Workforce Best Practices for People with Disabilities Toolkit
October 2023

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. As part of its work, it also evaluates and promotes best practices to assist with the assessment of policies for people with disabilities.

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, eight workforce areas from numerous California regions provided presentations and insights. Additionally, three surveys were conducted to identify service highlights and challenges for workforce areas, with dozens of areas participating in each.

To assist workforce service providers to better serve people with disabilities, the CCEPD developed this best practices toolkit. While there are existing workforce toolkits that have been developed at a national level, such as LEAD Center's Roadmap to Inclusive Career Pathways, the CCEPD is supplementing the information by creating this toolkit based on input received by California workforce areas. 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 the best results.

While primarily developed for workforce development boards and America's Job Centers of California (AJCCs), this toolkit has useful information that will benefit any workforce partner. The recommendations in this toolkit are not intended as prerequisites or requirements for serving people with disabilities. The CCEPD understands each workforce area is different in

their needs and capabilities. However, the CCEPD believes many best practices can be replicated at varying levels statewide.

This toolkit is organized into the following topics:
- **Accessibility and Accommodations**
- **Benefits Planning**
- **Co-Enrollment and Cross-Training**
- **Customer Centered Design**
- **Employer Engagement**
- **Funding**
- **Workforce Readiness Skills Development**

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) and Section 188 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) 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 program within the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) offers numerous trainings to assist addressing the needs of people with disabilities. Local workforce development boards and AJCCs can send staff to these trainings to improve services to customers with disabilities. In addition to accessibility and accommodations, these trainings include cultural and linguistic competency. 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 individuals are addressed to perform the work, service providers are encouraged to have discussions with job seekers about potential accommodations. The Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) created JAN's Workplace Accommodation Toolkit, which provides guidance and resources for developing or updating accommodation policies and processes while

leveraging the best proven practices available to date. JAN's toolkit contains actionable accommodation policies and processes from leading U.S. businesses, a suite of accommodation forms, training presentations, and role play videos modeling inclusive behaviors. The JAN toolkit also includes best and emerging practices for creating an inclusive workplace for people with disabilities during all phases of the employment life cycle. In addition to JAN's toolkit, JAN recently completed a report on the costs and benefits of accommodations. JAN surveyed over 3,500 employers and found workplace accommodations are not only typically low in cost, but also positively impact the workplace in many ways regarding retention, productivity, and more.

WorkforceGPS, sponsored by the Employment and Training Administration of the DOL, created a Workforce Innovation Cohort on Disability and Employment in 2019. The larger cohort included an Accessibility Cohort, with representatives from five states, including California. The Accessibility Cohort webpage includes accessibility resources, including a Guide to Increasing Universal Access in WIOA & Partner Systems, which includes an overview of how five cohort states identified concrete action steps addressing areas in leadership, organizational structure, and capacity building.

Assistive technology has become an essential part of employment for many people with disabilities, especially with the rise in remote work in recent years. Assistive technology can be both personal tools and a work accommodation. Employees can acquire on loan various types of equipment from device lending libraries through the Independent Living Centers or the California Assistive Technology Act program, as well as, AbilityTools, to determine if a type of technology works best. Ability Tools provides short-term loans of numerous assistive technology devices and gadgets and can even provide short-term loans for up to 30 days of equipment such as portable ramps, augmentative and alternative communication devices, magnifiers, computer software and more. Independent Living Centers and Ability Tools 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 that can be used by businesses to help create procurement policies for assistive technology.

It is important to ensure 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 an effective option for people with digital literacy challenges or challenges accessing digital devices. Virtual services may provide a more effective option for people with transportation or physical challenges. DOR offers resources for digital access, including accessible meetings and webinars.

Addressing transportation challenges is important for job seekers. DOR manages a webpage with resources for transportation issues.

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 that includes guidelines, trainings, and more.

American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters and Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) captioners should be available when requested.

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 that includes resources. DOR also maintains a website on reasonable accommodations 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 encourages 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 support. They are also at risk of overpayments of benefits that must be refunded to the Social Security Administration (SSA).

As a best practice, many local workforce development services have integrated benefits planning into their service delivery model when serving people with disabilities. Many local workforce development boards use the webtool, Disability Benefits (DB) 101 tool 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 connects users to real people who can help with their situation.

The World Institute on Disability (WID) can provide training on DB101.

