

**Virginia Commonwealth University  
Region III CRP-RCEP Fact Sheet**

**Quality Indicators for Competitive Employment Outcomes**

**INTRODUCTION**

Competitive employment provides the individual with a disability a real job, the potential for benefits, and the dignity that arises from gainful employment. Both the employer and the individual with a disability benefit since the employer gets a good worker, and the individual earns a competitive wage. Family, coworkers, and the general public are able to see the worker with a disability in a fully competent role in the workplace and community.

Competitive employment outcomes can be successful when emphasis is placed on careful job matches involving negotiated arrangements with employers. Unfortunately, the quality of employment outcomes obtained by individuals with disabilities has varied substantially. At times, employment outcomes in supported employment have been primarily entry-level jobs in a limited band of predominantly service-oriented occupations. These employment opportunities often represent a "forced choice" situation for a person with a significant disability. Job performance, satisfaction, and retention suffer.

CRPs that are assisting individuals in achieving competitive outcomes must be able to measure the quality of the services being provided and the job outcomes being achieved. A way to accomplish this is to identify and follow a set of quality indicators that reflect a variety of best practices in employment services. These quality indicators can be viewed from the perspective of the individual with a disability, the employer, and the funding agency paying for the supported employment services. The funding agency is concerned with positive employment outcomes for the individuals on whom dollars are spent for services.

The combined set of indicators can serve as a means for self-assessment by the supported employment program to help identify both areas of strength that can be used in marketing services and also areas that need priority attention for improvement. Some of the questions that a CRP might ask itself related to the services being provided include the following:

- Do individuals served by the supported employment program consistently achieve truly meaningful job outcomes?
- Does job planning include a review of disability benefits and the impact of employment on these benefits?
- Who selects these jobs and do these employment opportunities reflect informed customer choice and control?
- Are employers satisfied with the work produced by the workers with disabilities?
- What is the quality of the ongoing support services that the employer receives from the supported employment program / CRP?
- Does the provider have a well-coordinated job retention support system in place that assists both the individual with a disability and the employer?

What are the core indicators of quality competitive employment services that can be used collectively by an individual in choosing a CRP and an employment service agency seeking to measure the quality and effectiveness of its services? Current descriptions of best practices in providing services and supports for individuals with significant disabilities include seven key benchmark indicators. In the discussion that follows, each of the seven indicators will be described in terms of its importance as a quality measure. Probe questions are provided to assist the CRP in determining the extent to which its services and outcomes are consistent with the defined quality indicator. These indicators are:

1. Use of Benefits Planning
2. Individualization of the Job Goal
3. Quality of Competitive Job
4. Consistency of Job Status with Co-Workers
5. Employment in an Integrated Job Setting
6. Quality of Job Site Supports and Fading
7. Presence of Ongoing Support Services for Job Retention and Career Development

## **KEY POINTS**

Effective planning for an individual's successful employment outcome must include a review of the critical issues surrounding the receipt of disability benefits provided by both the Social Security Administration (SSA) and by other public programs.

High quality employment programs place a priority on empowering individuals to make choices regarding potential jobs and their career paths.

Wages and number of hours worked weekly are critical quality indicators for an employment program to evaluate.

A critical measure of the true quality of an employment outcome is the consistency of the job status of the individual with a disability with that of his/her co-workers.

Integration and community participation are important outcome measures of quality services.

A key to the career success of people with significant disabilities is the provision of the necessary supports that will assist each individual in obtaining and maintaining competitive employment.

The provision of ongoing supports as long as needed after employment is the core characteristic of supported employment that differentiates it from other employment services.

### **Indicator #1: Use of Benefits Planning**

For many individuals with significant disabilities, the monthly cash payments provided by SSA disability programs represent an important source of monetary support. The associated public health insurance benefits such as Medicaid and/or Medicare frequently pay for essential

medical services. However, work and receipt of disability benefits are **not** mutually exclusive. SSA work incentives are designed to ease the transition from dependence on benefits to greater economic self-sufficiency. These work incentives offer many opportunities to support movement to employment. Receipt of SSA disability should be viewed as a potential advantage that can be used strategically to assist the beneficiary in achieving employment goals. Potential probe questions for measuring the quality of benefits planning include:

- Did the agency secure services from a certified Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) to assist the individual and family in understanding the impact of wages on benefits?
- Was a written benefits analysis completed?
- Did the analysis present the impact of employment on all Federal and other benefits programs in which the individual is currently enrolled?

