

2019

# APSE Universal Employment Competencies



# Association of People Supporting Employment First’s Universal Employment Competencies

*“Competency” is defined as the ability do something successfully and efficiently. These competencies therefore, are designed to guide the successful and efficient implementation of services. Both knowledge **and** skill sets are necessary for practitioners and funders to understand the various domains of supported employment. These **universal employment competencies** represent the skills and standards of practice for providers of supported, customized, and self-employment services **for ALL people with disabilities.***

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## Introduction to APSE’s Universal Employment Competencies

APSE first developed and adopted supported employment competencies in 2001. The significant shifts in the policy and practice landscape for employment services requires that APSE periodically review these competencies. APSE’s Professional Development Committee reviewed and revised these competencies in 2018 to ensure they reflect current best practices and standards in the field of employment support. To date, several other national groups including ACRE<sup>1</sup>, WINTAC<sup>2</sup>, YTAC<sup>3</sup>, and others have updated new competency standards for both supported and competitive employment. As a result, APSE presents an updated, universal, set of competencies for employment professionals across that U.S. that reflect the evolving knowledge and skill sets needed to support job seekers with disabilities to find, secure, and succeed in the competitive job market.

As the only national organization devoted to Employment First, APSE believes Employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities, regardless of level of disability. To achieve this outcome a well-trained, competent, and passionate workforce of employment support professionals is critical. The APSE competencies provide a foundation of the knowledge and skills required to make employment first a reality around the nation.

These 2019 competencies, have been approved by the National APSE Board of Directors to guide Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, State Department of Health and Human Services, State Departments of Education, and service providers in providing customized and supported employment, services consistent with the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act of 2014<sup>4</sup> and Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Final Rule for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS<sup>5</sup>). For more information, please visit the APSE website: [www.apse.org](http://www.apse.org)

*The APSE Board thanks the Professional Development Committee and APSE staff members involved with the development of these competencies. This includes Wesley E. Anderson (The Arc of New Jersey), Nancy Boutot (National Disability Institute), Courtney Horton (Cape Fear Vocational Services), Kelly Nye-Lengerman (University of Minnesota), Erica Belois-Pacer (APSE), and Katie Wolf Whaley (University of Kentucky)*

*Additional contributions were made by members of APSE’s Certification and Accreditation Committee.*

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<sup>1</sup> (ACRE (The Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators), 2018)

<sup>2</sup> (Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center, n.d.)

<sup>3</sup> (Vocational Rehabilitation Youth Technical Assistance Center, n.d.)

<sup>4</sup> (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, n.d.)

<sup>5</sup> (Home & Community Based Services Final Regulation, n.d.)

## DOMAIN 1: APPLICATION OF CORE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE

### Introduction to Supported Employment

- 1) Competitive, integrated employment (CIE) can be achieved through a variety of employment approaches including but not limited to supported employment, customized employment, and self-employment. The pursuit of CIE expects employment support professionals to prioritize place and train models of support, as opposed to train and place or work readiness models.
- 2) Underlying values and definition of competitive, integrated employment:
  - a) define "normalization" and its guiding principles;
  - b) identify support strategies that enhance the image of a worker with a disability;
  - c) communicate the benefits of workplace inclusion for people with disabilities;
  - d) differentiate between individual and group approaches to employment;
  - e) placement supports prioritizing the job seeker's preference and priorities;
  - f) practice of zero exclusion- everyone can work with the right supports;
  - g) strengths- based approach to placement based on the skills, interests, and preferences of the job seeker.
- 3) Informed choice, self-determination, and active participation throughout the employment process.
- 4) Rights and responsibilities of individuals in employment.
- 5) Roles and responsibilities of employment support professionals' specialists (i.e. job developers, employment consultants, placement support specialists, etc.)
- 6) Engagement of support teams and social networks of individuals with disabilities, including friends and family.
- 7) Familiarity with legislation and regulations related to employment policies and services including but not limited to: state employment first policy, American with Disabilities Act, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Rehabilitation Act, Fair Labor Standards Act,

## Introduction to Supported Employment

### Olmstead, HCBS Settings and Achieving a Better Life Experience

- 8) Best practices in employment support services from intake to follow-along including, but not limited to:
  - a) Use of natural supports
  - b) Supported employment
  - c) Evidence-based practices
  - d) Motivational Interviewing techniques
  - e) The importance of non-traditional vocational evaluations
  - f) Best practices in school-to-work and community living transition.
  - g) Funding options for employment services, including vocational rehabilitation, state departments of health and human services, state departments of education, Ticket to Work, Medicaid, and veteran's benefits.
  - h) Current context of competitive integrated employment supports services and labor market metrics in your state.
- 9) Understand the impact of meaningful school provided work-based learning activities on future employment outcomes.