Another best practice is to have someone in the program trained as a benefits counselor. Some workforce areas have had staff complete the [Work Incentive Practitioner Credential Program through Cornell University](#). 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. Additionally, the Work Incentive Support Center at Cornell University has developed a [SSI at Work Toolkit](#) to help individuals with disabilities, families of individuals with disabilities, and professionals understand SSI rules. The toolkit breaks SSI benefits down by topic and offers nuts/bolts, case studies, and quick facts.

Other workforce areas have had staff complete the [Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) and Community Partner Initial Training and Certification through Virginia Commonwealth University](#). 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](#). The "Community Partner Initial Training" consists of a comprehensive 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.

Several of the local workforce areas the CCEPD met with became an Employment Network (EN) or a 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 EN or Ticket to Work program, the organization must contract directly with the [SSA](#). Social Security has released [SSA-EN-RFA-22-0001](#), which explains the responsibilities and purposes of an EN, requirements of an agreement, and directions for applying.

The Ticket to Work program also maintains a [YouTube channel](#). Videos include numerous webinars and trainings related to benefits planning that have proven helpful for numerous workforce areas.

The [Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) program](#) is another program assisting with Social Security needs. PABSS serves SSDI and SSI beneficiaries with disabilities who want to work by helping to remove barriers to employment.

Additionally, it should be noted that the SSA employs [Area Work Incentive Coordinators (AWIC)](#), who specialize in Social Security's Work Incentives and employment support programs. Each AWIC serves a specific geographic area. The AWIC manages and coordinates training on work incentives, conducts public outreach and provides support to beneficiaries with disabilities who want to work. ENs may want to contact their local AWIC to learn of or coordinate outreach events in their area.

When workforce areas do not have benefits planning expertise, it is encouraged they 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. Local vendors with DOR or Regional Centers and Independent Living Centers may have benefits planning expertise.

In addition to specific benefits planning, basic financial literacy skills also greatly improve the long-term employment outcomes for people with disabilities. These can include general personal budgeting and saving to build financial security. Through [CalABLE](#), a savings and investment plan offered by the state of California to individuals with disabilities, eligible individuals, family, friends, and employers can contribute up to $17,000 a year without affecting the account beneficiary's public disability benefits. CalABLE account owners who work can contribute even more to their accounts and earnings on qualified withdrawals from a CalABLE account are federal and California state tax-free.

The U.S. Department of Labor maintains a ["Secure Your Financial Future" toolkit](#) for individuals with disabilities. The toolkit provides useful financial information for preparing for a job, starting a job, maintaining a job, changing or losing a job, and retiring from a job.

Co-Enrollment and Cross-Training
In addition to the previously referenced trainings in the accessibility and accommodations section, training staff across programs and systems is also important. This cross-training can help increase efficiencies and co-enrollment.

Effective co-enrollment strategies include deliberate, intentional enrollment across multiple programs and systems. They are 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. It should be noted that effective co-enrollment should result in concurrent services. For co-enrollment to work, the cross-training of staff across partner agencies is necessary.

In addition to improving services, co-enrollment and cross-training strategies can help with breaking down silos amongst service providers. They help encourage a culture with shared goals and incorporate the concept of "collective wins" between systems and programs, not just meeting individual organization metric requirements.

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](#). 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 (EDD) and California Workforce Development Board (CWDB) issued [Directive WSD19-09](#) 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

understanding 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. An effective co-enrollment approach they use is a common intake form that 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](#), a 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.

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. If 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. 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 streamline interactions between programs. 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.

Most cross-training is usually left to service providers 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 (ADRC)](), which are partnerships between the local Area Agency on Aging and Independent Living Centers with other local partners. The [ADRC's purpose]() is to provide a single, more coordinated system for people seeking reliable information and access to long-term services and supports. 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 and can assist with support services for people with disabilities.

In addition to providing knowledge on disability related topics and working as a liaison with DOR, the local workforce development board's DOR representative should possess or be provided with information to support local area cross-training and technical assistance on the following topics:
- The availability and benefits of, and eligibility standards for, vocational rehabilitation services.
- Accessibility requirements for individuals with disabilities.
- Equal, effective, and meaningful participation by individuals with disabilities in workforce development activities through the following practices:
    - Promotion of programmatic and physical accessibility.
    - Use of nondiscriminatory policies and procedures.
    - Provision of reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids and services, and rehabilitation technology for individuals with disabilities.

