

Guiding the Transition to Competitive Integrated Employment: 10 Essential Steps for Individuals and Families

Indiana envisions a future where every person with disabilities not only feels empowered but also receives essential support and the freedom to pursue meaningful employment in their community. That vision includes something known as competitive integrated employment.

Competitive integrated employment is a term we use to describe jobs, usually in your local community, paying wages at or above the minimum wage, in workplaces that include people with disabilities as well as people who don't have disabilities.

The path to **competitive integrated employment** (CIE) is accessible to everyone with appropriate assistance and the informed choice to pursue it. Consider the following recommendations to ensure you have the necessary information and access to resources for preparing effectively for competitive and inclusive job prospects.

1. Understand and apply for Medicaid health insurance and Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services waivers.

Medicaid waiver services include various employment-related supports and can be used in combination with Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) employment services. Employment services can be essential to obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment.

Note that it can be a [multi-step process to apply for Medicaid](#).

- If you don't already have Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), apply for federal benefits [through the Social Security Administration](#). Once you are over the age of 18, Indiana determines eligibility for Medicaid waivers based in part on whether you are considered eligible for Social Security benefits. Because of this, the state's Bureau of Disability Services will encourage you to first apply for Social Security. To be eligible for waiver services, you will need to have a current application into SSA, be currently receiving benefits, or have an active appeal in place.
- Apply for Medicaid. Find information on the necessary steps on [Indiana's FSSA website](#). **Seek assistance from agency staff or others when completing the**

application. If you are applying for either the Family Supports Waiver or the Community Integration and Habilitation Supports Waiver, contact your local office of the [Bureau of Disability Services](#). They can help guide you through the application process.

- If you do not have a Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Waiver, you can apply for one. There are several different Medicaid waivers in Indiana. Using the webpage linked above, see the description of each for information on how to apply. If you currently attend a sheltered workshop, you may already have an Indiana HCBS waiver.
- Explore the "Available Waiver Services" section of each waiver for a list of the range of services offered in that program.

2. Apply for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

- Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) helps individuals with disabilities find employment. VR has many resources and services available to job seekers.
- You can apply for VR services by referring yourself (or a loved one can refer you) to VR by contacting [the nearest VR location](#).
 - Follow VR's guidance throughout the intake and eligibility process and seek assistance from the agency or your case manager as needed.

3. Understand Social Security and other benefits.

- Attend informational webinars about impacts of earned income.
 - [Watch "Putting Social Security Benefits to Work"](#) about benefits and earnings.
 - You could also register for the free webinar, ["Understanding Social Security Disability Benefits: A Guide to Beneficiaries Who Want to Work."](#)
- Ask your VR counselor about a referral to free Benefits Information Network (BIN) counseling. BIN liaisons provide information on federal and state work incentives and disability resources that can support employment. BIN services can help you understand your benefits and how work may impact benefits.

4. Learn more about employment systems and supports.

Participate in free [Family Employment Awareness Training](#) (FEAT) to learn about

- creative ways to customize competitive employment; and
- available state, federal, and community resources that support employment.

5. Take an inventory of your assets.

- Engage in a comprehensive self-assessment to unearth your strengths, assets, skills, preferences, interests, and the many ways you can enrich both your community and potential employers. This exploration serves as a valuable inventory, facilitating the discovery of your goals, passions, and the true sources of meaning in your life.
- With others who know you well or as a family unit, read this [article about the positive personal profile](#). Then, complete the [positive personal profile](#). You can find a [completed example here](#).
- Going through this strength-based process could help you develop career goals, social network connections, and employment possibilities. It will also help you create a clear and more defined path forward.
- Create a list of personal and professional connections, noting their relationships to you. Share this with agency staff and your case manager for potential employment connections and opportunities.

6. Tailor your employment goals.

- Consider using person-centered planning and the LifeCourse Framework tool to tailor employment goals to your strengths, preferences, interests, and needs.
- Learn more by attending related webinars:
 - [An Introduction to Charting the LifeCourse](#), from the Arc of Indiana. This webinar describes how the LifeCourse process can be used to set and reach life goals, including employment.
 - [LifeCourse Nexus: Daily Life and Employment](#)
 - To begin, select the Getting Started documents.
 - On this page, see the first three tools: the Integrated Support Star, Trajectory for Exploring Employment, and Trajectory for Employment Planning.
 - Additionally, familiarize yourself with the Employment Guide and share it with agency staff and your case manager for better alignment of support needed to reach your employment vision.

7. Define your employment vision.

- Outline the activities you plan to participate in during both working and non-working hours, including an ideal weekly schedule. While working enhances your emotional well-being, so too does pursuing and engaging in other meaningful activities. Both should be included in your life vision.

- Document your thoughts in writing or type them out on your computer, and share this with agency staff and your case manager.

8. Address transportation needs.

- Assess your transportation requirements and document your thoughts in writing or type them out on your computer.
- Discuss your transportation needs with the agency, your case manager, and your VR counselor. This will help ensure that you and your team are developing a transportation plan that fits your needs.

9. Identify home and personal assistance needs.

- Identify the home and personal assistance you will need to support your work goals. For example, what would be necessary to make that proposed schedule a reality? Document your thoughts in writing or type them using your computer.
- Share these details with agency staff, your case manager, and your VR counselor to ensure that supports are in place for both work and community participation.

10. Explore work opportunities.

- Make a list of 10 businesses near home where you can imagine yourself working.
- Describe the tasks you would undertake with appropriate support for each job role.
- Share this information with the agency and your case manager to facilitate job development and employer planning.

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