

# Expanding Integrated Employment: Lessons from Scaling Up Pathways to Careers

Center for Studying Disability Policy Webinar

September 24, 2020

## Answers to Questions Raised by Webinar Attendees

1. **Questions:** My organization is still in the process of establishing relationships with employers. At the present time, our primary service is finding job leads and helping the disabled apply for jobs. Could you recommend a strategy or approach you find successful on helping [people with disabilities] seek employment? Also, do you have any helpful tips on helping those with large employment gaps?

How do you help students/prospective employees with skills but little on-the-job history secure quality jobs? I work at a Vocational Training program for people with disabilities. Our students could master the material but without work experience, we found it very difficult to help them secure quality positions.

**Answer:** We have attached an overview PowerPoint describing the basic principles of Pathways, which includes standards that can help job seekers with not only disabilities but also gaps in employment secure a job. For example, through the Discovery process, each participant's strengths, conditions for success, and interests are identified along with their individual employment supports and other resource needs. The information gleaned during Discovery is then used to identify job opportunities that are closely aligned with each participant's competencies and conditions for success. For participants without work experience, internships allow employers to observe firsthand the degree of compatibility between the participant's interests, skills, and abilities and the requirements of the position.

2. **Question:** Can you discuss job coaching during COVID-19 when organizations are limiting those who can physically come into the building?

**Answer:** The following is a list of ideas that have proven to be useful for many agencies, some of which were discussed during the webinar:

- Checking in with employers, clients, and co-workers via virtual platforms (FaceTime, emails, phone calls, Zoom, Skype, etc.) daily, weekly, or as appropriate
- Some employers have allowed job coaches to observe clients from a distance while on-site and socially distanced or through video cameras

- Job coaches have set timers on phones or watches to remind clients of break times, start/end times, times that tasks change etc.
  - Use of cloud-based programs and apps developed for virtual job coaching and virtual task lists
  - Use of iPads, cell phones have been used to conduct Discovery (an alternate pre-employment assessment), and on-site job coaching
  - Grants have been issued for technology to connect clients and job coaches virtually
3. **Questions:** Can the presenters speak about how this approach might work for people living with mental health challenges? How well does it align with evidence-based supported employment?

What are some strategies to motivate people dealing with mental health issues to find paid or volunteer employment?

**Answer:** Pathways was primarily designed for people with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism, and less so for those living with mental health challenges. However, some Pathways participants have had a dual diagnosis in which we found the following methods helpful.

- The use of Discovery (an alternate pre-employment assessment) and Customized Employment to understand what conditions need to be met for the job seeker to be successful at work.
- A support plan given to the employers (after approved by the job seeker) which outlines some conditions (i.e. frequent breaks, flexibility with hours, environmental factors, etc.) that would help them to be successful in their job.

If you are not familiar with IPS, we have included a brief description and link to more information: Individual Placement and Support (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 regular jobs of their choosing. Although variations of supported employment exist, IPS refers to the evidence-based practice of supported employment. More information can be found here: <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/about-us-2/>. Mainstream education and technical training are included as ways to advance career paths.

4. **Questions:** What does success look like for these individuals? How independent do the employees become? What failures were identified and could be learned from?

Please discuss any effective strategies to create systemic impacts on increasing employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

**Answer:** Please refer to the attached PowerPoint slides describing the basic principles and strategies of Pathways with a few success stories of people employed through the Pathways process highlighting the impact of these strategies. Also, we encourage you to reference early findings on program outcomes from the Pathways evaluation (<https://www.mathematica.org/our-publications-and-findings/projects/pathways-to-careers-program-evaluation>), particularly this

[Fact Sheet](#) and recent [report](#) titled “Customized Employment: Translating Policy Into Practice Through SourceAmerica Pathways to Careers.”

5. **Question:** I know the Pathways program has been around for a while, but what steps have been taken to expand the program?

**Answer:** In 2020, SourceAmerica expanded and made Pathways to Careers service offerings available to all non-profit agencies (NPAs) throughout the United States, along with Job Matching and Customized Employment component-based trainings. Pathways is now a SourceAmerica technical center for NPA workforce supports. NPAs can opt to implement each component of the Pathways offerings based on the needs of the agency and the population it serves.

6. **Question:** How do you maintain genuine relationships with employer partners in the long term, especially now that in-person meetings are discouraged?