Customer Centered Design

Customer centered design (sometimes referred to as person or human centered design) is a process and a mindset for addressing complex problems by designing solutions with those who will ultimately utilize the solution (the customer). It is guided by key principles that promote empathy for end users and the generation of new and creative solutions by considering behaviors, ways of thinking, needs, and aspirations of those end users. A key component of customer centered design principles is the centrality of both the customer and stakeholders throughout the process of providing workforce services. This process requires a job fit balance between client and labor market needs.

When discussed as a process, customer centered design may refer to a specific set of tools that are used to guide staff members servicing customers. When discussed as a mindset, customer centered design may refer to the orientation an individual staff member or organization takes toward problem solving that focuses on empathy building and incorporating the perspectives of customers.

Meeting the customer where they are at is an important component of customer centered design. Many workforce areas have created a culture that allows more flexibility for customers with disabilities, including permitting additional time for appointments and not being as strict with the structure of scheduling appointments as they might be otherwise.

Customer centered design utilizes six key principles that center on the customer and engage stakeholders.
- Understand customers and stakeholders
- Engage with customers and stakeholders throughout all stages of service
- Test and revise solutions based on customer and stakeholder feedback
- Iterate to refine the best solution
- Consider entire experience
- Collaborate across disciplines

Because the customer centered design process can vary slightly between customers, there is no singular step-by-step process that can be

implemented universally. However, there are generally five phases within the process.

- Research and discover
- Synthesize and generate solutions
- Conceptualize and prototype
- Test and iterate
- Implement and refine

WorkforceGPS, sponsored by the Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), maintains a "Customer Centered Design Community" website. Content on the website includes webinars, case studies, toolkits, and other resources. Access to some resources requires creating a free WorkforceGPS account.

While the customer centered design process benefits both customers with and without disabilities, it is often most beneficial with customers with behavioral or mental health disabilities. Adding an Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model within the customer centered design process has improved outcomes for many workforce areas, including the San Diego Workforce Partnership and Verdugo Workforce Development Board. IPS is a model of supported employment for people with serious mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia spectrum disorder, bipolar, depression). IPS supported employment helps people living with behavioral health conditions work at jobs of their choosing. Although variations of supported employment exist, IPS refers to the evidence-based practice of supported employment. The IPS Employment Center is utilized by many workforce service providers to improve employment outcomes. IPS is based on eight principles.

- Competitive Employment
- Systematic Job Development
- Rapid Job Search
- Integrated Services
- Benefits Planning
- Zero Exclusion
- Time-Unlimited Support
- Worker Preferences

Addressing the other topics within this toolkit will also improve the customer centered design. For example, cross-training and the knowledge of disability accommodations and etiquette will naturally help to improve the

customer centered design process. Lastly, co-enrollment and integrated resource teams also improves the customer experience.

Employer Engagement

While this toolkit concentrates on the needs of the job seeker, it is critically important to also address the needs of employers. Workforce service providers must help identify and connect employers with job seekers with disabilities that have the skills and experiences that can benefit their organizations.

The key is to broaden the definition of who is being served. It is important to respect and respond to both the needs of the employer and job seekers with disabilities. Approach employers as customers and aid them on their journey of being business partners committed to disability, equity, and inclusion. Many workforce areas have staff dedicated to understanding and meeting the employment needs of businesses with in-person and online resources.

The San Bernardino County Workforce Development Board has developed an online "Employer Resource & Special Populations Toolkit" to provide employers with information and resources.

The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN), funded by the DOL's ODEP maintains the "Engaging Employers: A Guide for Disability and Workforce Development Service Providers" webpage. The resource provides information on how disability and workforce development service providers can work with employers to support employment of people with disabilities. Much of the information covers how to serve employers using the dual customer approach. Additionally, ODEP directly maintains an "Employers" webpage with numerous resources to assist with the employment of people with disabilities. Resources address recruiting, hiring, retention, career advancement, accommodations, and more.

Disability:IN, a nonprofit resource for business inclusion worldwide, includes a network of more than 400 corporations dedicated to expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Disability:IN collaborates with businesses to promote the full inclusion of people with disabilities, to inspire accessible innovation for all, and to foster cultures of inclusion. They have a central office and 25 affiliates, including California.

WorkforceGPS, sponsored by the Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor, convened an "Employer Engagement Cohort" in 2019. The cohort developed resources to address how to engage employers more effectively with recruiting, hiring, and training job seekers with disabilities as an integrated strategy of the American Job Center service delivery. Resources cover a variety of topics, including relationship development and developing meaningful and data-driven metrics for success when working with businesses.