**Strategies:** Arranging for benefits planning as a component of an employment plan is not the singular responsibility of the CRP. Benefits planning can be arranged through the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor or by others involved in the employment planning, including the person seeking employment and her/his family. The critical point for the job coach and CRP is to work with the individual and all those involved in developing the employment plan to assure that a careful benefits analysis is completed. Unaddressed questions or lingering concerns about the impact of employment on disability benefits by an individual and his/her family can be severely detrimental to the potential for achieving a successful employment outcome. A state-by-state national directory of the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) programs sponsored by the Social Security Administration can be found at:

<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/ServiceProviders/WIPADirectory.html>.

## **Indicator #2: Individualization of Job Goal**

Organizations that support choice and control shape their service delivery practices by the wants and needs of their customers. A critical factor in assessing the overall quality of an employment program is determining if users of the service are truly in control of their employment outcomes and make choices during the employment process. An individualized job goal flows directly from use of a person-centered process focused on assisting the individual with a disability in exploring job and career interests. For individuals who have had limited exposure to work and the community, it is important that the steps followed include activities that provide opportunities for the person to build an awareness and understanding of job possibilities. Potential probe questions for measuring the quality of the individualization of the job goal include:

- Were the individual's strengths, abilities, and interests considered when establishing job goal?
- Did the individual lead the planning and job assessment process formulating a job plan?
- Did the individual choose the job coach/employment specialist providing primary services and supports?
- Is the individual satisfied with the job goal identified and support services planned?

**Strategies:** The extent to which the person with a disability is in position to make an informed choice is a critical measure of the degree to which job goals are individualized. There are a number of strategies CRP staff can use in providing opportunities for informed choice. Use of a person centered discovery process in assisting the individual in setting an employment goal one key strategy. A discovery process involves both taking the time to really get to know the person with whom employment supports are being planned, and also for the person to get to know herself/himself in terms of job interests and goals. Community visits, observations in a variety of settings, job site assessments, involving family and friends for inputs: all of these activities are just some examples of how a CRP can utilize a variety of strategies to assure that the job goal chosen by an individual with a disability is individualized to that specific person.

### **Indicator #3: Quality of Job Outcome**

Supporting a high percentage of customers in lower hour jobs creates a variety of possible strains on the CRP. These can include creating the responsibility for helping individuals working a limited number of hours fill non-work hours. Many funding agencies require a certain level of program involvement per week; lower hours of employment can create situations where programs turn to more center-based, segregated services to fill hours. This practice perpetuates center-based services, ties-down staff that could be shifted to supporting customers in the community, and creates confusion among program participants and their families as customers move back and forth between competitive integrated work and center-based services.

Focusing on jobs that pay minimum wage or above sets up a real work for real pay employment situation. Hours of weekly employment establish the base for a number of meaningful employment outcomes. Jobs with low work hours are usually characterized by lower pay and limited benefits. In comparison, employment of 20 or more hours per week brings better access to higher wages and potential benefits such as health coverage, vacation and sick leave, and insurance coverage. Higher hours of weekly employment also improve access to work-related training provided through the employer and social interaction with co-workers. Potential probe questions for measuring the quality of job outcomes include:

- Does the individual with disabilities earn at least minimum wage?
- Is he or she working at least 20 hours per week?
- Is the employer satisfied with the job performance of the worker with a disability?

**Strategies:** There are a variety of ways to ultimately measure the quality of the job outcome and much of this will occur in the job negotiation phase between the employer and the new employee with a disability. Ultimately, the best advantages for career advancement and improved employee benefit packages are reserved for full time employees. If part time work is the goal of the new employee, do not negotiate work hours less than 20 hours per week. Make sure that the new employee's work schedule is similar to other workers in the business to ensure that social interaction is not impeded. Additionally, in all cases of part time employment, continue to reassess the employee's interest in full time employment. Over time, employees will build skills, stamina, and confidence and may be interested in a job change.

#### **Indicator #4: Consistency of Job Status with Co-Workers**

A critical measure of the true quality of an employment outcome is the consistency of the job status of the individual with a disability with that of his/her co-workers. A worker at a job site who is actually the employee of an outside service provider has limited career opportunities. Most people with disabilities are not interested in dead-end positions. As with other members of the labor force, people with disabilities are interested in jobs where they can build their resumes and/or employment positions and potentially grow with a company. Meaningful employment outcomes for individuals in supported employment are jobs that are similar to other jobs within the workplace in terms of how people are hired, supervised and compensated; the opportunities they have to interact with co-workers; and the access they have to job advancement and career opportunities. Potential probe questions for measuring the consistency of job status with co-workers include:

- Is the individual employed and paid by a business where work is taking place, not by a service provider?
- Are wages earned and benefits received commensurate with those received by others doing similar work?
- Are opportunities for advancement consistent w/ those available to co-workers?

