

T-TAP

Training and Technical Assistance for Providers

Virginia Commonwealth University & The Institute for Community Inclusion
University of Massachusetts Boston

Q & A on Customized Employment:

Funding of Community-Integrated Employment Outcomes

Nationally, participation in facility-based programs continues to exceed participation in community-integrated employment by individuals with significant disabilities. However, a number of community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) have evolved their services to primarily focus on funding supports to individuals in community-integrated, inclusive employment settings. Funding is matched to support an individual's customized employment outcome rather than being used primarily to maintain facilities.

This fact sheet will provide information on how to use a diversified array of funding resources to support community-integrated employment outcomes. Ms. Nancy Brooks-Lane, Director of Developmental Disabilities Services, Cobb-Douglas Counties Community Services Boards in Georgia, provides detailed examples of how to target and use a variety of funding opportunities for this purpose. First, Ms. Brooks-Lane discusses how her organization decided to shift its focus from facility-based programs to community-integrated outcomes. Then, she answers frequently asked questions about how the organization funded this change using multiple resources.



When and how did Cobb-Douglas Counties Community Services Boards begin to focus on assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve community-integrated employment outcomes?



In 1999, Developmental Disabilities Services of the Cobb-Douglas Counties CSBs, two Boards that work together under the same administrative umbrella, operated four sheltered workshop programs. The state funding streams reinforced facility-based services, meaning that funds were allocated to maintain individuals in day activity and sheltered work programs. Most of the participants' parents were elderly and did not want changes to be made in the service system. Additionally, several of the staff had worked in the programs for many years and were more comfortable with the facility-based model. At that time, shifting from a sheltered workshop to community-based supports was not a priority for the Boards. As a result, previous attempts at change had been minimally successful.

In the fall of 1999, the CSBs hired a new Chief Executive Officer who supported innovation and moving the program to a community-integrated approach to services. At that time, the change process began in earnest, which underlines the importance of leadership support for the implementation of significant organizational change. Sub-minimum wage contracts were phased out.

The organizational change effort was driven by the values of community integration and self-determination for individuals with significant disabilities. Individual or small group meetings were held to involve families and advocates in the change process. Many families were not in favor of the plans and for about six months struggled with the idea. These struggles presented themselves through a range of behaviors from productive discussion to personal attacks. The values of community integration and self-determination were returned to frequently as a guide for problem solving, decision-making, and moral support during those first difficult months.

Realigning the mission of the organization was key in moving to a focus on funding community-integrated employment. During the summer of 2002, a business plan was sent to the local funding board from the leadership of the Cobb-Douglas Counties Community Services Boards. This document contained the following value statement:

We will concentrate efforts on service/support delivery that maximizes each individual's opportunity for inclusion, both socially and professionally. Consumers will be provided with the tools to compete for employment, including white-collar jobs, in their respective communities.



The Office of Disability Employment Policy,
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Were there any key activities that Cobb-Douglas Counties Community Services Boards implemented during the organizational change and staff development process?



During the organizational redesign process, staff focused on four key activities. The first was an emphasis on self-examination that challenged our attitudes and practices that were potentially devaluing or judgmental. The second was an emphasis on the values represented in our program and services. Individuality, choice, respect, participation, competence, social inclusion, community settings, and employment became the focal point of our work with the individuals in our program who are our “customers.” The third activity was attention to restructuring and strong leadership that resulted in the flattening of the organizational structure, resulting in all staff being involved with customers. A value-based culture of creativity was developed. The final focal point was staff training to create new skill sets with an emphasis on person-centered planning, a team focus, natural supports, mentoring, internal versus external motivation, seeing new possibilities, valued roles, and making a difference. Self-directed work teams were formed with staff assuming more generic roles. Employment and the principles of community inclusion were our guiding light. Goal development was customer driven and determined by the individual’s passions. Person-centered planning determined how staff turned these passions into customized employment outcomes.



What are funding options that are potentially available to align dollars and other resources with the focus on community-integrated employment outcomes?