The National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials (NCRTM), funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), is the central clearinghouse for vocational rehabilitation (VR) information for individuals with disabilities. It offers the VR and education communities an opportunity to contribute new knowledge to their specific fields and gain visibility for their work. While organized primarily for VR and education needs, their "Business Engagement" website can also provide helpful information for addressing numerous workforce service needs related to employer engagement.

DOR's Workforce Development Section (WDS) works collaboratively with local and national business partners to develop inclusive workforce strategies. Businesses can call on WDS for disability awareness trainings, online recruitment tools, and information about hiring incentives and job accommodations. WDS also provides employment information, resource materials, technical assistance, and training to DOR staff statewide, supporting the successful implementation of local employment strategies.

To serve the needs of employers, it is necessary to effectively collaborate and understand the roles and responsibilities of each agency and the services they provide to build partnerships with employers. It is recommended workforce service providers hold ongoing meetings with DOR staff to strategize working together and expanding opportunities for employer engagement. In many workforce areas, DOR staff has assisted with the coordination of employer training, career fairs, hiring events, and more.

Funding
To address most of the topics previously referenced in this toolkit, funding is obviously critical. While there are constant funding streams to support

workforce services, much workforce funding often comes from competitive grants and is only provided short-term. Existing funding can support many workforce services. However, additional specialized funding is often needed to provide more robust services and fill any gaps. As a result, a strong commitment to partnerships requires partners to blend and braid resources to help the employment journey of a person with disabilities.

Blended and braided funding both involve combining two or more sources of funding to support a program or activity. Blended funding combines multiple funding streams for one purpose without continuing to differentiate or track individual sources. Braided funding pools multiple funding streams toward one purpose while separately tracking and reporting on each source of funding. Recently, both WorkforceGPS and the LEAD Center, both sponsored through the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), held events to assist workforce areas with blending and braiding. Event materials and videos can be found on the WorkforceGPS and LEAD Center event pages. Local workforce development areas can collaborate with DOR to braid or blend funding for people with disabilities.

Obviously, much workforce funding comes from WIOA, the landmark legislation designed to strengthen and improve our nation's public workforce system and help get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, into high-quality jobs and careers and help employers hire and retain skilled workers. The DOL maintains a WIOA website with numerous WIOA resources on WIOA programs, including guidances, fact sheets, and more. The WIOA also offers National Dislocated Worker Grants (DWGs), discretionary grants awarded by the U.S. Secretary of Labor. DWGs provide resources to states and other eligible applicants to respond to large, unexpected layoff events causing significant job losses. This funding is intended to temporarily expand capacity to serve dislocated workers and meet the increased demand for WIOA employment and training services, with a purpose to reemploy laid off workers and enhance their employability and earnings. Because workers with disabilities are often disproportionately impacted by such events, this additional funding can prove beneficial.

The CWDB coordinates numerous initiatives and grants aligned with California's Strategic Workforce Development Plan. The overarching goal of the plan is the reorientation and realignment of California's workforce programs and institutions to support a dynamic and globally successful

state economy that offers all residents – including the most vulnerable – an opportunity for a higher quality of life. Current grants and initiatives can be found on the [CWDB's "Initiatives" website](#).

EDD issues numerous workforce development solicitations for proposals (SFPs) to fund programs in the workforce community. Many of these initiatives put an emphasis on targeted populations, including people with disabilities. Current SFPs, past grant award lists, and project summaries, related to California workforce development can be found on [EDD's "Workforce Development Solicitations for Proposals" webpage](#).

The [Employment Training Panel (ETP)](#) provides funding to employers to assist in upgrading the skills of their workers through training that leads to good paying, long-term jobs. Partnering on ETP programs with businesses is beneficial for many workforce areas.

Many workforce areas have used Social Security's Ticket to Work program funding to enhance their service offerings to people with disabilities. Ticket to Work supports career development for Social Security disability beneficiaries aged 18 through 64 who want to work. 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. The program maintains a [website for service providers](#) that includes numerous helpful resources. As previously referenced in the benefits planning section, this program can provide benefits planning resources to workforce service providers and job seekers.

The DOL offers many grants to empower workers and job seekers. Their ["Department of Labor Grants" webpage](#) offers information on available grants, how to apply, and reports on grants inaction.

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 DOR under its [Student Services](#) program. STEPS is a contract between DOR and the Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC) with assistance from the ETP. The FCCC in partnership with DOR provides "Employer of Record" services to assist potentially eligible and eligible students with

disabilities in obtaining valuable work experience. The FCCC only serves as the employer of record; it will not be involved in job development activities. Job development may be conducted by a community rehabilitation program, a cooperative programs partner, or DOR staff.

