

Florida Provider Network



University of South Florida, Division of Applied Research and Education Support
Funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council

Benefit Information Key to Job Success

US Economic Stimulus Package Impacts Employment of People with Disabilities

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, signed into law on Feb 17, 2009, will fund a broad range of initiatives, some of which can be used to support the employment of people with disabilities. Here is a brief list:

Vocational Rehabilitation

\$540 million in funding which must be spent over the next two years. There is **no** state match required. Also includes another \$140 million for Independent Living.

Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth Services

Typically available for youth 14 to 21, stimulus funds may be used for individuals up to the age of 24. About 15% of individuals currently using these funds are individuals with disabilities, and for such folks, this can be a major source of support tied to transition efforts.

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Gain Marketable Skills and a Scholarship

Florida Provider Network Meets in Orlando



The Florida Provider Network (FPN), a set of regional employment teams from around the state of Florida that are collaborating on best practices and training on the employment of people with disabilities, met in Orlando on March 5-6, 2009. The meeting provided an opportunity for each team to report on its activities (Selina Renee Agnew, St. Augustine DVR Unit Supervisor, pictured above middle), and to hear from state leadership from Vocational Rehabilitation and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. The event was facilitated by Brenda Clark from USF (pictured above at left).

Pam Hinterlong (above, far right), VR administrator, provided a review of VR's current implementation of its Order of Selection process. The purpose of an order of selection is to provide a "fair and orderly way of determining the order in which individuals with disabilities are served." The process goes into effect when VR experiences funding constraints and is unable to serve all who apply.

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Florida Provider Network Update...

The process establishes priority categories to which individuals are assigned based on the significance of their disability. Federal law mandates that individuals with the most significant disabilities are served first. Those not served are placed on a waiting list.

Florida VR uses three category definitions for order of selection.

1. Most significant
2. Significant
3. Eligible individual with a disability

According to VR data as of March 3, 2009, there were 11,481 people on their waitlist. This included 3,742 people in category 1, (most significant), 5,787 in category 2 (significant), and 1,752 in category 3. This represents a 5,853 person increase from just seven months ago, despite the fact that over 5,600 people have been served off the wait list during that same time.

JB Black (pictured above), from APD Central Office, provided a discussion of APD's efforts to continue to support the employment of people with disabilities. He reviewed job placement data collected by the state, and gave an overview of some of APD's ongoing activities, including Start-Up Florida, the federal Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, and the Florida Benefits Information Resources Network.



Following this presentation, each of the FPN teams gave a presentation that summarized the initiatives going on in their region. A chance for questions, answers, and feedback highlighted the discussions.

Dale DiLeo, of Training Resource Network, then gave an overview of some of the national events impacting the employment of people with disabilities. Specifically, he highlighted a recently published study by Robert Cimera that compared the longitudinal costs of supported employment with sheltered work. This study is important because supported employment typically has

higher upfront costs during career planning and job development phases, and then costs decrease as supports decrease over time. What the study found was that the cumulative costs of supported employment (\$6,619) were about two-thirds cheaper than sheltered work (\$19,338). Stated another way, for every person funded in sheltered work, 2.82 supported employees could have been funded in the community.

The study did not even take into account the wages and cost-efficiency advantages of supported employment found in other research. The reference is:

Cimera, R. (2007). Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities. Vol. 22, No. 4. p. 247

Economic Stimulus Supports Employment of People with Disabilities

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Expansion of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)

The stimulus package includes expansion of the WOTC for "disconnected youth and unemployed veterans."

Individual with Disabilities Education Act

\$11.3 billion in Part B Funds. These resources can be used in part to support individuals in transition from school to employment. This is a significant amount in that the total funding for this line in 2008 was only 10.9 billion dollars.

Disability-Owned Businesses

Businesses owned by people with disabilities are to receive specific consideration when contracts for economic stimulus funds are issued.

Medicaid

\$87 billion increase in the Federal government's share of Medicaid spending, a main source of health care and employment support funding for people with disabilities.



Situational Assessments: Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

by Dale DiLeo

Why is it important to have a vocational assessment in supported employment?

A career is a big part of life, but people with disabilities have high rates of unemployment. Even when employed, many have entry level jobs based simply on whatever was available at the time of the search. With a vocational assessment, a job search is more likely to reflect a person's deeply held aspirations and life dreams. The resulting jobs tend to be more satisfying and more successful.

