

## **A Framework for Achieving Competitive Employment Findings from the SourceAmerica Pathways to Careers Evaluation**

### **Answers to Questions Not Addressed During the Webinar**

1. **Question:** While customized employment is currently the strategy supported by the Office of Disability Employment Policy and Employment First, several recent evidence reviews noted that, to date, there have been no "gold standard" experimental design trials for customized employment. Could you please let me know if anything is in process or in the planning stage?

**Answer:** We recognize the need for additional research, and we are not aware of any experimental or quasi-experimental studies of customized employment models or initiatives that are either in the planning stages or being implemented. The Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (<http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/resources-and-strategies-competitive-integrated-employment/promising-practices-and-lit-review/customized-employment>) is a good resource for identifying research findings related to customized employment.

2. **Question:** Is the data collection tool used for the employment outcome results available to the public?

**Answer:** Each Pathways demonstration site captures data on participants' hourly wages, monthly earnings, and employment via an Excel file that is not publicly available. These data support Mathematica's evaluation of the Pathways initiative.

3. **Question:** You stated that there are 180 employers who have agreed to be Pathways employers/partners. Can you talk a little more about that process? What does it take to be a partner? Is there an actual signed agreement?

**Answer:** Pathways sites continually recruit employer partners in order to ensure that potential internships and/or employment options in areas that are diverse enough to match the interests and conditions that underpin success for each Pathways participant. Pathways staff strive to recruit employer partners within each of the 16 Career Clusters that represent all sectors of the national economy.<sup>1</sup> In addition to representing a wide, diverse set of jobs across the Career Clusters, employer partners must (1) express a willingness to include

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<sup>1</sup> National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, The National Career Clusters® Framework, 2014. See <http://www.careertech.org/career-clusters>.

people with any type of disability; (2) allow the Pathways team to perform the customized employment process (i.e., tour the building/facility, conduct employer needs analysis, work and task analysis, and so on); (3) hire interns if the internship is considered successful or consider a direct placement; and (4) assist the Pathways Initiative in further outreach to other employers in the community. After Pathways staff determine that an employer is a good potential match as a Pathways partner, they enter into an agreement with the employer that outlines the role and responsibilities of the employer and the Pathways program, and states their interest in working together toward having the employer host an intern. Pathways and the employer partner sign additional agreements at two more points in the process: (1) when Pathways identifies a participant who is interested in an internship with the employer and whom the employer partner agrees is a good fit, and (2) when the employer partner hires a Pathways participant.

4. **Question:** What does the individual enrollment process look like? What does it involve?

**Answer:** The first step in the enrollment process for a potential participant is to meet the Pathways eligibility criteria, which differ from site to site depending on the entities that partner together to implement Pathways in the locality. Second, prospective Pathways participants who meet the eligibility criteria for their site must complete an application form that includes information on their living situation, current eligibility for various services, disability status, and other data that support the evaluation of Pathways. Prospective participants must also complete a consent form that explains the application and service delivery processes. Once the Pathways staff review the applications, they select an equal number of applications at random from each referral source. The Pathways sites notify applicants of their status within two weeks of when they have been selected. Applicants who are not selected to participate in Pathways during a particular round of recruitment are informed about the decision and are encouraged to apply again in the future.

5. **Question:** If I had an employer that I think could benefit from the Pathways to Careers model, to whom should I refer them?

**Answer:** Pathways is currently operating in four demonstration sites: Davis County, Utah; Boston, Massachusetts; Detroit, Michigan; and Oakton, Virginia. Employers interested in partnering with Pathways in these locales should contact Therese Fimian at [TFimian@sourceamerica.org](mailto:TFimian@sourceamerica.org).

6. **Question:** What happens to participants who do not gain employment through an internship? Are there other routes for job development?

**Answer:** Pathways participants who do not gain employment through a particular internship can enter into another internship. Pathways participants who do not want to participate in a paid internship can go right into a permanent job. Staff use a Customized Internship/Job Development process to identify a good participant-employer match.