In addition to STEPS, DOR offers many contract and grant solicitations to improve the employment of people with disabilities. DOR can provide case services to individuals based on their individualized plan for employment and can work with local workforce partners to fund aspects of training or needed supports for the individual.

California's Department of Developmental Services (DDS) offers employment grants to improve access to services that increase pathways to employment.

The California State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) issues requests for proposals (RFP) through Program Development Grants (PDG) on a yearly basis. SCDD's successful grant projects are implemented by community-based organizations that research, develop and/or implement innovative programs and promising or best practices in local communities throughout the state and its diverse regions.

California's Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) distributes grant funding to support specific initiatives. The Commission releases RFPs and Requests for Applications (RFA) when funds become available and awards grants through a competitive bid process. MHSOAC's "Grant and Funding Opportunities" webpage provides information on bidding process steps and current funding opportunities.

The California Apprenticeship Council (CAC) and Interagency Advisory Committee on Apprenticeship (IACA) both offer grant funding. Additionally, the Apprenticeship Innovation Funding (AIF) is a new funding source in the state of California as of 2022 for new and innovative apprenticeship programs, defined as apprenticeships associated with IACA. The AIF aims to support IACA apprenticeship program sponsors to sustain and scale their programs and train apprentices.

The Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR), the California Labor Workforce Development Agency (LWDA), and the Governor's Office

of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz) facilitated the development of the [Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF)](#). The CERF was created to promote a sustainable and equitable recovery from the economic distress of COVID-19 by supporting new plans and strategies to diversify local economies and develop sustainable industries that create high-quality, broadly accessible jobs for all Californians.

Workforce Readiness Skills Development
Workforce readiness skills describe several commonly expected skills that employers seek from most employees. Workforce readiness skills are a set of skills and behaviors that are necessary for any job. These skills are transferable abilities that can be used in many career fields. Having these skills can help improve a job candidate's competitive advantage over other candidates. Workforce readiness skills are sometimes called soft skills, employability skills, or job readiness skills.

These skills help employees learn how to interact with supervisors and co-workers. They help reinforce the importance of timeliness and build an understanding of how we are perceived by others. Employers value employees who can communicate effectively and act professionally. No matter what technical skills a job may require, every job requires good social skills/interpersonal skills.

While these workforce readiness skills are necessary for any job, skills training is no substitute for the importance of developing soft skills through work experience and on the job training.

Many workforce areas have incorporated workforce readiness skills trainings. However, most trainings have been created to address the population being served at the local level, and many often target younger job seekers through pre-employment transition services, regardless of disability. That said, some workforce areas, such as the Verdugo Workforce Development Board, have more targeted workforce readiness trainings. Through Glendale Community College, the Verdugo Workforce Development Board uses curriculum specifically designed for adults with disabilities. Regardless of the targeted audience, a greater knowledge of these skills will benefit job seekers of all ages, especially those with disabilities, who often have incomplete or inconsistent work histories.

Proper workplace communication is probably the most important soft skill to develop and demonstrate. Workplace communication skills are a combination of how you listen, speak, and write, as well as your body language. This understanding is especially important, as some disabilities affect a person's communication skills, be they verbal, body language, or written.

ODEP, an agency within DOL, has created the [Skills to Pay the Bills](#) curriculum program focused on teaching workforce readiness skills to youth, including youth with disabilities. While created primarily for younger job seekers, the curriculum can benefit job seekers of all ages. The basic structure of the program is comprised of modular, hands-on, engaging activities that focus on six key skill areas: communication, enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism.

Michigan's Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity has developed an [eLearning Soft Skills Program](#) to raise awareness among students and employees about key skills needed for workplace success. The 14 eLearning modules provide a universally accessible soft skills training resource for the workforce for basic and foundational skills for the workplace, to help ensure the workforce is ready to succeed in the 21st century. The 14 modules are broken into the following four primary sections: communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity.

Additionally, the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC), a project through the U.S. Department of Education, maintains a [webpage with numerous workforce readiness resources](#). These resources include promising practices, trainings, and more.

Some skills previously referenced in other sections, such as digital literacy, knowledge of accommodations, and basic financial literacy, can also be considered workforce readiness skills.

If you have any questions about this toolkit, please email CCEPD@dor.ca.gov.