**Workforce Best Practices for People with Disabilities Toolkit**

(Working Draft/Outline)

**Overview**

The California Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (CCEPD) is a statewide advisory body that seeks to increase the employment rate of people with disabilities and better coordinate programs and services for people with disabilities. The CCEPD makes policy recommendations to the Secretary of the Labor and Workforce Development Agency and the Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency.

Throughout 2022 and 2023, the CCEPD held numerous meetings with workforce areas identified as best practices for serving people with disabilities throughout the state. In addition to CCEPD member organizations, (8) workforce areas from numerous California regions provided presentations and insights. While the CCEPD understands each workforce area is different in their needs and capabilities, the CCEPD believes many best practices can be replicated at varying levels statewide.

To assist workforce areas to better serve people with disabilities, the CCEPD developed this best practices toolkit. The toolkit is intended to provide informational resources on numerous systems and programs. It also provides information on service delivery approaches and practices that typically yield best results.

This toolkit is organized into the following topics:

* Accessibility and Accommodations
* Benefits planning
* Co-enrollment and cross-training
* Customer centered design
* Skill development
* Employer engagement
* Funding

**Accessibility and Accommodations**

Developing a knowledge of disabilities and accommodations is essential for workforce service providers to meet the accessibility needs of job seekers with disabilities. While the [Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)](https://www.ada.gov/) and [Section 188 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/civil-rights-center/statutes/section-188-workforce-innovation-opportunity-act) ensures basic physical and programmatic accessibility is in place, more actions need to take place to attain superior results for job seekers with disabilities.

The [Disability Access Services](https://www.dor.ca.gov/Home/DasTrainings) program within the Department of Rehabilitation offers numerous trainings to assist addressing the needs of people with disabilities. Local workforce development boards and America’s Job Centers of California can send staff to these trainings to improve services to customers with disabilities. Training topics include:

* Disability Sensitivity, Etiquette, and Inclusion
* Best Practices to Improve Disability Employment
* Disability Law and Regulations
* Accessibility Practices for Digital Content

To ensure the unique needs of the individual are addressed to perform the work, service providers are encouraged to have discussions with job seekers about potential accommodations. The [Job Accommodation Network](https://askjan.org/) provides resources to employers and people with disabilities regarding accommodation needs.

Assistive technology (AT) has become an essential part of employment for many people with disabilities, especially with the rise in remote work in recent years. AT can be both personal tools and a work accommodation. Employees can borrow various types of equipment from [device lending libraries](http://abilitytools.org/services/at-exchange-transition.php) through the Independent Living Centers or the California AT Act program, [AbilityTools](http://abilitytools.org/), to determine if a type of technology works best. Independent Living Centers and AbilityTools can also refer individuals to specific companies for technology needs.

Businesses can also create a procurement list of items that can be used for assistive technology. Disability:IN, a nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion worldwide, has developed [an accessible technology procurement toolkit](https://private.disabilityin.org/procurementtoolkit/) that can be used by businesses to help create procurement policies for assistive technology.

It is important to ensure that the assistive technology is appropriate for the end user and is compatible with the software and computer equipment utilized by the company. The referenced resources can also assist with many basic digital literacy skills.

Providing the options of both in-person and virtual workforce services is essential for people with disabilities. In-person services may provide a superior option for people with digital device or literacy challenges. Virtual services may provide a superior option for people with transportation or physical challenges. Typically, Zoom provides more accessible functions, especially for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, than many other platforms. The Department of Rehabilitation has [resources for digital access](https://www.dor.ca.gov/Home/DigitalAccess), including accessible meetings and webinars.

Addressing transportation challenges is important for job seekers. The Department of Rehabilitation manages a [webpage with resources for transportation issues](https://www.dor.ca.gov/Home/TransportationResources).

Communicating in plain language so customers can understand the first time they read or hear information assists with the efficiency of providing services. The recommended grade levels are typically between sixth and eighth grades. The U.S. General Services Administration manages a [Plain Language website](https://www.plainlanguage.gov/) that includes guidelines, trainings, and more.

American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters and Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) captioners should be available when requested. Information can be obtained through the Department of Rehabilitation’s [Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services webpage](https://www.dor.ca.gov/Home/DeafandHardofHearingServices).