The information learned in an assessment is not isolated. It is in the context of whether or not a job and its setting fit within what a person wants to do with his or her life.

What is a situational assessment?

A situational assessment is a unique way to gather information about a job seeker. The process documents vocational interest, competencies, stamina, speed and other work variables in a variety of job "try-outs" in real work environments.

The use of situational assessments can help employment consultants learn things otherwise not easily known from the person's past experiences or knowledge base.

Shouldn't assessments be done in a more controlled, testing environment?

Until recently, most vocational testing used simulated work settings, generally for purposes of standardization. While such a test environment is more controlled than the real world, it is also artificial.

This artificiality may not pose a problem for some people and has certain advantages for comparisons to others in some occupations. But for many people with disabilities, it has limited what you can learn about their skills.

For example, some difficulties are:

- the use of work "samples" only assesses small and isolated pieces of real jobs out of context
- real work environments affect work behavior and performance, and this crucial factor is missing in test environments

How can a vocational assessment occur in a real setting?

Arrange for a job seeker to spend a brief amount of time trying out a job or several jobs in various employment settings. The worker can experience first-hand the tasks that need to be done, the setting and the types of people in that setting.

The evaluator can then sensitively observe and record information about the worker when appropriate, as well as interview the individual and co-workers to gain perspective.

These try-outs can range from a couple of hours to a couple of weeks, depending on the situation and person. The longer the time spent, the more reliable the information will be. However, longer-term experiences generally become less an assessment tool and more of a temporary job, subject to federal Department of Labor regulations.

What can be learned in a brief work experience?

Short-term experiences can provide a wealth of reliable information about work. Vocational interests, competencies, stamina, speed and other

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Situational Assessment

work-related variables can be explored.

In obtaining work-related information, keep in mind that performance in any setting is complex. Time-limited experiences in a small number of settings, even if they are real, still cannot provide a guaranteed prediction of performance.

But useful information can often indicate avenues to follow. For example, does the job-seeker:

- show a preference for certain kinds of settings, jobs, co-workers or work shifts?
- work in such a way that technology could enhance?
- socialize well with co-workers?
- require certain training strategies to succeed?
- demonstrate stamina and safety to the setting and tasks?
- express expectations for certain wages, responsibilities and career advancement?

Why would an employer allow a situational assessment in his or her workplace?

Employers most often cite skilled people as their most important resource. By entering into a partnership with SE professionals, the employer will invest time in finding those people who are motivated in and skilled at doing the work that needs to be done.

These tryouts also have the advantage to employers of letting them learn about prospective workers without any obligations to hire. By gaining experience with different kinds of workers, the employers also learn how to be better supervisors.

They gain first-hand experience with a more diverse and more productive workforce. Because hiring workers with disabilities is projected to become more common, employers will be better suited to compete in the future. At the same time, job seekers gain valuable insight into future career goals.

Does the job seeker get paid for the work done?

In some situations, it is appropriate for the employer to provide some payment for the work completed. For example, the worker may be temporarily filling a real opening, or helping to handle extra work.

He or she may be competent enough to provide what the US Department of Labor (DOL) calls an “immediate advantage” to the employer. The employer will then treat the individual as a temporary worker subject to the guidelines of the US Fair Labor Standards Act.

In many instances, wages need not be paid for situational assessment work experiences. There are a number of factors that the DOL uses to determine if wages are required.

For instance, if the work experience is short-term, does not displace other workers, provides no immediate advantage to the employer and is for the purpose of gathering information about the job seeker, then the worker will probably need not receive a salary. The DOL expects the work experience to be similar to the training one would find in a vocational school. Both the employer and worker must understand from the start that the worker will not be entitled to a wage at the start.

To be certain of employer federal wage obligations, contact the US Dept. of Labor, Employment Standards Administration, Wage and Standards Division, Washington, DC 20210. State wage and hour laws also vary and should be reviewed within each state.

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Making sense of all the information learned during an assessment process for career planning can be challenging. Listening and learning about a person with a disability and discovering work aptitudes, skills and support needs is a necessary first step to helping the people to think about their future career.



**Career
Assessment**