**Strategies:** Job negotiations conducted with the employer will be vital to ensuring that the job status of the new employee with a disability is generally the same as other company employees. Agreeing to or actually setting up “special” or different payment structures, work schedules, and or benefit packages will diminish some of the major benefits of competitive employment and will make it difficult for the new employee to become socially integrated within the work site. Employers are generally open to job accommodations modifications because they make these arrangements with most all employees. Too often CRP job developers working with a perspective new employee with a disability set up an employment contracts that are unusual and many times unconventional when compared to other employees in that business. All individuals with disabilities should earn wages commensurate with that of coworkers performing the same or similar job functions.

#### **Indicator #5: Employment in Integrated Settings**

Individuals with significant disabilities can and should work in regular business environments and participate fully in life of their communities. Work is a highly valued activity in the American culture and offers wage earners numerous benefits. Having a job and paying taxes can enhance an individual's status in the community and offer the employee an opportunity to interact with co-workers and to develop a host of relationships at work and in the community. Potential probe questions for measuring the quality of employment in integrated settings include:

- Is the work site absent of a congregation of workers with disabilities?
- Are there co-workers who are not disabled within the work site with whom the individual has regular contact?
- Are there social interactions with co-workers at the work site (e.g.: during breaks, lunch, or after-hours gatherings of co-workers)?

**Strategies:** There are multiple factors that can be examined when determining if an employee is integrated in the workplace and participating in the community. Analyzing a business site to determine if the company offers an opportunity for integration is important, as is the need to repeat the analysis periodically as the worker with a disability becomes more familiar to his or her coworkers. In addition, the individual's work area, work hours, and satisfaction level play an important role in assessing a customer's integration and community participation.

### **Indicator #6: Quality of Job Site Supports and Fading**

A key to the career success of people with significant disabilities is the unique arrangements of the necessary supports that will assist each customer of employment services in obtaining and maintaining competitive employment. Detailed job analysis, identification and use of community and workplace supports, systematic instruction, compensatory strategies, orientation training, and workplace accommodations have always been the cornerstones of a well-developed plan of support. Potential probe questions for measuring the quality of job site supports and fading include:

- Do job site support strategies match the learning style of the individual and the culture of the job site?
- Is there evidence of a well thought out plan for fading job supports, designed from the first day of employment?
- Is the employee with the disability a partner in all aspects of his or her plan for job site support, including the selection of compensatory strategies and the decision to involve co-workers with instructions and support?

**Strategies:** An experienced employment specialist knows to base all employment decisions upon the preferences of the worker with a disability. Critical to the success of job site support and fading is a well-designed plan. For example, waiting until the new employee has learned his or her job before thinking about fading substantially increases the likelihood that the job coach will experience difficulty fading from the job site. An efficient job coach has a plan for fading from the first day of work.

### **Indicator #7: Presence of Ongoing Support Services for Job Retention and Career Development**

There is strong evidence that the maintenance of ongoing supports after employment is a characteristic of successful supported employment programs that generate better employment outcomes. Well coordinated job retention systems provide ongoing individualized supports that assist the worker with a disability in areas such as structuring needed workplace accommodations, monitoring and assessing job stability, adjusting supports to address changing needs both at and away from the job site, and providing other supports that enhance job retention. Well-coordinated job retention systems provide replacement assistance in situations of job loss or job enhancement.

Community rehabilitation programs can face a substantial challenge in operating a well-

coordinated job retention system after the time limited funding from Vocational Rehabilitation ends. Although there are very few studies that have focused on extended services, there is evidence that many supported employment providers have very limited access to funding for extended services. Extended services funding provided to agencies frequently does not cover the cost for providing these services and monthly follow along services are often funded from other program revenues. Potential probe questions for measuring the quality of ongoing support services for job retention and career development include:

- Is there a written long-term supports plan and is the plan being implemented?
- Are contacts made with the individual at least twice monthly to monitor employment stability?
- Is there a plan for career advancement?
- Do ongoing post-employment support services for the individual include support for changing job settings/re-employment?

**Strategies:** Too often employment specialists engaged in long terms supports take on the role of assisting each individual on their caseload with all of their work support needs. When this occurs, the employment specialist becomes overextended in his/her commitments and has a drastically limited the number of individuals that he or she can serve effectively. Long term supports should be approached with the employment specialist serving in a coordinating position by managing and directing the long term supports plan where possible rather than providing the actual services. For example, if a worker with a disability were having difficulty paying his or her bills, a creative brainstorming process should take place considering the possible options. Once the individual selected the option of choice, the employment specialist would follow up to be sure that the plan is being implemented as designed.

