ACRE Competencies with an Emphasis on Customized Employment

ACRE

Association of Community
Rehabilitation Educators

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How employment competencies came to be:

APSE (the Association of People Supporting Employment First) has promoted community employment for people with disabilities since 1988. APSE assembled nationally recognized experts to establish the first formal set of supported employment competencies for employment providers in February 2001 (*by Flippo, Rogan, Geary, Martin Luecking, Keul, Harrison, Harvey, Dutton, Drouet, Niemiec, McDonald, Killam, Quinn, DiLeo, Hoffman, and the NJ APSE Chapter).*

In collaboration with APSE, ACRE refined and expanded the APSE competencies so that they would extend beyond supported employment. The expanded competencies include multiple approaches to employment for people with disabilities, including competitive employment, Customized Employment, supported employment, and transitional employment.

The first ACRE competencies were released in 2004 *(by G. Brandenburg, L. Bandy, L. Ford, L. Fussell, S. Hartnett, L Holloway, D. Martin-Lueking, W. Quarles, C. Sax, P. Todd, J. Trach, D. Wilkerson)*, and were updated in 2013 to reflect revisions in the APSE competencies, and recommendations from the competency committee and ACRE Board members *(J. Goldston, B. Bilodeau, R. Cook, V. Ferrara, L. Ford, L. Fussell, M. Jordan, S. Mahon, A. Scott, G. Brandenburg, C. Gandolfo, M. Garber, and D. Verstegen).*

The Introduction of Competencies with an Emphasis on Customized Employment (CE):

In 2017, a new ACRE curriculum group was formed to meld the existing ACRE competencies with the **Essential Elements of Customized Employment** developed jointly by the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) and the Vocational Rehabilitation Youth Technical Assistance Center (Y-TAC). This group incorporated initial work done by two ACRE teams who explored options for creating CE Competencies starting in 2016. Those teams, led by *Darla Wilkerson and Judi Goldston*, included the following: *M. Callahan, T. Callahan, P. Cassidy, A. Dwyre, M. Garber, C. Griffin, M. Held, B. Keeton, P. Kiburz, S. Morrow, M. Sparling, and J. Tijerin with input from Board members at that time: D. Verstegen, C. Gandolfo, and V. Ferrara.*

These 2017 ACRE competencies with an emphasis on CE, have been approved by the ACRE Board and will support Vocational Rehabilitation agencies and their contracted service providers in serving individuals needing Customized Employment, consistent with the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act of 2014.

The ACRE Board recognizes and thanks the writing committee and other committee members involved with the development of these competencies. This includes *Adele Patrick (University of Georgia), Beth Keeton (Griffin-Hammis), Patty Cassidy (Griffin-Hammis), Sara Murphy (Transcen), and Laurie Ford (University of Washington).* Other committee members include *Aimee Sharp, Emily Harris, Karen Ward, Martha Garber, and Peggy Hale*, whose efforts are very much appreciated. Finally, the Board would like to thank Laurie Ford assuming a leadership role in this process.

Organizations wishing to provide training where trainees receive one of the ACRE's National Certificates must become ACRE members and submit their curriculum to ACRE for review and approval. For more information, please visit the ACRE website: **www.acreducators.org**

Competencies for ACRE Competencies with an Emphasis on Customized Employment

- Completion of the Basic certificate requires at least 40 hours of training on the 40 listed CE competencies.

- Completion of the Professional certificate requires the Basic certificate (either in CE or Employment Services), one year of experience, and at least 20 additional hours of training on the 30 indicated CE competencies.

- Competencies labeled "Knowledge" require exposure to the facts and concepts involved. Competencies labeled "Skill" require satisfactory demonstration via live training activities, field work, or completion of case studies.

> **Competencies with a green/shaded background are either brand new or significantly changed.**

DOMAIN 1: APPLICATION OF CORE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE
(4 hours required for Basic Level, 2 hours suggested for Professional Level)

K: Knowledge
S: Skill

Basic Level	Professional Level	COMPETENCY
K	K	1. Understand the differences between traditional segregated employment and contemporary community models of employment, with emphasis on equal access in the general workforce, zero exclusion, and full inclusion. Understand the differences between overall concepts of Supported Employment and Customized Employment.
K	K	2. Understand the underlying values, ethical guidelines, definitions, and philosophy of community employment, including: a) "Normalization" (social role valorization) and its guiding principles. b) Assumption of competence on the part of the job seeker c) Determining an individual's strengths, needs, and interests in a positive, qualitative, and timely fashion. d) Ways that support strategies can enhance or detract from the image of a worker with a disability. e) The benefits of workplace inclusion and minimum/prevailing wages for people with disabilities. f) The dual customer approach (business and job seeker), with the job seeker being the primary customer g) Strategies for incorporating disability etiquette instruction in employment settings specific to individuals. h) The use of person-first language in all interactions, including those with employers. i) Multicultural impacts and considerations in services delivered. j) Confidentiality and respect for disclosure choices made by the job seeker
K		3. Understand what it means to incorporate informed choice, self-determination, and active participation of the job seeker and, where appropriate, family members throughout the employment process.
K		4. Be knowledgeable about best practices in community employment services, from intake to follow-along: a) Motivational Interviewing techniques b) Use of natural supports c) Supported employment d) Evidence-based practices e) School-to-work and post-secondary education transition practices