7. **Question:** Are Pathways individuals usually working at a SourceAmerica contract provider at the time of referral?

**Answer:** Pathways participants are not typically working for a SourceAmerica contract provider when they are referred to the program.

8. **Question:** What is the average age of the clients?

**Answer:** The average age of the 155 participants enrolled across all four demonstration sites through August 2017 was 27.6 years at the time of application.

9. **Question:** Are you planning to expand the number of pilots, and is there an application process?

**Answer:** Yes, SourceAmerica is planning to expand Pathways by up to four additional demonstration sites in Utah in 2018. SourceAmerica expects to release a solicitation in early 2018. Please contact Therese Fimian at [TFimian@sourceamerica.org](mailto:TFimian@sourceamerica.org) and Brian DeAtley at [BDeAtley@sourceamerica.org](mailto:BDeAtley@sourceamerica.org) for more information.

10. **Question:** How is the funding structure set up for customized employment? How do you convince clients and their families to enter competitive integrated employment, to let go of their SSI income, and to pay income taxes?

**Answer:** The funding structure for customized employment differs from state to state. We have seen a fee-for-service structure and a milestone/outcome structure for the services provided through a Customized Employment approach. An important aspect of these employment services is that they also provide information on certified benefits planning to participants and their families so that they can get the facts on the impact that earnings will have on their benefits. The use of a flexible option, such as a paid internship in Pathways, may have helped individuals and families overcome their concerns and fears about losing benefits because it provides a “quasi-permanent” time during which they can determine what level of employment will work best for them.

11. **Question:** Do you have a list of benefits that an employer will get by hiring a client at or above minimum wage?

**Answer:** When Pathways staff approach employers about a potential partnership, the staff highlight several benefits to the employer, including the following:

- Pathways pays the intern’s wages, offers workers’ compensation, and provides support staff at the employer site.
- Pathways provides a risk-free recruitment source of interns and an internship facilitator who serves as both a problem solver and a support for the intern and the employer, as needed, in the early stages of the internship.
- Pathways offers the employer payroll tax adjustment (EPTA) as an additional incentive to employers who hire and retain an intern.

The customized employment approach focuses on what the client can contribute to an employer, rather than how well they can compete for a typical job. By balancing what the client can contribute with what the employer needs, and by customizing the relationship between both parties, a value proposition/benefit to the employer can be identified for an individual to be offered a full wage position. Aspects of the value proposition to employers include the following:

- Addressing the unmet needs of the business

- Tasks better done by others
- Tasks that enhance the business

**12. Question:** Could you please break down the employer payroll tax adjustment offered?

**Answer:** Employers in Utah that hire Pathways participants are eligible for EPTA payments of between \$167 and \$583 per month for each hired Pathways participant who works and earns at least \$750 per month. Four EPTA amounts are available, depending on a participant's earnings and whether he or she is enrolled in a health plan sponsored by the employer. The Pathways project director at each site determines the appropriate EPTA amount based on a participant's earnings and health insurance status. EPTA payments are available for up to five years after the participant first becomes employed. Employers may use the payments as they see fit—for example, to offset the cost of providing accommodations for Pathways participants.

**13. Question:** Were internships given support services? What were the services given?

**Answer:** Pathways staff provide on-site job supports to many participants while they work at their internships. Data through 2016 for the Utah site indicate that, on average, about 30 percent of internship hours involved on-site support from Pathways staff. The Pathways data file does not capture the specific types of support services provided to participants on site. At the start of each internship, Pathways staff conduct a job analysis and develop a detailed plan that describes the support needs of the participant and strategies for meeting these needs. Typically, Pathways staff provide more intensive support to participants during the first month of the internship, and the level of support decreases after the first few weeks as the employer provides the participant with natural supports in the workplace.

**14. Question:** Do you implement group internships or single participants per job placement?

**Answer:** Pathways matches individual participants, not groups, to an internship. The process of matching participants to internships is individualized because Pathways' goal is to match people with significant disabilities to competitive, integrated employment that is aligned with each participant's skills, interests, strengths, and abilities.