



Partnership for Employment First

Current Situation

In Ohio, there are more than 30,000 working-age adults with developmental disabilities who receive adult services. The vast majority of these services are provided in segregated settings. According to Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities data, only 24% of working-age adults in Ohio currently receive integrated employment services. Everyone deserves the opportunity to be successfully employed.

In many areas of the state, vocational rehabilitation agencies and county boards of DD have a strong collaborative partnership. However, there are still many places where these two agencies have not actively partnered. Historically, cases for DD-eligible adults may have been closed because the individual was considered “unable to benefit from services” (i.e. too disabled to work), and it is still a common practice to request a VR denial to gain an individual’s access to waiver services. Further, a lack of coordination of long-term supports can sometimes lead to job loss for those individuals after their VR case is closed.

Expected Outcomes

This statewide partnership between OOD and DODD will address many of the commonly identified barriers to community employment for people with developmental disabilities and will accomplish the following objectives:

- Strengthened relationship between county boards of DD and VR
- Assurance of sustainability by building system capacity
- Development of provider competencies and skills
- Personalized career planning process for each individual to identify job interests and support needs and information about benefits planning
- Identification and planning for a seamless transition to long-term wrap-around supports

Leveraging Resources

Through this partnership, Ohio will maximize state general revenue funding (GRF) to serve more people and achieve greater outcomes. Every \$1 contributed yields approximately \$3.69 in federal revenue to support this project.

Project Model

DODD will provide funding for 15 dedicated OOD counselors who will engage approximately 1,500 DD-eligible adults each year, serving an average caseload size of 60. These individuals will be new referrals for VR services, and will be the only consumers served by these OOD Counselors. DODD expects to transition approximately 5.5% of the adults who are currently served in a segregated setting, such as a sheltered workshop, ADS facility or an enclave into VR services in the first year. Under this model, OOD Counselors will be an active part of the individual’s team, providing personalized career planning that is

based on established supported employment competencies. Individuals with developmental disabilities will receive services designed to identify jobs that match their interests, strengths, preferences and support needs. Individuals who receive public benefits like SSDI/SSI or Medicaid, will receive a benefits analysis, and information about possible work incentives to maximize earning potential.



Once a person’s path to employability is established through this person-centered planning process, performance-based job development will be provided, leading to a successful job match with an employer, followed by job coaching and follow-along services. When the individual achieves job stabilization, the Counselor will close the case and the county board of DD will provide long-term supports to maintain employment.

Statewide Allocation Method

Each county board in Ohio will have an opportunity to refer a pre-determined number of DD-eligible adults for participation in this project.

It is suggested that “Referral slots” will be allocated based on the number of adults who are not employed in the community but are currently receiving services (adult day support, vocational habilitation and supported employment) through the county board. DODD projects that 5.5% of adults (est. 1,500) will be “transitioned” to VR services statewide. This means that some larger counties may receive more than 150 slots, and some less-populous counties may only receive a few, but each county will receive a minimum of 5 slots. DD-eligible adults who desire competitive integrated employment should be referred to the project. OOD and DODD will continually monitor this method, and if necessary, make course corrections along the way.

Co-Located Counselors

To promote unified coordination of services and to maximize capacity, it is suggested that OOD Counselors be embedded in sheltered workshop facilities. OOD Counselors will be an active member of each individual’s team, providing guidance and counseling throughout the personalized career planning process, developing an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) to achieve each person’s vocational goals, and monitoring services and progress. These embedded counselors will also act as a direct liaison with county board of DD staff, providing consultation and connecting job developers with businesses through OOD business sourcing points of contact. This co-location will ensure ease of referral, streamlined eligibility, assessment and planning processes, and regular connection with individuals served and their teams.

Professional Development

A vital component of the partnership will include professional development activities for OOD Counselors and service providers based on supported employment competencies. As a result of these trainings, staff will gain knowledge in supported employment philosophies, assessment and career planning, marketing and employer engagement, on-the-job training and supports. This approach will ensure sustainability by building system capacity through the development of highly-skilled professionals throughout the state. County board SSAs will also receive a brief training on the VR process and personalized career planning process that supports the overall competency-based supported employment training for providers and OOD Counselors.

A handbook will also be developed that describes the VR and DD/Medicaid Waiver systems for the benefit of both agencies. This handbook will be made available to each of the key players in the project, and will serve as a reference manual to ensure agency alignment for the project objectives.

Dual Certification

OOD and DODD will be establishing criteria for approval of waivers to OOD accreditation requirements for DODD certified employment service providers who will be required to complete the OOD/DODD prescribed training curriculum in competency based supported employment. This will allow DODD-certified Medicaid waiver providers to provide VR services for these individuals. Since Waiver providers will provide the long-term follow-along supports once the RSC case is successfully closed, this dual certification will ensure continuity of service provision and lead to more successful transitions from time-limited to long-term supports.

Business Relations Manager and Employer Engagement

RSC has recently hired a Business Relations Manager who will play a critical role in the employer engagement process for the overall VR program. Duties for the Business Relations Manager include identification of target areas for business engagement. In addition, RSC staff will also coordinate outreach to potential business partners and other stakeholders and provide information about employer benefits/incentives including tax credits. OOD and DODD will also explore other opportunities to support business development, including consultation with national experts in employer engagement best practices.