Basic Level	Professional Level	COMPETENCY
K	K	5a. Be knowledgeable about the definition of Customized Employment (CE) in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA): Customized employment (CE) refers to competitive integrated employment, for an individual with a significant disability, that is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual with a significant disability, is designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer, and is carried out through flexible strategies, such as: • Job exploration by the individual and • Working with an employer to facilitate placement, including » Customizing a job description based on current employer needs or on previously unidentified and unmet employer needs; » Developing a set of job duties, a work schedule, specifics of supervision (including performance » evaluation and review), and determining a job location; » Representation by a professional chosen by the individual, or self-representation of the individual, in working with an employer to facilitate placement; and » Providing services and supports at the job location. 5b. Be knowledgeable about the Essential Elements in Customized Employment, including the Discovery process and production of Discovery documents, the Customized Employment plan, and employment development representation.
K		6. Understand the rights and responsibilities of individuals in community employment, including the right of all individuals, including those with significant disabilities, to be employed in their community without having to demonstrate pre-employment readiness.
K		7. Understand the history and status of community employment services in your state.
K		8. Be familiar with state-specific and federal legislation, regulations, and legal decisions related to community employment, including but not limited to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and amendments, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Rehabilitation Act, Ticket to Work And Work incentives improvement Act (TWWIIA), individuals with Disabilities Education Act (iDEA), the Fair Labor Standards Act and other Department of Labor (DOL) regulations, Olmstead as well as the Equal Employment opportunities Commission (EEOC) and its role, and the Employment First initiatives.
K	S	9. Understand state/federal funding streams that support employment services (e.g., vocational rehabilitation (VR), mental health, developmental disabilities, Medicaid waivers, Ticket to Work). **SKILL: Demonstrate how available funding streams can be used to provide employment services including Discovery, job exploration, job modification, job training, and ongoing support.**
K		10. Be knowledgeable about local and national consumer resources including the discrimination complaint process in your state as it relates to the ADA and amendments, Independent Living Centers, and Protection & Advocacy networks.
K	S	11. Demonstrate professionalism for employment specialists: a) Interact with job seekers, family members, employers, potential employers, and other providers in a respectful, non-judgmental, and effective manner. b) Dress in a manner that fits the environment and occasion. c) Write reports, case notes, emails, etc. that are purposeful and concise while also neat, objective and easily understood.

Basic: 11 K
Professional: 3 K, 2 S

DOMAIN 2: DISCOVERY/INDIVIDUALIZED ASSESSMENT AND EMPLOYMENT/CAREER PLANNING

(10 hours required for Basic Level, 6 hours suggested for Professional Level)

K: Knowledge
S: Skill

Basic Level	Professional Level	COMPETENCY
K	K	12. Understand how to design and implement a Discovery process for job seekers who are seeking customized employment.

K	S	13. Understand how to gather information about each job seeker's unique interests, strengths, needs, and conditions of employment; encouraging the job-seeker's active participation and decision-making. Activities may include:
		
		a) Conducting home visits to learn about the individual and his/her interests, abilities, and activities, chores, places of community engagement, clubs, associations, etc.
		b) Interviewing family members, friends, and/or others who know the job-seeker well and can provide positive insight about the job seeker's attributes, skills, and interests
		c) Exploring the individual's cultural and social background, including native and spoken language, as well as his/her valued role in the family, and community to determine its impact on employment, if any.
		d) Reviewing the individual's past records to collect any pertinent information that may impact successful employment.
		e) Observing the individual in his/her current daily routines and environments to collect information about the individual's:
		  • Current tasks, skills, and personal interests
		  • Preferred style of learning
		  • Environmental tolerances/preferences
		  • Preferred modes of communication
		f) Exploring non-work needs that may impact the achievement and maintenance of employment, as well as work-life balance (e.g. money management/banking, social/recreational needs once employed, transportation, childcare, scheduling appointments so they don't conflict with the work schedule).
		