In addition to the previously referenced accommodations, job seekers and employees with disabilities may need other reasonable accommodations. California’s Civil Rights Department has created a [webpage for reasonable accommodations](https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/accommodation/) that includes resources. The Department of Rehabilitation also maintains a [website on reasonable accommodations](https://www.dor.ca.gov/Home/ResourcesforEmploymentIssues) and can provide assistance with employment issues. Reasonable accommodations can include, but are not limited to, the following:

* Changing job duties
* Providing leave for medical care
* Changing work schedules
* Relocating the work area
* Providing mechanical or electrical aids

**Benefits Planning**

Benefits planning helps individuals determine how their cash benefits (including SSI and SSDI) and healthcare benefits (such as Medi-Cal, Medicare, and In-Home Supportive Services) or housing benefits may be impacted by earnings from employment. Clear, timely, and accurate benefits planning supports people with disabilities to choose employment over benefits, and plan for their future. Benefits planning greatly improves long-term employment outcomes and job retention.

If people with disabilities do not manage their benefits, they risk losing access to health care or long-term services and supports and are at risk of overpayments. Overpayments of benefits must be refunded to the Social Security Administration.

As a best practice, local workforce development services have integrated benefits planning into their service delivery model when serving people with disabilities. Local workforce development boards use the webtool, [Disability Benefits (DB) 101 tool](https://ca.db101.org/) and weave aspects of the information as the individual is seeking career information and services. Workforce staff are using DB101 to support their clients with information on employment and benefits without additional training needed.

DB101 helps people with disabilities and service providers understand the connections between work and benefits. DB101 provides:

* Information: Users can learn about benefits programs and rules around work, get answers to frequently asked questions, and find out how to avoid common pitfalls.
* Estimators: Users get results tailored just for them to help plan and set goals for work, and get tips for success for individual situations.
* Experts: Users can find answers to questions, connect to community resources, and get help understanding their next steps. [DB101’s Get Expert Help directory](https://ca.db101.org/ca/directories/planners.htm) connects users to real people who can help with their situation.

The [World Institute on Disability (WID)](https://wid.org/) can also provide training.

Another best practice is to have someone in the program trained as a benefits counselor. Some workforce areas, including ENTER NAMES LATER, have had staff complete the [Work Incentive Practitioner Credential Program through Cornell University](https://www.ytionline.org/). The unique, scientifically based credentialing program consists of 17 webinar sessions, an online examination, and a file review process. It explains Social Security disability programs and work incentives—and ensures that participants can apply that information in real-life situations to guide people with disabilities towards employment.

Other workforce areas, including ENTER NAMES LATER, have had staff complete the [Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) and Community Partner Initial Training and Certification through Virginia Commonwealth University](https://vcu-ntdc.org/training/initial/initial.cfm). Like the Cornell program, this program is designed for professionals who will deliver individualized work incentives counseling services to Social Security disability beneficiaries on a regular basis. These programs can assist workforce service staff educate beneficiaries about the effect of an earning goal on their public benefits, including Social Security disability benefits, Medicaid, Medicare, and other public benefits. This training and certification program is a required component of the Social Security [Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program](https://www.ssa.gov/work/WIPA.html). The “Community Partner Initial Training” consists of a rigorous 40-hour training program that supports WIPA staff and community partners in developing the basic knowledge and skills that are necessary to provide individualized work incentives counseling at a novice level.

From the eight local workforce development boards, several became either an Employment Network or Ticket-to-Work program. These programs provide payment to the organization when a person with disability gains employment. The funding from these programs helps build programming for people with disabilities To become either an Employment Network or Ticket-to-Work program, the organization must contract directly with the [Social Security Administration](https://www.ssa.gov/work/enrfa.html).

If benefits planning is needed and the local workforce development area does not have the expertise, consider partnering with DOR and/or vendors who serve people with disabilities. DOR can also assist in benefits planning if a consumer is enrolled in vocational rehabilitation services in the job-ready status. Local vendors may have benefits planning expertise.