Vocational Rehabilitation, One Stop Career Centers, and provider agencies that support individuals with a disability are generally familiar resources. One resource that is less familiar to some is the Micro Enterprise Center. These Centers started out as a grass-roots economic development initiative. In Georgia, United Way, as well as other foundations and endowments such as Hewlett-Packard, which funded a computer lab for our Micro Enterprise Center, fund Micro Enterprise Centers. Micro-loans can be provided by these Centers and are usually in the neighborhood of \$2,000 to \$3,000, but certainly can vary. These Micro Enterprise Centers vary from state to state, so it is important that people get to know how a Center operates in their own state. Some of the other financial options that Cobb-Douglas Counties CSBs have used include:

- Provider Short Term-Loans
- Individual Training Accounts and Individual Development Accounts
- PASS Plans
- Family Contributions



Can you provide an example of using a no-interest micro loan to fund a customized employment outcome?



Diane’s story is a good example of using a no-interest micro loan and an Individual Development Account. She wanted to start her own salon. With the start-up funds from the micro-loan that she accessed through our agency, Diane began the process of building her business, *Hair Designs by Broadway*. She also used an Individual Development Account through the Micro Enterprise Center. Diane saved \$500, and the Center matched these dollars 2 to 1, resulting in an additional \$1,500 for her to put towards her business. Diane was very creative in purchasing some of the supplies for her salon, and made her dollars go much further. She used thrift stores and also contacted salons that had gone out of the business to purchase supplies. She saved a lot of money by her smart shopping. Diane got the magnetic business sign to go on her car, so wherever she is, she advertises her business.



Could you provide more information on what you mean by provider short-term loans?



Provider short-term loans are an option that our organization has begun to provide to assist our customers with start-up costs. The loans come from donated funds, flexible dollars, and/or endowments and foundations. Cobb-Douglas Counties CSBs have provided loans to individuals with disabilities to start their business or to purchase a resource. The loans generally total \$1,000 to \$3,000, and there is no interest charged to the person. Our customers pay back the loans over a period of time, usually 18 to 24 months. These loans give more flexibility to the customers to be able to get what they need to achieve the outcomes that have been identified as their goals.

Our program has provided loans to five individuals. An example of a business supported through the short-term no-cost loan is an individual who received a loan to have the Georgia driver’s manual translated into Spanish. That was a resource lacking in the State, and Georgia has a growing Hispanic community. Loan funds were used for supplies and for printing the translated manual. One individual started his own synthetic oil business; another started a lawn care business. Loan funds were used to purchase start-up supplies and equipment needed to operate the businesses.

Q How can an Individual Training Account or Individual Development Account be used to fund a customized employment outcome?

A Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) are available through One Stop Career Centers to provide funding for educational or vocational training. Individual Development Accounts (IDA) are a potential funding resource that many people do not know much about. They are special savings accounts designed to assist low-income people on their path toward asset ownership through matched savings and financial education. Our program has utilized IDAs to support employment for about five individuals in their businesses such as child care, an on-line shoe retail business, a home inspection business, and an IT repair and retail business. IDAs are a matched-funding financial option, so an individual who is going to access an IDA must have some funds to use for the match requirement. In Georgia, the IDAs were funded under United Way and now are under our micro enterprise center called the Edge Connection. Some Banks and Credit Unions also offer this option. More information is available about IDAs at the following Website: <http://www.alternatives.org/ida.html>

Q Do you have an example of someone who has used an Individual Training Account through a One-Stop Career Center?

A Edward is an example of a person who used an Individual Training Account through the One-Stop System to fund his employment outcome. During his vocational profiling process, staff learned Edward had a very strong interest in personal training and had a connection to a particular gym. So, we used that connection. This is a very good example of how social capital can be a very important employment resource. Edward already had this connection with someone who has a career as a personal trainer. So with the support of an educational coach, he went through the training to become a personal trainer. His training was purchased through the One-Stop system, using funds from an Individual Training Account (ITA). Based on the informational resources provided through Edward's personal trainer and the money for him to attend training, staff is now working with a local gym to customize a personal training position.

Q Do you have any other information on how to creatively use funding?

A Plans for Achieving Self Support (PASS) for recipients of Social Security Disability Benefits are another option. Funds can be set aside within a PASS plan to pay for services and resources needed to achieve an employment outcome. Also, our program has begun to encourage families with youth in middle school and high school to start an employment fund for their family member with a disability, much like a college fund. We have just started discussing this concept with families, and so far, families have responded well. Finally, donated funds are a potential resource. For example, churches are wonderful repositories of resources and social capital that can open doors for individuals with disabilities. These are some of the types of diverse funds that we have been able to work with customers in achieving employment outcomes.

Q Do you have an example of a customized job that was funded by Vocational Rehabilitation?

