

**A Systematic Approach to Revising Iowa's Integrated Employment
Funding System Supplemental Report:
Building Capacity and Expertise of Employment Specialists
September 2012**



Iowa is in the process of restructuring the state's funding mechanisms to support individual integrated employment outcomes. One goal of the restructuring is to ensure that payment rates for job development and initial integrated employment training supports are sufficiently high to support the hiring of employment specialists that have advanced community employment competencies and are adequately compensated for their expertise.

The rate structure proposed by the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) assumes high levels of expertise in the delivery of employment services and supports. To assure that staff providing integrated employment services have the necessary skills to implement high quality services it is recommended that Iowa's Mental Health and Disabilities Services (MHDS) develop and implement training and technical assistance structures that will assure a qualified and sustainable provider workforce with the expertise to effectively deliver employment services. This supplemental report will provide information and guidance on the factors MHDS should consider in designing and implementing a qualification and training system for employment professionals.

This document will:

- Describe why Iowa should consider a qualification and training system
- Describe the 7 elements to address when doing workforce development for supported employment professionals
- Describe important elements to include in an Employment Supports Core Training
- Suggest ways to provide ongoing professional development
- Describe the national training standards and national certification processes
- Ideas for offering provider level training and technical assistance

Why Consider Requiring a Qualification and Training System?

Why is it important to consider the need for Iowa to develop and implement a qualification and training system for individuals providing job development and employment support services?

- First, if the rates paid for integrated services are going to be increased it is crucial that MHDS also ensure that the professionals providing the services have the capacity to deliver the quality of services they are being paid for.
- Second, the idea of ensuring a basic quality of service through certifying the competency of the provider is common. Doctors, teachers, lawyers and other professionals, including many human service workers, participate in various processes for licensing and certification. Supported employment professionals themselves often express a need for greater respect and professionalism for their work in the field, and the establishment of a qualification and training system would respond to this need.
- Third, in employment services for individuals with disabilities there has been a steady evolution of services, service designs, and expectations for employment professionals. One result of the pace of these changes has been tremendous variability in how supported employment services are offered and provided, as well as variability in the quality of services people have received. The variability in the quality of services individuals have received has produced confusion for job seekers with disabilities, their family and friends, state service agencies (Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health, and Intellectual and Developmental Disability, etc.), and the business community about what employment professionals actually do. Who in the field of employment services has not heard stories of employers concerned about ill-prepared or misguided employment professionals coming into a business setting and reducing their businesses' efficiency and effectiveness? Or of people with disabilities and their families, asking for a concrete explanation of what employment professionals can do to support their career goals and what kind of support they should expect. Establishing a qualification and training system will help to eliminate this variability.
- Fourth, it is a research based practice.¹ Hall, Butterworth, Winsor, Gilmore, and Metzel (2007) found that training and professional development for employment professionals was a key element in states serving a high percentage of individuals in integrated employment. Requiring completion of specific curricula is one way for Iowa to continue to improve employment services for individuals with disabilities. Other states that are also pursuing this strategy are Florida, Maine and New Mexico.

Workforce Development for Supported Employment

What should a workforce development plan for supported employment services look like? A comprehensive but realistic workforce development model should emphasize supported employment competencies and target community employment staff, managers, and administrators, as well as case management staff. The workforce development goal is to have a sufficient statewide labor pool of Supported Employment Specialists (SES) who will be expert supported employment practitioners and have mastered the core competencies and practices of supported employment.

¹ Hall, A.C., Butterworth, J., Winsor, J., Gilmore, D., & Metzel, D. (2007). Pushing the employment agenda: Case study research of high performing states in integrated employment. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* 43(3) 182-198.

In developing and expanding the capacity of the SES labor pool MHDS should consider these elements:

- *Development of an employment training tracking system.* Initially this will require the identification and evaluation of currently available trainings on supported employment that are used in Iowa. The evaluation should be used to create a summary of basic training options (both online and in-person) which are available and identify existing expertise in supported employment. A second step would be to determine and communicate new training and certification requirements (if MHDS chooses to implement this strategy) throughout the state, and to develop and implement a system to track the training status of employment professionals. MHDS could choose to do this based on previously approved certification.
- *Development of a basic employment certification system.* This element is described in detail under the heading Employment Supports Core Training on page 3.
- *Development of an employment staff mentoring system.* Develop opportunities for employment staff to be mentored by experts in the state so that opportunities for continued skill-building and expert consultation are available. This could include local level provider networking meetings, state and regional level communities of practice, peer-to-peer mentoring relationships, and employment provider agency-to employment provider agency supports.
- *Development of a system for providing professional development on advanced topics in job development and support.* Develop a system for offering professional development opportunities. There are important topics that may not be covered in a basic employment training curriculum but would be critical to employment staff that hold specific leadership and supervision roles, and that work with specific populations (individuals with mental health concerns, autism, multiple disabilities, and individuals that are interested in self-employment, etc.).
- *Development of an infrastructure to support the long term development of competencies.* It is important to develop a process for ensuring training is provided in a consistent manner and that updates to the training occur to reflect the most up-to-date information about providing high quality supported employment services.
- *Development of buy-in from the community.* A component of ensuring that training is not only received but is put in to practice is to set expectations for improved employment outcomes, and create excitement in and offer support to the provider community to try new techniques and strategies for supported employment.
- *Development of different modes of instruction.* It is important to consider the variety and benefit of aligning with and encouraging employment related staff to access different venues and events for instruction and how different modes of instruction can be used to meet MHDS's core training and continuing education goals. Different venues for instruction to consider: attending or presenting at workshops and seminars, participating in online training, attending

or presenting at professional conferences, membership in professional organizations, relevant coursework, conducting an independent study (professional reading, site visits, and relevant observation activities), serving on local, state, or national committees or task forces, and participation in relevant research or demonstration projects.

Employment Supports Core Training

This section is an example of the learning modules that should be minimally included in the development of an employment supports core training curriculum and some suggestions for their implementation.

Sample learning modules

- *Introduction to Employment Services:* Topics to include in this learning module include an overview of the history of community employment including the social, political and economic changes that led to the expansion of opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and the variety of approaches that can be used to ensure success for the job seeker and the employer.
- *Person-Focused Career Planning:* This learning module will focus on the job seeker and the approaches used to assess the individuals employment goals, abilities, interests and capacities. Participants will learn how to coordinate and implement the person-centered planning process, identifying personal and family networks, develop vocational profiles, and schedule and evaluate situational assessments.
- *Job Development and Business Engagement:* This learning module will focus on developing jobs in an ever-changing economic environment that places increasing demands on employment professionals. Topics to include in this learning module are informational interviewing, marketing, labor market analysis, responding to objections, and accommodations. Due to the complexity of this module it would be best as a two-day training with the requirement that registrants would need to attend both days in order to receive credit.
- *Job Coaching and Support Strategies:* This learning module should focus strategies to support job retention such as: on the role of the job coach, the development of natural supports and importance of facilitating social inclusion in the workplace, systematic instruction, maintenance and fading of job coach services, use of assistive technology, and strategies to address behavioral issues that impact employment success. Due to the complexity of this module it would be best as a two-day training with the requirement that registrants would need to attend both days in order to receive credit.

Suggestions for implementation

It is advised that these initial trainings be done in-person (potentially using a train-the-trainer model, rotating training locations, etc.) and available on a continuous basis to accommodate evolving staff needs and turnover across the state. MHDS should consider whether these learning modules should be a series of trainings sessions that can be taken separately, or a combined multi-day training for a comprehensive perspective on innovative employment services, and whether there should be a

requirement to repeat or refresh the training periodically to ensure that employment professionals remain up-to-date in their skills.

Ongoing professional development

It is critical to consider how the skills taught in the learning modules will be practiced and reinforced to assure that staff build competencies and not just amass attendance and completion credits. Typically funding for ongoing training and travel to attend the training is not robust and this impacts the ways in which additional professional development opportunities can be received. Live (“real-time”) online events are one strategy to mitigate this issue and provide valuable opportunities to reinforce Iowa’s focus on employment, build awareness of employment-related events, and engage stakeholders. The emphasis of these events should be on building familiarity with tools, terms and the potential for application. Topics that are well suited to this type of online event include:

- An overview and history of individualized integrated employment
- Building relationships and networking
- Challenges to implementing person-focused career planning
- Supporting individuals who are transitioning to Community Employment
- How do you address disclosure of disability and accommodations requests
- Working successfully with business owners
- Developing and fostering the use of natural supports
- Non-traditional business designs such as self-employment and micro-enterprise

Opportunities for mentorship, onsite technical assistance, and distance technical assistance for employment support professionals are other strategies that can be used to ensure that the information acquired in the core training learning modules will be practiced and reinforced. These opportunities for professional growth and assistance help to ensure that employment staff receive guidance when solving employment related problems and structured support in the implementation of learning module skills. Some states include the completion of field work and on-site mentorship as part of the fulfillment of Employment Supports Core Training requirement. For example New Mexico has developed an Employment Institute staffed by certified trainers for their statewide curricula on employment and to provide ongoing mentorship to provider employment staff. Other states encourage employment providers to join APSE in order to provide access to opportunities for peer-to-peer mentorship and access to current training on best practices in supported employment services.