## DOMAIN 2: DISCOVERY/INDIVIDUALIZED ASSESSMENT AND EMPLOYMENT/CAREER PLANNING

### Assessment and Career Planning

- 10) Understand how to develop a vocational profile, containing information about each job seeker's unique interests, strengths, needs, and conditions of employment. Profile may be based on:
  - a) Home visits to learn about the individual and his/her;
    - i) Current tasks, skills, and personal interests
    - ii) Preferred style of learning
    - iii) Environmental tolerances/preferences
    - iv) Preferred modes of communication
  - b) Interviewing family members, friends, and/or others who know the job-seeker well and can provide insight about the job seeker's attributes, skills, and interests
  - c) Exploring the individual's cultural and social background, including native and spoken language, as well as his/her valued role in the family, and community to determine its impact on employment, if any.
  - d) Reviewing the individual's past records to collect any pertinent information that may impact successful employment.
- 11) Exploring non-work needs that may impact the achievement and maintenance of employment, as well as work-life balance ((e.g. transportation, counseling, food, assistance, financial, housing, etc.)
- 12) Identify opportunities for new activities that will inform the initial career planning process, whether or not the individual is receiving adult or youth transition services.
  - a) Organize task-based discovery activities in both familiar and novel locations, individually developed for each person based on his/her personal interests, in multiple community settings.
  - b) Conduct community mapping with the job seeker
  - c) Arrange informational interviews, job shadows, tours of businesses
- 13) Develop opportunities for job seekers to try tasks and skills in community businesses aligned with their individual interests and desires; these may be labeled work trials or community-based assessments. These opportunities must align with Department of Labor guidelines about unpaid work and address potential business concerns about liability risks.

## Assessment and Career Planning

- a) Ask the job-seeker's opinions about the tasks, skills, and business setting being sampled
- b) Assess environmental or job-task modifications for the person to succeed in his/her choices of employment settings
- c) Explore available of community and transportation supports
- d) Test necessary assistive technology or other accommodations

14) Synthesize relevant information into a comprehensive, non-evaluative document that provides sufficient information to assist the job seeker in planning a career development strategy. This plan should identify essential and ideal features of employment and be reviewed and approved by the job seeker.

15) Understand the difference between Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and the impact of wages on SSI, SSDI, state and local benefits (i.e. SNAP, TANF, Housing), Medicaid, and Medicare. Identify local and national resources for benefits planning information

16) Understand the basics of self-employment/entrepreneurial business development for people with disabilities, including:

- a) Examples of self-employment
- b) local and national resources
- c) VR's role in self-employment

17) Understand how to make referrals to appropriate local agencies, organizations, and networks based on individual career plans.

## DOMAIN 3: COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND JOB DEVELOPMENT

### Marketing and Job Development

- 18) Use local employment studies, conduct market surveys, research business groups, and other methods for updating information about employment opportunities in the local job market. Conduct informational interviews with new employers.
- 19) Develop a system for compiling and organizing information on businesses.
- 20) Develop a file (print or electronic) of pertinent information on each employer identified.
- 21) Maintain updated information on new area businesses, type of jobs available, and locations of job sites within the community.
- 22) Target and identify types of businesses to contact based on the needs and interests of job seekers.
- 23) Develop marketing plans targeted to employers.
  - a) Position the agency as an employment service.
  - b) Target messages to audience needs, rather than offering one general presentation or brochure
  - c) Illustrate the ways employment agencies can support businesses to hire, train, and retain employees with disabilities.
  - d) Use language and images that highlight skills, abilities, and interests of job seekers, and respect the job seeker's disclosure choices
  - e) Explain work incentive provisions available to employers for hiring employees with disabilities, including: Work Opportunity Tax Credit, Arc Wage Reimbursement Program, Disabled Access Tax Credit, Architecture/Transportation Tax Deduction, VR On- the-Job Training Wage.
- 24) Create effective marketing tools for supported employment, including:
  - a) Understand publication strategies for marketing employment services, including employment brochures; employment fact sheets, cover letters to businesses and testimonials;
  - b) Develop and deliver presentations to individuals and/or parent groups, advocacy groups, local civic organizations, service providers, and employers;
  - c) Participate in community business organizations. (career centers, Chambers of Commerce, etc.);

## Marketing and Job Development

d) Serve as a consultant to businesses on disability issues.