**Answer:** Maintaining regular contact with employer partners is always important but is particularly crucial at this time. Maintaining contact can be conducted using various modes including newsletters, email updates and check-ins via telephone, Zoom, or Skype. Maintaining a genuine relationship may include not only inquiring about new job opportunities for job seekers but also checking in to see how employed Pathways participants are doing and how they’re progressing in their jobs. This strategy can strengthen the partnership between your two organizations. It is typically recommended to check in with employers monthly in the beginning (first few months) and quarterly thereafter. However, with all the many changes in the world, more frequent contact may be necessary.

7. **Question:** I am wondering about the scalability of customized employment approaches. I am used to them being very case by case, and I would be interested to know about organizations hiring different numbers of people using this approach.

**Answer:** More and more funders, such as state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies, are recognizing the value of customized employment (CE) and have made efforts to align CE funding with sustainability. SourceAmerica recognizes that there is still work to do and is continuing to advocate for increased CE funding as an avenue to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

8. **Question:** What were some of the unanticipated positive and negative outcomes resulting from project implementation?

**Answer:** Please refer to the attached PowerPoint slides, which provide an overview of the basic principles of Pathways and include a few success stories of individuals employed through customized employment. Other positive outcomes include the extensive training Pathways staff received for professional development. As for negative outcomes, the demonstration highlighted that it can take considerable time to do customized job development for some participants which needs to be explained to all stakeholders (including the job seeker, families, support staff, and funders) from the start. Customized employment is a longer process (compared to supported employment) and one that many are not accustomed to. Pathways utilized paid internships as a successful step to employment. The length of the internship needs to be carefully considered for each individual so it’s not too long or too short.

9. **Question:** How do you help educate individuals and families so they are willing to try customized employment?

**Answer:** Some methods found helpful to educate/interested individuals and families include:

- Showing success stories of others that have gone through customized employment and found a job they love.
- Suggesting benefits counseling (for those concerned about the impacts working could have on their benefits).
- Introducing the Discovery process (an alternate pre-employment assessment) and explaining that it is person-centered, strengths-based, and a positive process that family members are engaged in (if the job seeker approves).
- Explaining that customized employment is all about matching the job seekers' interests and skills to the needs of a business while considering any conditions that need to be in place for the job seeker to thrive in his/her role.

10. **Question:** How are agencies dealing with barriers to broadband access and accessibility in work-based learning platforms? What innovations are you seeing?

How can agencies ensure equitable access for low income folks who may not have Wi-Fi or broadband access? What are some creative strategies?

**Answer:** Agencies have been able to employ several strategies, including:

- This website with information for those with limited/no broadband access due to income: <https://decisiondata.org/internet/low-income-internet-options>
- Free/low-cost WiFi advertised by Xfinity and T-Mobile (among other companies)
- Available grants to purchase technology (i.e. iPads)
- Virtual Job Shadow, a website used for virtual job exploration: <https://www.virtualjobshadow.com/>

11. **Question:** How do you involve young adults who do not want to be seen as having a disability?

**Answer:** There are several ways to explain the process and engage young job seekers, including:

- Explaining that many people (diagnosed disability or not) utilize others to assist them in their job search
- Describing the Discovery process (an alternate pre-employment assessment which focuses on skills, abilities and positive traits and contributions) as an approach that many people experiencing employment barriers have found useful with their job search
- NOT leading any conversation with discussion about their disability

12. **Questions:** How did you get employer buy in? How did you overcome your biggest hurdles?

What tools or programs are available to employers to engage employers in offering job opportunities to individuals with disabilities and how much does it cost?

How does this program create, increase, or maintain community relationships with both small and large businesses? What are some of the core areas of system change that are focused on to better encourage employment of people with disabilities?

**Answer:** Please refer to the attached PowerPoint slides describing the basic principles of Pathways including employer outreach. Pathways has a process that helps employers see the goal of professional partnership focusing on the needs of the employer, matched to the skills of a job seeker. One of the biggest hurdles with employers is trying to overcome preconceived notions they may have about hiring people with disabilities and/or past experiences they may have had (often resulting from poor job placements). Thorough explanation and ongoing education, Pathways helps employers recognize that their goal is to identify a good job match for each participant and employers are provided ongoing support throughout the process.

13. **Questions:** What strategies are used to establish business relationships [with employers] and secure jobs for people with disabilities, through this pandemic?

Do you have any advice for finding employment in the time of COVID?