A Bill's situation is an example of how working proactively with a funding source such as Vocational Rehabilitation to achieve a creative employment outcome can also result in a positive change in policy and practice. Bill wanted to work outside in a more naturalistic setting. After much community-based assessment, the employment option identified with him was a cat-fish catch-and-release or catch-and-keep pond stocked by the owners. Staff found there was a void in that the particular business for someone to process the fish. Funding for the various pieces of equipment needed to assist Bill in realizing his employment goal came from braiding together resources from a U. S. Dept. of Labor Customized Employment Grant and State Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Vocational Rehabilitation provided the scooter that Bill uses for mobility and to access the grounds of the fishing hole. VR also made the processing workstation easily accessible for Bill, as well as the tools to keep it clean hygienically. The employer provides on-site employment supports that he might need in addition to further training on the fish-cleaning process and use of the equipment. In exchange for these supports, the employer has Bill's approval to utilize his equipment when he is not working there.

Bill was able to bring to this business state-of-the-art fish cleaning processing equipment, a very good example of resource ownership as a customized employment outcome. Customers of the pond bring their catch to Bill for him to process. Bill's equipment and service adds value to this particular business. Many customers are choosing to come to this particular fishing hole, because many of the other ponds in the area do not offer the processing service. Bill's employment outcome helped convince VR that resource ownership is an employment option that VR funding could support. VR in Georgia now offers resource ownership options for individuals with disabilities under the tools and equipment section of their policies and procedures

Summary

All too frequently, funding decisions within and by community rehabilitation programs are driven by perceived programmatic needs. Funding decisions must be driven by the individual community-integrated employment goals and support needs of participants in the CRP. The Cobb-Douglas Counties Community Services Boards provide an excellent example of how funding can be successfully redirected within a community rehabilitation program to accomplish a singular outcome, community-integrated employment.

There are a number of critical factors within the design of community rehabilitation program that influence the extent to which funding can be redirected to achieve community-integrated employment outcomes. These organizational change factors include, for example:

- The CRP must commit to an organizational priority on achieving competitive employment outcomes, including customized employment.
- This commitment sets in place an organizational focus driven by a clear mission that directs program resources, including funding, on participants achieving competitive employment outcomes.
- This mission-driven effort involves the program's Board, administration, staff, and consumers. Staff and programs are aligned to support this mission.
- A diversified funding base is developed, and funding is aligned to support the mission and focus on integrated customized job outcomes.
- Business and industry become a partner and a customer.
- The consistent thread running through these efforts is the self-determined, informed goal of each individual served, including addressing the questions and concerns of family members.
- For funding to be directed to achieving community-integrated employment outcomes, organizational level change strategies must be linked and fully complement each other.

References

Brooks-Lane, N., Hutcheson, S., & Revell, G. (2005). Supporting consumer directed employment outcomes. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 23(2), 123-134.

Butterworth, J. & Fesko, S. (2004). *Successful organizational change*. Richmond, VA: T-TAP, Virginia Commonwealth University RRTC. Available at: <http://www.t-tap.org/strategies/factsheet/successchange.htm>

Butterworth, J., Ghiloni, C., Revell, G. & Brooks-Lane, N. (2004). *Creating a diversified funding base*. Richmond, VA: T-TAP, Virginia Commonwealth University RRTC. Available at: <http://www.t-tap.org/strategies/factsheet/diversifiedfunding.html>

Resources

The Training and Technical Assistance to Programs (T-TAP) project has developed a series of Fact Sheets available on-line that focus on the individual primary factors influencing how funding is targeted within a community rehabilitation program. These are as follows:

Hutchinson, S. & Revell, G. (2005). *Developing a business plan for organizational change*. Richmond, VA: T-TAP, Virginia Commonwealth University RRTC. Available at: <http://www.t-tap.org/strategies/factsheet/developingbusplan.htm>

Inge, K. & Targett, P. (2005). *Addressing parental concerns*. Richmond, VA: T-TAP, Virginia Commonwealth University RRTC. Available at: <http://www.t-tap.org/strategies/factsheet/parents.htm>

Inge, K. & Targett, P. (2004). *Changing staff roles*. Richmond, VA: T-TAP, Virginia Commonwealth University RRTC. Available at: <http://www.t-tap.org/strategies/factsheet/changingstaffroles.html>

Targett, P. & Inge, K. (2005). *Employment negotiations*. Richmond, VA: T-TAP, Virginia Commonwealth University RRTC. Available at: <http://www.t-tap.org/strategies/factsheet/employnegotiation.htm>

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