

Competitive Integrated Employment For Families and Students

The ability to obtain competitive integrated employment (CIE) involves a partnership among students, families, and their circle of support. A circle of support can also include disability-related state agencies and employment-related service providers. CIE should result in a customized job match between the student and employer. The following provides more information about the critical components of competitive integrated employment.

- **Competitive:** Workers with disabilities earn the same wages and benefits as co-workers without disabilities in the same job and have the same opportunities for upward mobility within the company.
- **Integrated:** Employees with and without disabilities work together and have opportunities for interaction. There is a natural proportion of individuals with disabilities in any one workplace. Employees with disabilities are not congregated or separated from other employees within the workplace. Workplaces also offer remote or virtual employment options, which should be available to all job seekers, including those with disabilities.
- **Employment:** A wide variety of jobs are secured in diverse businesses that have a positive workplace culture and climate. Ongoing support is provided as needed.
- **Reasonable Accommodations:** This includes any equipment, technology, and/or other materials and support that are needed, and reasonable, to complete the job. Reasonable accommodation is provided for all employees, as needed, to complete the essential components of the job.

A national “Employment First” initiative has made CIE the first and preferred outcome of states’ employment services for individuals with disabilities. Indiana continues to move away from programs like sheltered work toward inclusive employment in jobs and careers with ongoing support. As Indiana makes this shift, the emphasis will be to increase those outcomes for all Hoosiers. More information can be found on the [INAPSE: What is Employment First? webpage](#).

Connecting with Post-School State and Local Employment-Related Services

Individuals with disabilities can benefit from connecting with their state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency to gain access to and funding for educational and/or employment-related services. Each region of Indiana has a VR office. Review the [VR Service Locations in Indiana](#).

In addition to VR services, students often receive help from a local agency that provides competitive integrated employment services for individuals with disabilities. VR and the Medicaid Waivers provide funding for these services. Employment Specialists/Job Coaches may be assigned to the student. These professionals should be part of the transition planning team. Their focus is to support the student in looking for a job and getting accommodations in place for success after high school. For a list of employment service providers, view the [VR Picklist](#) webpage.

VR provides “follow-along” services for those with more significant impacts of disability. Students with developmental disabilities may qualify for one of Indiana’s Medicaid Waivers. Medicaid Waiver funds “extended services” (support services) for those needing ongoing support. The Arc of Indiana website, [The Arc of Indiana and Medicaid Waivers](#) provides the following information about Waivers: “Medicaid Waivers, sometimes called Home and Community Based Services (HCBS), allow Medicaid to fund supports and services for children and adults with disabilities in their family homes or community residential programs instead of institutions. Indiana offers eight Medicaid Waiver programs for people with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, traumatic brain injury, and mental health needs. For more information, visit the [Medicaid and Home-Based Community Services](#) webpage.

Another state agency that provides employment-related services for any student is the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. This agency serves all Hoosiers to secure employment, training, and support that leads to well-paying jobs. For those who may not need a lot of help finding and keeping a job, they can be a practical alternative. Visit the [Indiana Department of Workforce Development](#) website.

Finding Interests, Skills, and Support Needs Through Discovery

VR provides several steps in the process of improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The first step, called “Discovery,” is the process of getting to know an individual’s unique strengths, interests, preferences, needs, goals, and dreams, as well as their knowledge, skills, learning preferences, values, personality traits, likes and dislikes, life experiences, support systems, support needs, and accommodations. By assuming the student can work, families, educators, and other professionals can design training and support early to ensure the student’s success in finding and keeping employment.

Discovery uses a variety of approaches to help students explore various jobs and/or post-secondary educational options, if needed. Job shadowing, job tryouts, internships, apprenticeships, and enrollment in educational courses or programs are examples. Real-life work experience reveals more about the student’s skills and areas where they will need more help than simulated scenarios. The information gained in Discovery is documented and used to find the types of employment that the student wishes to pursue and conditions or characteristics of such employment (e.g., full-time or part-time, educational and/or skill requirements, accommodation and support needs, or transportation options).

All the information contained in Discovery enhances individual transition planning. This must be a team effort, including the student and those who know them best. It should address all areas

that the person may need support, like transportation, benefit planning, extended services, potential job loss strategies, and individualized approaches to on-the-job supports. The result should be an agreed-upon career direction and a job before graduation.

Supporting Employment

Once an employment direction is clear and employment-related services have been secured, the job development and job training process begin. Typically, this involves completing employment applications, scheduling interviews with employers, negotiating wages, hours, and benefits, setting a start date, arranging accessible, dependable, and affordable transportation, providing onboarding, and training activities, and providing needed accommodations and supports. An employment specialist/job coach from an adult service agency can help students throughout this process, but the goal is for the student to lead this process.

Disclosing Disability and Obtaining Accommodations

Students may choose to disclose their disability at any stage of the employment process. It is up to them to decide if and when to disclose. Disclosing information on the accommodations and supports a student needs can lead to greater job success. Employers must provide those accommodations when they are reasonable, and the student is qualified for the position. For more information, review the [Disability Disclosure](#). Reasonable accommodations are required by law in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For more information about the ADA, review the [Americans with Disabilities Act website](#). The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) offers excellent information about job accommodations. Visit the [Job Accommodation Network website](#).

Utilizing Natural Supports

When supporting people on the job, it is important to maximize the use of those things that are available to all employees. This is known as natural supports. Employment specialists/job coaches can promote co-worker involvement in training and support activities rather than provide this assistance themselves. Training programs can be adapted so they work for the employee with a disability.

Competitive Integrated Employment means that employees with disabilities have the same opportunities for job growth and advancement as their fellow employees. Becoming stable in a job should not be the end of services. It is important to assess whether the job continues to be satisfying to the employee over time and to act if it is not (e.g., advocate for a raise or advancement, considering seeking a new job). Individuals with ongoing support needs should receive follow-up and/or extended services. The focus here is on skill development, continued career advancement, job changes such as new management, and if a student loses a job, services to immediately find new employment. Ongoing support should be holistic and proactive to consider all concerns that may impact work across the person's life.

Understanding the Impact of Working on SSI, SSDI, and Medicaid

It is important to understand how employment will affect one's federal and state benefits. Maintaining benefits while working is possible. State and federal programs can help people with disabilities go to work, pay the rent, take a class, get transportation, access healthcare, and save for the future. Work incentives (safety nets) are available. Federal and state benefits planning and information services are available from multiple sources, including the Center for Community Living and Careers (CCLC) at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (IIDC) on the [CCLC Benefits Information Training](#) webpage.

There are ways to save money while employed. For example, an ABLE Account allows you to save for qualified disability expenses without losing eligibility for certain assistance programs such as SSI (Supplemental Security Income) and Medicaid. A Special Needs Trust (SNT) also allows individuals to save financial resources and keep their benefits. For more information, visit the [National Able Alliance](#) or [The Arc Trust](#). There are other options, such as ABLE accounts that benefit liaisons can help with. If an individual is not connected to VR, contact the WIPA Project at [SIRS \(Southern Indiana Resource Solutions\)](#) or [Aspire Indiana](#), or the [SSA \(Social Security Administration\) Ticket to Work Program](#).

More benefit planning and assistance can be found by contacting an Employment Network Provider (EN) such as [Ticket to Work](#) or Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA). You may email indianaworks@aspireindiana.org or wipainsirs@sirs.org.

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