25) Develop methods to assist job seekers in their job search process.

- a) Assemble job seeker portfolios, including resumes (including video and visual resumes), letters of introduction, and references.
- b) Assist in completing job applications, arranging job interviews, job sampling. etc.
- c) Utilize social media/electronic media, as well as traditional job search resources.
- d) Demonstrate personalized job development and relationship marketing, utilizing personal networking.

26) Utilize job matching strategies, including:

- a) Identify and clarify existing job descriptions;
- b) Identify and clarify unmet employer needs;
- c) analyze the existing workplace cultures and climates;
- d) Organize available transportation options; and,
- e) Evaluate the fit between the targeted business' needs and the job seeker's profile.

27) Differentiate between job carving and job restructuring

28) Identify and recommend job carving options.

29) Demonstrate how to develop employment proposals based on business and job seeker preferences and negotiate accommodations and job details

- a) Negotiate typical job designs, including hours, wages, tasks, work area, breaks, orientation, training, and supports.
- b) Provide examples of customized employment proposals (i.e. potential task list, cost savings analysis, tailored resume/portfolio).

## DOMAIN 4: WORKPLACE AND RELATED SUPPORTS

### Job Acquisition

- 30) Facilitate communication with relevant team members as designated by the job seeker (e.g., job seeker, parents, rehabilitation counselors) to ensure all members are fully informed.
- 31) Understand the relationship between earned income, healthcare, and Social security benefits
- 32) Prepare necessary supports and resources for a successful employee onboarding process (e.g., transportation, employee orientation, paperwork, special equipment, uniforms) coordinating with housing/residential staff, if applicable.

### Job Analysis

- 33) Conduct a comprehensive job analysis, including:
  - a) Obtain clear performance expectations from employer
  - b) Organize the tasks of the job in sequentially, then by the approximate time required to perform each task.
  - c) identify supports and reinforcers natural to the work site.
  - d) evaluate the integration potential offered by a position, including physical, social, and cultural factors.
  - e) identify opportunities for creating or adapting jobs that make use of integrated and natural supports.
  - f) identify potential job modification and accommodation opportunities.
  - g) discover opportunities to explain and promote Universal Design

### Worker Orientation

- 34) Arrange travel/transportation supports and training based on current job specific needs and potential changes
- 35) Implement strategies for establishing positive, new employee on-boarding, including:
  - a) Advocate for maximize hours on the job, including natural social times (breaks and lunch);
  - b) Ensure the new employee is introduced to coworkers and direct supports by worksite

## Worker Orientation

- personnel, as typical to the workplace
- c) Supplement typical new employee orientation and training procedures; and,
  - d) Recommend necessary modifications and accommodations are in place.

## Workplace Supports

- 36) Understand strategies for developing workplace supports.
  - a) Identify effective methods to establish natural supports within work environments.
  - b) Analyze work cultures to better understand sources of support and social relationships.
  - c) Support coworkers/supervisor by supplementing their existing employee training practices
  - d) Eliminate artificial support strategies that can stigmatize or stereotype employees.
  - e) Facilitate mentor relationships between supported employees and coworkers.
- 37) Recognize the elements of systematic training, including task analysis, natural cues and reinforcers, error correction procedures, and self-instruction techniques.
  - a) Utilize effective verbal, visual, auditory, and/or tactile prompts.
  - b) Identify and promote use of naturally occurring reinforcers and natural cues.
  - c) Describe how to enhance natural cues and reduce dependence on prompts.
  - d) Recognize and differentiate individualized reinforcement strategies, including reinforcement preferences and hierarchies, satiation effects, effect of quantity and quality, and natural versus artificial approaches.
  - e) Define and employ the various reinforcement schedules: continuous, fixed ratio, variable ratio, fixed interval, variable interval, and how to fade reinforcers to naturally occurring levels.
  - f) Formulate strategies to systematically fade prompts and other forms of assistance to the lowest level possible
- 38) Conduct a task analysis for job duties that require instruction.
  - a) Utilize task analysis to conduct a baseline assessment
  - b) Analyze baseline data.
  - c) Establish an instructional plan that includes schedule for training, instructional procedures, natural prompts, natural reinforcers, reinforcement procedures, and data collection/evaluation procedures.
  - d) Apply data collection procedures using frequency, duration, interval, and performance.

