

# What Does High-Quality Supported Employment Look Like?

## Plain Language Summary

### A Quick Look:

Supported employment helps people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) find and keep paid jobs in their communities.

Although supported employment can work well, the quality of services differs across agencies and communities. Researchers held 10 national focus groups with 19 experienced employment support professionals and 25 vocational rehabilitation (VR) professionals. They asked ***what practices lead to strong employment outcomes***.

### What Participants Agreed On:

- **Get to know the job seeker** through:
  - conversations,
  - observations,
  - work experiences, and
  - input from people they trust.
- Match jobs to the person's ***strengths, interests, preferences, and support needs***.
- Learn what ***businesses need*** and show how a job seeker's skills can ***help meet those needs***.
- Use ***clear teaching strategies*** at the worksite.
- Build ***coworker and supervisor supports***.
- ***Fade*** job-coach help as the employee becomes ***more independent***.
- Stay involved after placement. ***Regular check-ins*** can identify and solve problems before a job is at risk.

### Quality Goes Beyond Getting a Job:

Both groups described high-quality supported employment as an ***ongoing, person-centered process***. ***A job placement alone is not enough***. Strong services depend on communication, trust, stable providers, employer engagement, and coordination across VR, provider agencies, families, employers, and long-term support systems.

#### Shared message:

*Good supported employment creates a strong match for both the employee and the employer, and provides that support long enough for the match to last.*

### Barriers Can Still Get in the Way:

- Turnover and inconsistent training among employment staff
- Transportation problems and fewer services in rural areas
- Delays in Medicaid waiver or other long-term supports
- Poor communication when workplace concerns first appear
- Limited continuity when staff, agencies, or funding sources change

### Putting It into Practice:

- Use the same core quality expectations across agencies and service phases.
- Train employment staff in person-centered planning, employer engagement, systematic instruction, fading, and long-term follow-along.
- Track how services are delivered, not only whether a person was placed in a job.
- Create clear plans for communication, staff transitions, transportation, and long-term support.

Source: VCU-RRTC national focus group studies of employment support professionals and VR professionals (manuscripts under review/in preparation).

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For more on this project, visit: <https://idd.vcurrctc.org/research/rs5.cfm>