rather than email.				
<i>If an item is not applicable, please comment about the reasons why:</i>				
Getting to know the job seeker				
8. I describe the job seeker’s positive traits (gifts, talents, and interests), rather than just their challenges (diagnosis, poor work history, behavioral issues).				
9. I emphasize “why” and “how come” questions, and listen to the job seeker, rather than just reviewing the job seeker’s records.				
10. I use the job seeker’s desires that seem hard to implement as clues for understanding their deeper aspirations.				
11. I spend meaningful time with the job seeker in typical environments (home, volunteer sites, workplaces).				
12. I spend meaningful time with the job seeker’s family members and others who know the job seeker well.				
13. I define the job search criteria in detail, including negotiables and non-negotiables for the job seeker and their family and support network.				
<i>If an item is not applicable, please comment about the reasons why:</i>				
Addressing supports planning				
14. I identify support strategies to address needs identified in “getting to know the job seeker.”				
15. I brainstorm and plan for on the job support strategies including job task supports and communication tools.				
16. I explore the effectiveness of technology such as phone or tablet apps as support resources.				
17. I set up businesses tours, informational interviews, and mock interviews to help the job seeker to gain self-confidence, build social skills, and learn about a variety of workplaces.				
18. I brainstorm transportation solutions early in the process.				
19. I support the job seeker and his/her family members to understand and address work incentives planning.				
<i>If an item is not applicable, please comment about the reasons why:</i>				

	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Not applicable
Finding tasks/jobs				
20. I talk with the job seeker and family members about their contacts—rather than just asking them to fill out forms—to expand the network of potential employers.				
21. I expand my network of employers through attending business events.				
22. I build a relationship with a business by taking time to explore their priorities and needs, rather than only looking for job openings.				
23. I search for tasks that a business needs completed and that could be used to create or adapt a job description.				
24. I create job opportunities by identifying tasks and negotiating a job design that meet the goals and needs of both employer and job seeker.				
25. I use job postings to identify businesses and understand the labor market rather than focusing on applying to postings.				
26. I market my role to employers as a provider of workforce solutions including diversity awareness, labor regulations, and tax expertise.				
27. As part of acknowledging employers' needs, I meet them at a time and place of their choice.				
<i>If an item is not applicable, please comment about the reasons why:</i>				
Providing support after hire				
28. I facilitate a job entry that mirrors the approach used by other workers.				
29. I identify and facilitate the worker's participation in workplace customs and social activities.				
30. I facilitate building friendships and mentoring relationships among the worker and co-workers/supervisors.				
31. I support coworkers and supervisors to develop strategies to support and train the worker before delivering supports myself.				
32. I break down complex tasks into smaller, easier-to-accomplish steps using strategies like task analysis.				
33. I develop tools such as picture checklists, videos, and apps to support the worker to sequence and complete tasks and be independent without my presence.				
34. I stop by or call the job seeker and/or co-workers regularly to check how things are going.				
35. I develop a plan to reduce staff presence at the workplace from job entry.				
<i>If an item is not applicable, please comment about the reasons why:</i>				

Bringing Employment First to Scale Key Findings series

The Bringing Employment First to Scale Key Findings series shares research from ICI's ThinkWork projects, which focus on increasing employment for individuals with IDD. The goal of this series is to identify and share findings that support state agencies, providers, advocates, individuals and families to make the philosophy of Employment First a reality.

ThinkWork!



The Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities is a project of ThinkWork! at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. ThinkWork! is a resource portal offering data, personal stories, and tools related to improving employment outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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