- e) Analyze a data-set to determine the progress of a worker over time.

### Adapting the Job Site

- 39) Develop adaptations and accommodations that meet the needs of both the employee and employer.
  - a) compare identified supports needs with pre-existing natural supports;
  - b) research potential, non-stigmatizing, accommodations and modifications;
  - c) identify opportunities to introduce and integrate the use of assistive technology.
  - d) assess the ongoing need for, and effectiveness of, implemented adaptations and accommodations. Substitute artificial supports for natural ones, when appropriate.

### Professionalism on the Job

- 40) Assisting employees to meet the professional interpersonal expectations of the existing workplace culture.
  - a) identify cultural norms of the workplace.
  - b) describe observable actions in measurable and observable terms.
  - c) recognize consequences that may inadvertently be reinforcing interfering actions and attitudes.
  - d) obtain input from relevant parties before implementing proposed performance improvement strategies
  - e) Identify the relationship between the existing environment and employee actions
  - f) Forecast events and situations that may indicate tensions between employee and employer.
  - g) Prioritize naturally occurring methods of reinforcement, including natural cues and universal design.
  - h) Develop appropriate, non-stigmatizing, strategies for supporting individuals in developing positive professional relationships

### Retention

- 41) Maximizing worker job performance and social integration.
  - a) monitor employees on -the-job performance

## Retention

- b) Research strategies to increase employee productivity, if necessary.
- c) Collaborate with employee, employer, co-workers and support team to develop and implement a systematic plan for fading supports

## DOMAIN 5: LONG-TERM SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

### Ongoing Supports

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|--|
| 42) Identify sources for long-term, ongoing support.   |
| 43) Understand the scope and limitations of on-going support based on current WIOA guidelines.   |
| 44) Recommend resources for supporting individuals, families, and employers/coworkers over time.   |
| 45) Assess the quality of provided supported employment services through outcome measurement, satisfaction indicators, and process indicators.   |
| 46) Conduct semi-regular inquiries with relevant parties to;<br>a) collect data on supervisor's satisfaction with assistance provided by employment consultant;<br>b) gauge employer's satisfaction with performance of employee; prioritizing the employer's existing evaluative methods and metrics<br>c) discuss employee's satisfaction with their current position (i.e. wages, hours, responsibilities, etc.)<br>d) identify additional or emerging support needs and present accommodation recommendations;<br>e) collect additional information regarding employee's progress from family members, coworkers, counselors, or support coordinators; |
| 47) Foster collaborative working relationships with other human service professionals.   |
| 48) Collaborate with the job seeker and family in self-advocacy.   |
| 49) Recommend community resources that will assist supported employee in maintaining and improving his or her quality of life, including benefits advisement and financial self sufficiency: including asset development, and career advancement.  |

## Managing Benefits

- 50) Demonstrate knowledge of financial incentives and barriers to employment.
- 51) Refer to benefits counseling/advising professionals through Work Incentives and Benefits Assistance (WIPA) programs.
- 52) Discuss with individuals and support teams the impact of work on their benefits.
- 53) Identify strategies to increase financial literacy and personal income while maintaining self-sufficiency for or replacing critical benefits, including healthcare.
- 54) Identify state and or federal work incentives to assist in an individual achieving employment (i.e. TTW, PASS, IRWE).
- 55) Develop a Plan to Achieve Support Self-Support (PASS) with the job seeker and or support team when applicable.
- 56) Recognize possible impairment related work expenses (IRWE).
- 57) Explain SSA's expedited reinstatement process for benefits.
- 58) Describe to job seekers who are students (i.e. high schools, college, vocational training, etc.) and their families about the student earned income exclusion through SSA.

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