**Co-enrollment and Cross-Training**

Effective co-enrollment strategies include deliberate, intentional enrollment across multiple programs and systems. It is intended to be participant centered and provides all necessary services to achieve positive outcomes. Coordination should prevent duplication or the supplanting of intensive services. Co-enrollment can streamline services such as case management, job search assistance, and follow-up services. For co-enrollment to work, the cross-training of staff across partner agencies is necessary.

The WIOA places a strong emphasis on planning and implementation across multiple partner programs to ensure alignment in service delivery. Co-enrollment is consistently supported by [California’s Unified Strategic Workforce Development Plan](https://cwdb.ca.gov/plans_policies/2020-2023-state-plan/), therefore, local workforce development areas are strongly encouraged to utilize co-enrollment as a strategy to further leverage resources for maximum benefit to a participant. The Employment Development Department and California Workforce Development Board issued [Directive WSD19-09](https://edd.ca.gov/siteassets/files/jobs_and_training/pubs/wsd19-09.pdf) in 2020, which provided guidance and established procedures regarding California’s strategic co-enrollment. The directive covers eligibility/intake/referral procedures, partner roles and responsibilities, case management, and cross-training. The level at which co-enrollment and cross-training strategies can be implemented may differ between regions. However, many components of these strategies can be implemented, regardless of region.

The most successful co-enrollment strategies include a common intake and referral process across programs and systems. To implement such strategies, formal data sharing agreements and memorandums of understand are often necessary. The Verdugo Workforce Development Board has streamlined their intake process and their partnerships include many levels of the education and workforce continuum. A common intake form collects information on multiple programs and services clients may co-enroll in.

To assist with the integration of service delivery, many workforce areas use [Unite Us](https://uniteus.com/), the nation’s leading software company bringing sectors together. Through Unite Us’ national network and software, community-based organizations, government agencies, and healthcare organizations are all connected to better collaborate to meet the needs of their customers. Unite Us can build and scale coordinated care networks, track outcomes together, identify service gaps and at-risk populations, and most importantly, empower members of communities to take ownership of their own needs.

To enhance service delivery, when service providers can provide customers with a single point of contact, or as few as possible, across program and services, long-term outcomes improve. When a service provider is unable to be a single point of contact across programs, warm handoffs are beneficial and should be encouraged. Cross-training is essential for this to happen to both understanding the various roles within the organization and how to help a client with disabilities. Cross-training between organizations also helps staff understand how each program can offer an individual the supports needed from the beginning of first contact.

While some of the trainings referenced in the “Accessibility and Accommodations” section may include general components of cross-training, cross-training is typically more focused on specific programs and systems. Cross-training is the practice of training employees across multiple roles and programs to enhance the service experience for people with disabilities and all customers. It allows for the understanding of the different requirements for each program and helps streamlines interactions between programs.

Most cross-training is left to service provider themselves, at the regional level. Because this cross-training is often the result of specific initiatives and funding streams received at the regional level, there are large inconsistencies regarding the depth and/or length of cross-training programs. However, much cross-training can be achieved through enhancing relationships between partners and asking partners to provide training to staff on specific topics. Cross-training on disability topics can include DOR, Regional Centers or State Council on Developmental Disabilities, Independent Living Center, or local behavioral health office. Oftentimes, DOR can provide much of the training but there are other entities who serve people with disabilities.

Developing partner and integrated resource teams, and having them meet regularly, is an important strategy for cross-training. Many workforce areas have partners present on various programs, services, and systems, at each meeting so staff can expand their knowledge. The Madera County Workforce Investment Corporation encourages their staff and partners to create short videos about their roles that can be shared to gain a greater understanding of programs and systems. This not only helps with collaboration between partners, but it also helps with onboarding staff.

The California Department of Aging oversees the [Aging and Disability Resource Connection](https://aging.ca.gov/Providers_and_Partners/Aging_and_Disability_Resource_Connection/#pp-po), which are partnerships between the local Area Agency on Aging and Independent Living Centers with other local partners. The [ADRC’s purpose](https://aging.ca.gov/Providers_and_Partners/Aging_and_Disability_Resource_Connection/Map_of_Local_ADRCs/) is to provide a single, more coordinated system for people seeking reliable information and access to long-term services and supports (LTSS). This purpose is achieved by building community partnerships, providing services using a person-centered approach, and reducing the number of barriers for accessing services. Cross- training between partners is a critical component of the ADRC.