**Answer:** The following is a list of ideas that have proven to be useful for many agencies, some of which were discussed during the webinar:

- Research employers online and then call to schedule an initial virtual meeting in place of in-person meeting at the business
- Conduct the initial meeting/presentation with employer via virtual platforms (FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, etc.) as this is more personal approach compared to phone or email
- Use of cloud-based programs and apps developed to virtually research lines of business and identify potential employers
- Use of iPads and cell phones have been used to conduct Discovery (an alternate pre-employment assessment) and on-site job coaching
- Grants have been issued for technology to virtually connect clients and Employment Specialist

14. **Question:** As a revitalized Certified Vocational Evaluation Specialist (CVE), what help can I provide the Vocational Evaluation and Career Assessment Professionals (VECAP) Association? I am now retired but would like to renew my interest and am still practicing somewhat.

**Answer:** As outlined during the presentation, the Discovery process is utilized by Pathways as an alternate assessment process. SourceAmerica believes strongly that Discovery has useful applications for vocational evaluators and would encourage you to see where Discovery aligns with VECAP.

15. **Question:** What are some no-cost or low cost platforms you can suggest that can support transformation away from face to face contacts?

**Answer:** No-cost or low-cost platforms include Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, Facetime, and Google Docs. Other resources, such as Virtual Job Shadow which is a site for virtual job exploration: <https://www.virtualjobshadow.com/> , are available at a nominal cost.

16. **Question:** Given the changes COVID-19 has thrust upon our culture “how things can get done” at schools, State VR agencies, employers, and the Protection and Advocacy Systems, what advice do you have for us as a new school year begins and COVID-19 is still with us, especially for those who believe that “waiting, being patient” until things get better is NOT an option?

**Answer:** Pathways to Careers has been implemented in non-profit agencies rather than in school settings. However, here are a few places to consider focusing:

- Directly involving students with all aspects of planning including their IEPs and vocational plans
- Continuing to develop relationships with community employers
- Training and developing professional staff

17. **Question:** Can you discuss how to offer pre-employment transition services to student with disabilities?

**Answer:** Typically, working with your local transition schools and state VR will connect you to students with disabilities seeking employment.

18. **Question:** Can you discuss credentials for providing customized employment supports?

**Answer:** Credentials vary by state, but many states require Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) certification.

19. **Question:** Do service providers differ in the type of participants they serve and services they offer? How does the program measure success, aside from employment and earnings? Does SourceAmerica measure employment and earnings outcomes after exiting the program or while in the program?

**Answer:** Service providers differ greatly in the competitive integrated employment (CIE) services they offer to those served, including Pathways participants. Some agencies serve a cross-section of people while others focus on specific disabilities (school-age, individuals in congregate employment settings, aging adults, etc.) Earnings and employment are important outcomes to assess, but Pathways administrators also paid special attention to the wait time to access service times as well as reduction in federal disability benefits in response to high earnings. We encourage you to reference early findings on program outcomes from the Pathways evaluation (<https://www.mathematica.org/our-publications-and-findings/projects/pathways-to-careers-program-evaluation> ), particularly this [Fact Sheet](#) and recent [report](#) titled “Customized Employment: Translating Policy Into Practice Through SourceAmerica Pathways to Careers.”

20. **Question:** What strategies have been used to assure broad access for individuals and families to Pathways to Careers at routine sites? What has been the biggest challenge with existing policies and procedures in order to faithfully provide Pathways to Careers services? What has been the biggest staff training challenge in providing Pathways services?

**Answer:** In the beginning, each Pathways site held informational sessions with a variety of audiences (i.e. transition schools, funding offices, facility-based employment sites, etc.). As Pathways expanded, interested agencies have the option to choose which trainings they would like to participate in. The Pathways principles are provided to agencies and encouraged as a way to maintain quality CE standards.

Training seems to be a common area that some NPAs struggle with, typically because of the cost of staff release time and the loss of revenue for providing reimbursable services. Pathways is in the process of building out a cloud-based learning management system as a way to offer training and resources that staff can access on demand.

21. **Question:** I'm having a difficult time finding candidates for employment due to COVID-19. Many of the potential employees are receiving SSI or SSDI and also may be hesitant to rejoin the workforce even with precautions in place. Any advice?

**Answer:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, there are increased opportunities to engage in work remotely from home. One possible option is to encourage job seekers to consider job opportunities that they can do from home. Resources, such as LiveOps, can help connect job seekers to such job opportunities: <https://www.liveops.com/blog/find-flexible-work-people-disabilities/>.

22. **Question:** Will it be closed captioned or will it have American sign language interpreters?

**Answer:** The webinar event held on September 24, 2020 used closed captioning. A link to the recorded event can be accessed here: <https://www.mathematica.org/events/expanding-integrated-employment-early-lessons-from-scaling-up-pathways-to-careers>.