Also, there is strong documentation that once there is a change in management at the job site, many supported employees experience difficulty for a host of different reason. It is vital for the employment specialist to remain in contact with the business site. When there is a change in management, support must be provided by going back into the business and explaining the ongoing employment services as a key resource for the employer in maintaining a productive employee within the business.

## Summary

The quality of employment outcomes achieved by people with significant disabilities varies widely across the country. However, if CRPs followed the quality indicators and strategies described in this fact sheet they could potentially improve their services and the job outcomes for people with disabilities. Interested programs can download a form to measure the quality indicators described in this fact sheet by visiting: [<http://www.crp-rcep.org>] or contact Grant Revell at [[wgrevell@vcu.edu](mailto:wgrevell@vcu.edu)]. The form can be used as a self-assessment by a CRP in reviewing the consistency of its employment services and supports with a core set of quality indicators.

## References

Bond, G.B., Becker, D.R., Drake, R.E., Rapp, C.A., Meisler, N., Lehman, A.F., Bell, M.D., & Blyler, C.R. (2001). Implementing supported employment as an evidenced-based practice. *Psychiatric Services*, *52*, 313-322.

Brooke, V., Inge, K., Armstrong, A., & Wehman, P. (Eds.). (1997). Supported employment handbook: A customer-driven approach for persons with significant disabilities. Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports. Accessed February 13, 2008 at: <http://www.worksupport.com/research/viewContent.cfm/101>.

Callahan, M. (2008). Discovery and customization – The touchstone of customization: Who is this person? Richmond, VA: VCU RRTC, T-TAP. Accessed February 11, 2008 at: [http://www.t-tap.org/training/onlineseminars/callahan/callahan\\_discovery.htm](http://www.t-tap.org/training/onlineseminars/callahan/callahan_discovery.htm).

Federal Register (February 11, 1997). 62(28), 6311. 34 CFR 361.

Inge, K. (2008). Demystifying Customized Employment for Individuals with Significant Disabilities Fact Sheet. Richmond, VA: VCU Region III CRP RCEP. Accessed February 11, 2008 at: <http://www.crp-rcep.org/resources/viewContent.cfm/490>.

Inge, K., Targett, P. & Revell, G. (2008). Supporting community employment as an employment outcome. Richmond, VA: VCU Region III CRP RCEP Accessed February 13, 2008 at: <http://www.crp-rcep.org/resources/viewContent.cfm/500>.

Miller, L., O'Mara, S., & Kregel, J. (Eds.). (2007). Promoting and supporting employment outcomes for SSA disability beneficiaries. IN: The WIPA national training curriculum: Promoting employment of SSA beneficiaries with disabilities. Richmond, VA: WIPA National Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University. Accessed February 11, 2008 at: <http://www.vcu-ntc.org/documents/module1.doc>.

Targett, P. & Inge, K. (2008). Employment negotiations fact sheet. Richmond, VA: VCU Region III CRP RCEP. Accessed February 11, 2008 at <http://www.crp-rcep.org/resources/viewContent.cfm/493>.

Wehman, P., Revell, G., & Brooke, V. (2003). Competitive Employment: Is it the First Choice Yet. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *14*(3), 163-173. Accessed February 11, 2008 at: [http://www.worksupport.com/documents/proed\\_competitiveemployment.pdf](http://www.worksupport.com/documents/proed_competitiveemployment.pdf).

The authors for this fact sheet are Valerie Brooke (PA TA Liaison), and Grant Revell (DE TA Liaison). For more information on VCU CRP-RCEP, please visit <http://www.crp-rcep.org>.

**For additional information, contact your TA Liaison.**

### Delaware

Grant Revell - [wgrevell@vcu.edu](mailto:wgrevell@vcu.edu)

**Maryland**

Howard Green - [jhgreen@vcu.edu](mailto:jhgreen@vcu.edu)

**Pennsylvania**

Valerie Brooke - [vbroke@vcu.edu](mailto:vbroke@vcu.edu)

**Virginia and West Virginia**

Jennifer Todd McDonough - [jltodd@vcu.edu](mailto:jltodd@vcu.edu)

**Washington D.C.**

Pam Targett - [psherron@vcu.edu](mailto:psherron@vcu.edu)

This fact sheet was funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which is part of the U.S. Department of Education (#H264B050007). The contents do not necessarily represent the interpretations or opinion of the U.S. Department of Education. Virginia Commonwealth University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution providing access to education and employment without regard to age, race, color, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, veteran's status, political affiliation, or disability. If special accommodations or language translation are needed, contact Katherine Inge at: [kinge@vcu.edu](mailto:kinge@vcu.edu) or Voice (804) 828 - 1851 | TTY (804) 828 - 2494.