		SKILL: Demonstrate development of an information gathering plan for a specific individual who needs Customized Employment

S	S	14. Identify opportunities for new activities that will inform the initial career planning process, whether or not the individual is receiving Customized Employment services including Discovery. Activities may include: a) Task-based discovery activities in both familiar and novel locations, individually developed for each person based on his/her personal interests, in multiple community settings. b) Community mapping with the job seeker c) Informational interviews, job shadows, tours of businesses
S	S	15. Develop opportunities for job seekers to try tasks and skills in community businesses aligned with their individual interests and desires; these may be labeled work trials or community based assessments. These opportunities must align with Department of Labor guidelines about unpaid work and address potential business concerns about liability risks. Capture what is learned in descriptive notes that detail: a) The job-seeker's opinions about the tasks, skills, and business setting being sampled b) Needed environmental or job-task modifications for the person to succeed in his/her choices of employment settings c) The availability of community supports and transportation. d) Any necessary assistive technology or other accommodations

Basic Level	Professional Level	COMPETENCY
S	S	16. Integrate relevant information into a comprehensive, narrative, non-evaluative document that provides sufficient information to assist the job seeker in planning a career development strategy. This plan should identify essential and ideal features of employment, and be reviewed and approved by the job seeker.
K	S	17. Understand how to develop and facilitate a customized employment planning meeting or other individual customized employment team strategy that results in the identification of targeted job tasks and a listing of specific potential employers. **SKILL: Demonstrate the development and facilitation of a customized employment planning meeting or other individual customized employment team strategy.**
K	S	18. Understand the difference between Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and the impact of wages on SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, and Medicare. Identify local and national resources for benefits planning information **SKILL: Identify strategies to increase financial literacy and personal income while maintaining eligibility for or replacing critical benefits, including healthcare, through the use of social security work incentives such as Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS Plans), Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWEs), Medicaid Buy-in, Continued Medicaid Eligibility (1619B), Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE), etc.**
K	S	19. Understand the basics of self-employment/entrepreneurial business development for people with disabilities, including: a) Examples of self-employment b) local and national resources c) VR's role in self-employment **SKILL: Demonstrate how a customized employment plan might involve development of a micro-business or other self-employment approaches. Develop a feasibility testing strategy for a micro-business or other self-employment approach.**
K		20. Understand how to make referrals to appropriate local agencies, organizations, and networks based on individual career plans.

Basic: 6 K, 3 S
Professional: 1 K, 7 S

K: Knowledge
S: Skill

Basic Level	Professional Level	COMPETENCY
K	S	21. Understand how to develop marketing plans, and how to develop a system for organizing information on businesses and business contacts, including new area businesses and types of jobs available in the local area. **SKILL: Explore local and national labor market information for employment trends via the internet, market surveys, outreach to business groups, etc.; analyze labor market information to inform the job development process.**
K	S	22. Understand the development and use of effective marketing tools for community employment, including customized employment a) Develop and use marketing tools, including websites, employment brochures, fact sheets, cover letters to businesses, and business cards. b) Plan and deliver presentations to groups of individuals and parents, advocacy groups, local civic organizations, service providers, and employers. c) Participate in community business organizations (career centers, Chambers of Commerce, etc.). **SKILL: Demonstrate an effective presentation designed for a specific audience**
S	S	23. Demonstrate the use of effective messages for community employment a) Promote the agency as a resource to help businesses meet their hiring needs b) Explain the various ways employment agencies can support businesses to hire and train employees with disabilities, including creating customized positions. c) Understand and articulate the features and benefits offered by both supported employment and customized employment d) Target messages to the audience, rather than offering only one generic presentation or brochure. e) Use language and images that highlight skills, abilities, and interests of job seekers, and respect the job seeker's disclosure choices. f) Use business appropriate terminology/ language g) Share information about incentives to businesses when hiring job seekers with disabilities (e.g., tax credits, on-the-job training, diversity goals).
S	S	24. Demonstrate how to develop relationships with businesses: a) Target and identify businesses to contact based on job seeker's profile (skills, interests, and needs) and personal networks. b) Use informational interviews, tours, and observations to understand the business culture and unmet needs, and identify possible opportunities/job tasks for the job seeker. c) Provide information about disabilities, inclusive hiring, accommodations, etc. to potential employers. d) Respond to businesses' concerns about job seekers' abilities and challenges in the workplace. e) Maintain the business perspective, focusing on employer benefits and using business terminology f) Conclude business contact with clear next steps (interview, proposal, job offer, situational assessment, etc.). **PROFESSIONAL LEVEL: Utilize business management principles and/or process improvement methods (such as Lean or Six Sigma) to identify staffing, operational or workflow issues and other business needs.**

Basic Level	Professional Level	COMPETENCY
S	S	25. Demonstrate different ways to assist job seekers in developing portfolios, resumes (including video and visual resumes), cover letters, letters of introduction, references, and other job application documents in various media, including electronic and print.

