

Implementation of Customized Employment Provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act within Vocational Rehabilitation Systems

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Introduction

Effectively integrating provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) into public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) systems will require extensive effort at both the organizational and system levels.

Both “ideal” implementation methods and “pragmatic” methods are presented based on the experience of one state’s efforts to incorporate customized employment strategies into its VR system.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

The WIOA (2014) reauthorizes the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, and contains important changes to the Rehabilitation Act. WIOA increases access to high quality workforce services to prepare individuals with disabilities for competitive, integrated employment.

Major changes that impact the public VR system include:

1. An increased role in transition of youth with disabilities from school to adult life.
2. A requirement for formal cooperative agreements between VR and State Medicaid and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (IDD) Agencies.
3. Expansion of the VR system to work with employers.
4. A federal definition of competitive integrated employment as an optimal outcome.
5. An updated definition of supported employment that includes customized employment.

Customized Employment

Customized employment is defined by WIOA as, “Competitive integrated employment, for an individual with a significant disability, that is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer, and carried out through flexible strategies.” (Civic Impulse, 2015, p. 573).

Figure 1
Customized Employment Process



Customized Employment Process

The customized employment process consists of the following key elements:

1. **Discovery** is a qualitative process that takes place in natural environments and involves interviews, conversations, and observations to get to know the job seeker and his or her interests, talents, and ideal conditions. Discovery culminates in the development of a vocational profile that provides a descriptive picture of the job seeker.
2. **The Vocational Profile** is a comprehensive document that captures the information “discovered” and provides a narrative snapshot of the job seeker.
3. **Customized Employment Planning** meeting is used to develop a customized employment blueprint that bridges the gap between Discovery and job placement.
4. **The visual resume** is a sales tool to introduce the job seeker to potential employers. It is different from a typical resume in that it utilizes photos or video clips to demonstrate the job seeker completing tasks/skills essential to the position. This tool is very useful for individuals who may not be able to express their talents and abilities in verbal format.
5. **Customized Job Development and Negotiation.** Customized employment includes negotiating employment opportunities with employers through the identification of unmet business needs that may be filled by the talents of a job seeker. Typically, this process begins by meeting with employers and touring businesses to identify mutually beneficial matches.
6. **Accommodation and Post Employment Support** is the development of natural supports and resources targeting challenges prior to the loss of employment. Employees and employers should be aware of the resources to identify and implement accommodations as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