National Training Standards and National Certification

Lastly, MHDS should consider taking part in national training standards and national certification processes.

National Training Standards would require participating in the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE)². ACRE is the *only* national organization that certifies when an employment professionals training participation meets APSE standards. In this role ACRE awards certificates to individuals who

² ACRES website is <http://www.acreducators.org/>

complete a minimum of 40 hours of training or professional development provided by an ACRE-approved training resource. The following chart displays the topics that must be covered in any approved ACRE training resource meeting APSE competencies:

Topic	Hours Needed for Basic Certificate
Introduction (Values, Ethics, Rights, Legislation, Best Practice)	4
Assessment and Career Planning	5
Marketing and Job Development	6
Job Acquisition (Decision Making, Impact on Benefits, Preparation)	3
On the Job Training and Support	5
Ongoing Support	2
Specific Disabilities	1
Other Topics (specified)	14 (can also be additional hours in above categories)
TOTAL	40

ACRE approves a curriculum one time and currently does not have a process to review revisions of curricula for current best practice. However it should be noted that in direct discussion with a sample of ACRE training providers most use the “Other Topic” time to provide instruction in current employment practice. To view all approved Trainers and Training programs see at <http://interwork.sdsu.edu/acre/members.htm>

Another approach that can be used is the process of obtaining national certification for an employment training program. Certification refers to an endorsement from a body of experts issued to individuals who practice in a given field. The process used can range from an informal peer review board, to issuing formal certificates that testify to the completion of a course or study or that an individual has demonstrated certain core competencies. Certification has been used in other fields as a prerequisite to providing services; that is, you cannot be employed without being certified. Other fields allow a broader range of practitioners, but use certification as a symbol of a higher level of service provision. Certified personnel thus become more highly sought after and in some instances they are also paid higher wages. APSE has established the Employment Support Professional Certification Council a national certification program through the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) for *Certified Employment Support Professional*. (<http://www.apse.org/certification/>)

Provider Training and Technical Assistance

This document has primarily focused on training at the individual employment professional level, however MHDS should consider whether there is a need for training and technical assistance at the service provider level. Three initial training and technical assistance needs that should be considered are: organizational development, organizational support, and topical workshops.

- *Organizational development to rebalance provider agency capacity to focus on Community based employment services:* Service providers will need support to restructure or rebalance resources and develop policy, strategy and staff expertise to increase individual employment

outcomes. Key strategies could include intensive organizational assessment and consultation relating to organizational change.

- *Intensive organizational support for long term organizational change:* Technical assistance would be provided to support a comprehensive organizational review, development of an organizational rebalancing plan, and the development and implementation of strategy and policy designed to increase and improve individual employment outcomes. Participating organizations typically need intensive consultation and technical assistance over a one to two-year period. Key support elements to consider:
 - The selection of service providers through a request for proposals process
 - An initial quantitative and qualitative organizational assessment
 - Ongoing data summary and analysis to support and track organizational development
 - Individual Outcomes Log
 - Staff Time log
 - Organizational Survey
 - Development of an organizational action plan
 - Assignment of a mentor from another service provider(optional)
 - On-site consultation and technical assistance
 - Telephone and email consultation
 - Opportunities to participate in webcasts, conference calls and discussions with other participating organizations to learn about better practices for achieving a strong organizational focus on integrated employment.

- *Topical workshops:* Driven by provider and state needs, topical workshops could be offered and designed to support specific instructional need areas. Examples of topical workshops to consider:
 - Understanding Social Security Work Incentives
 - Concepts of Self-Employment/Business Ownership
 - Quality Employment Practices for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
 - Co-occurring Mental Illness /Substance Abuse and Employment

Conclusion

MHDS is currently undertaking systems change activities to improve employment outcomes for Iowans with disabilities. One systems change effort under consideration is changes to the employment qualification and training requirements for supported employment. This document provides a starting place as MHDS considers the need for a qualification and training system, the elements to address when doing workforce development for supported employment professionals, the elements to include in an Employment Supports Core Training, suggestions for providing ongoing professional development, a description of the national training standards and national certification processes, and ideas for offering provider level training and technical assistance. The information in this document should be used as a tool for facilitating discussion amongst stakeholders in Iowa about the ways in which qualification and training requirements can be used to improve existing opportunities and expand service capacity for support employment services.