INFORMATION ON THE BELOW TOPICS WILL BE EXPANDED SOON.

**Customer centered design**

* Create a customer centered design for service delivery
* Initial intake and continued services through process
* Understanding of the importance of customer involvement for goals
* More information on process
* No wrong door is a best practice
* Use Individualized placement and support
* Understanding of mental and behavioral health
* Understanding of intellectual and developmental disabilities
* Highlights from Verdugo and San Diego

**Skill Development for Customers/Participants**

* Incorporate digital literacy
* Incorporate soft skills
* Self-advocacy
* Disclosure, accommodations, tools for right decisions
* Job readiness
* SETA workshops/focus groups
* Richard Pimentel / Job Accommodation Network
* What’s a perfect workday?
* Pacific ADA?
* National Employment Network Association (NENA) training resources (related to Ticket to Work)
* Decision making
* “Focus on Abilities”
* Personal finance support (separate from benefits)
  + Able accounts
  + Managing wages and benefits
  + Conservators/POAs/representative payees

**Employer engagement**

* Focus of January meeting
* The San Bernardino County Workforce Development Board (SBCWDB) has developed an online [“Employer Resource & Special Populations Toolkit”](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/af46725974284d73883e41766e4ddf6f) to provide employers with information and resources.

**Funding**

* Overview on the importance of commitments to partnerships and the braiding of resources
* Sources/initiatives
  + Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
    - Discretionary funding – intersectionality between populations
      * Look at funding if not in Governor’s proposed budget overview doc
  + State general fund through workforce – EDD and CWDB
  + Apprenticeship (and pre-apprenticeship) funding related to intersectionality
    - IACA website
    - Some in Governor’s proposed budget doc
  + New funding on equity (disability included?)
  + EDD [Equity Target Population Fund](https://www.grants.ca.gov/grants/equity-target-population-fund-program-year-2022-23/#:~:text=The%20Equity%20Target%20Population%20Fund,in%20in%2Ddemand%20industry%20sectors.) - SFP out currently (can target multiple groups, but entire SFP is limited to 15 pages)
    - Closed January 5, 2023.
  + [Comprehensive Economic Resilience Fund](https://opr.ca.gov/economic-development/)
  + Entrepreneurship programs
  + Earmarked funding important
  + [Mental Health Services Oversight Commission grant and funding opportunities](https://mhsoac.ca.gov/connect/grant-funding-opportunities/)
  + County behavioral health funds
  + Loan forgiveness
  + [Ticket to Work Program](https://www.ssa.gov/work/)
    - The federal Ticket to Work Program through Social Security supports career development for Social Security disability beneficiaries aged 18 through 64 who want to work. The Ticket Program is free and voluntary. The program helps people with disabilities progress toward financial independence. Most individuals who receive Social Security benefits because of a disability and are age 18 through 64 qualify for the program.
    - Highlights from San Diego
  + [Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Program](https://www.ssa.gov/work/WIPA.html)
    - The goal of the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program is to enable beneficiaries with disabilities to receive accurate information and use that information to make a successful transition to work.
  + Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)
    - The Summer Training and Employment Program for Students (STEPS) is another common program used by workforce. STEPS provides paid work experience, career exploration and work readiness training for students with a mild to moderate disability and is sponsored by the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) under its [Student Services](https://www.dor.ca.gov/Home/StudentServices) program.
    - [Demand Side Employment Initiative (DSEI)](https://www.dor.ca.gov/Home/DSEI_Employability#KeyElements) is an employer incentive program to support businesses to expand or start hiring people with disabilities. Key elements include:
      * EmployABILITY Business Grant
      * Targeted Marketing Campaign
      * Earn and Learn Opportunities
      * Human Resources Training and Collateral
    - [Jobs for the Future’s (JFF) Braided Funding Toolkit](http://application.jff.org/braided_funding_toolkit/) - Although specific to state and college collaboration to support integrated career pathways and students, the resources are worth referencing.

Possible Misc. Resources

[State Workforce Development System Partnership With Vocational Rehabilitation Services To Address The Needs Of People With Disabilities Impacted By COVID-19](https://www.nga.org/publications/workforce-development-vocational-rehab-covid-19/)