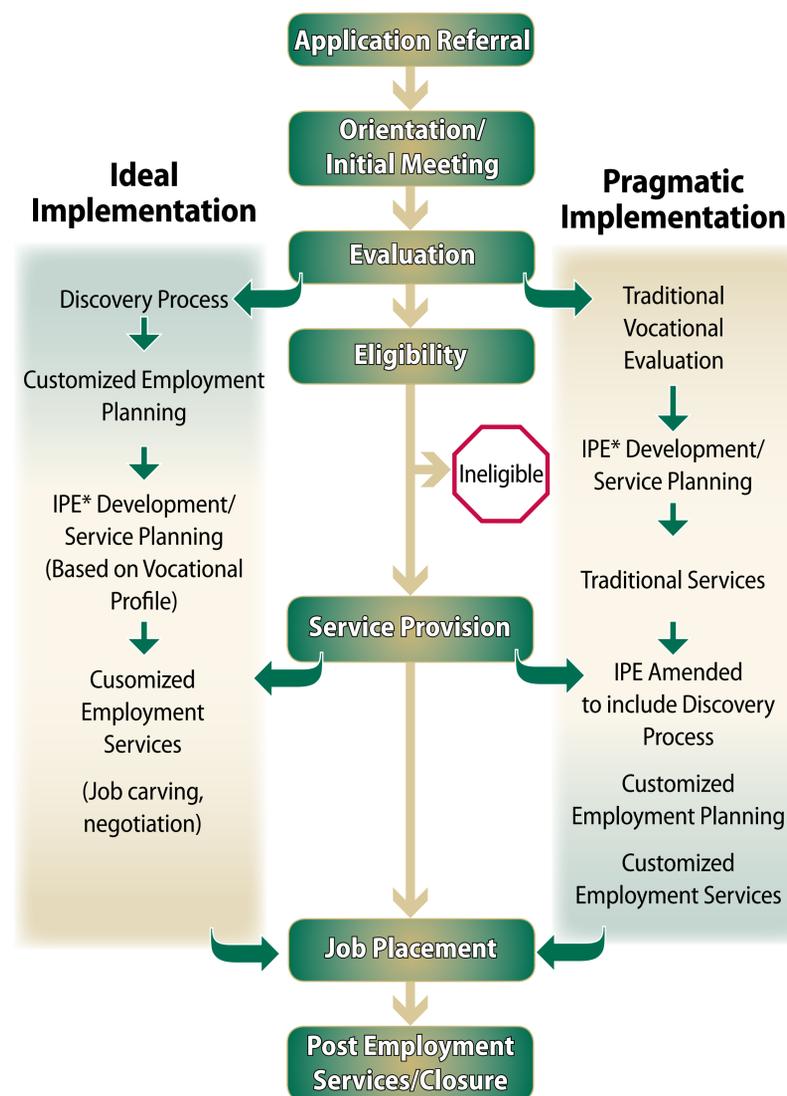
Ideal vs. Pragmatic Implementation

Integration strategies are being presented in two formats: ideal and pragmatic. Public VR systems typically do not have the capacity (in funding and in staffing) to serve the influx of individuals who are eligible for services through the use of Discovery as an evaluation tool.

The ideal implementation of customized employment practices would replace traditional vocational evaluation with Discovery for persons with complex disabilities who may not do well in answering questions, completing assessments, and performing tasks that compares individuals to a normative sample. Findings of vocational evaluations of will often find individuals with complex disabilities “too significantly disabled to achieve an employment outcome.” Discovery, on the other hand, will always identify interests, skills and abilities of the person that translate to employment options.

The pragmatic implementation approach involves Discovery after eligibility has been determined. The Discovery process is added to the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) after traditional strategies have not resulted in a competitive, integrated employment outcome. The issue with this implementation approach is twofold. First, many applicants will be determined ineligible for services based on the traditional vocational evaluation. These individuals will not benefit from Discovery as an alternative strategy to identify their strengths and employment options. Second, for individuals determined eligible, the time frame from employment planning to employment may be delayed since customized employment strategies are only employed after traditional strategies have failed.

Figure 2
Vocational Rehabilitation Process



*Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)

Implications for Policy and Practice

Successful implementation of CE strategies involves educating all stakeholders, training service providers, and monitoring and evaluation of activities to promote ongoing quality in service provision. It is recommended that public VR systems:

1. **Utilize a phased approach** for introducing new practices.
2. **Develop success measures** that are clearly connected to the project activities and provide a basis for decisions to expand or sustain the new practice.
3. **Develop a work plan with timelines** covering all phases (pilot, expansion, full integration).
4. **Employ strong project management** to ensure that the work plan is completed as scheduled.
5. **Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of all phases** of implementation. It is also important to build and leverage partnerships among appropriate stakeholders to achieve consensus on resource allocation, key outputs and outcomes.

Practice Implementation Tools

Tool	Application/Indicators
Roadmap A comprehensive approach to planning that provides a clear picture of the nature and scope of the project and builds understanding and consensus around key project components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of the current operational environment including and analysis of the gap between current and desired results Assessment of the readiness of the agency and stakeholders to introduce a new practice Communication plan (internal and external) to inform stakeholders of the progress and results of the new practice Logic model which lists all inputs (resources), outputs, and outcomes (short and long term); provides a basis for developing a project dashboard Project work plan including key events, milestones, timelines, and responsibilities Evaluation strategy to measure the results and impact
Integration Scale Grounded in change theory; used to measure agency progress in integrating new practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency buy-in (all levels) to ensure commitment to the success of the new practice Policy and procedures that support the new practice and provide guidance to staff and agency partners Capacity/resources needed to sustain and grow the new practice Data collection needed to track progress and evaluate the outcomes and impact of the new practice Accountability through performance management Evaluation plan to measure and provide timely reports of the results and impact of the new practice Continuous improvement plan to address barriers and challenges and to build upon the positive aspects of the new practice
Community of Practice A group of peers implementing similar projects; scheduled communication to share best practices and lessons learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster peer networking and exchange of information and resources Evaluate progress toward integrating a new practice Conduct an ongoing assessment of need for training and technical assistance

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