S	S	26. Demonstrate different ways to assist job seekers in their job search process:
		   a) Identify potential employers through discovery or other processes, schedule tours or informational interviews
		   b) Where appropriate, use job seeker discovery information to identify marketable features
		   c) Use the personal and professional networks of both job seekers and employment staff, including targeted use of social media.
		   d) Assist in completing job applications or proposal presentations; arrange job interviews, working interviews, job try-outs, etc
		   e) Support job seekers' disclosure decisions and advise about the best disclosure practices.
		   f) Use social media/electronic media, as well as traditional job search resources.

K	S	27. Understand and be able to summarize job matching considerations
		   a) Identify/clarify existing job descriptions.
		   b) Identify/clarify unmet employer needs.
		   c) Analyze and understand workplace cultures and climates.
		   d) Consider transportation options.
		   e) Evaluate the fit between the targeted business' needs and the job seeker's profile

S	S	28. Demonstrate how to develop employment proposals based on business and job seeker preferences and negotiate accommodations and job details, including hours, wages, tasks, work area, breaks, orientation, training, and supports. Include examples of customized employment proposals (i.e. potential task list, cost savings analysis, tailored resume/portfolio).

Basic: 3 K, 5 S
Professional: 8 S

DOMAIN 4: WORKPLACE AND RELATED SUPPORTS
(10 hours required for Basic Level, 6 hours suggested for Professional Level)

K: Knowledge
S: Skill

Basic Level	Professional Level	COMPETENCY
S	S	29. Negotiate a comprehensive support plan with the employer that offers the new employee access to all of the naturally–existing features of the workplace and utilizes the employer/coworkers as primary trainers to the maximum extent possible, offering the assistance of employment specialists/job coaches to provide additional support as needed.
K		30. Understand how to ensure the employee enters the job in the most inclusive manner possible: a) Maximize the employee's hours on the job, including natural social times (breaks and lunch). b) Support worksite personnel in introducing the new employee to coworkers. c) Maintain adherence to typical new employee orientation and training procedures.
K		31. Understand resources for identifying and arranging transportation to and from work a) Facilitate transportation to and from work (natural supports, public transportation, paid transportation agreements, etc.). b) Provide travel training as needed; or connect employee with other resources for travel training. c) Explore creative transportation solutions such as Uber
S	S	32. Complete a comprehensive job analysis: a) Identify strategies for creating/designing jobs that make use of integrated and natural supports. b) List in sequence the duties and requirements of the job as well as the approximate time required to perform each task. c) Describe job skills needed for an employee to perform the job functions. d) Develop task analyses as required and appropriate e) Identify reinforcers that are natural to the work site (e.g., praise from a coworker or boss; taking a break). f) Create a specific task list based on the new employee's skills and support needs
K	S	33. Identify accommodations and universal design strategies that match the needs of the worker and employer: a) Identify commonly available and non-stigmatizing accommodations and modifications. b) Develop individualized adaptations, including assistive technology, low-tech and no-tech solutions. c) Teach the employee (and natural supports where appropriate) to use the accommodation strategy selected. d) Evaluate the need for/appropriateness of accommodations on an ongoing basis. **SKILL: Demonstrate the development of individualized accommodations to support a specific individual in a specific Customized Employment position.**
S	S	34. Implement the job training and fading plans based on completed job analysis. Collect data on effectiveness and modify job training plan as needed. Approaches may include: a) Providing consultation on systematic instruction to the natural/typical trainer in a business. b) Increasing support to or temporarily stepping in for the natural trainer c) Temporarily increasing the reinforcement schedule and then strategically fading when data indicates task mastery d) Identifying, accessing, and using additional technological supports as needed e) Adjusting or modifying the tasks or duties only when the employment specialist has provided best practice systematic instruction and data indicates mastery is not occurring

Basic Level	Professional Level	COMPETENCY
S	S	35. Demonstrate approaches to help individuals meet social/behavioral expectations of the workplace culture: a) Identify cultural norms of the workplace. b) Where needed, develop a behavior change approach that includes describing behaviors in measurable and observable terms, identifying antecedents and consequences, and assessing the communicative functions of behaviors. c) Evaluate options before implementing behavioral interventions. d) Design strategies to support individuals in demonstrating socially acceptable behaviors.
S	S	36. Demonstrate strategies for developing workplace supports: a) Explore workplace/culture for opportunities for natural supports and how to implement them. b) Facilitate training of the employee by his/her coworkers wherever possible. c) Model and facilitate supports that promote inclusion and good social interactions rather than those which may be stigmatizing or stereotyping. d) Facilitate mentor relationships between the employee and his/her coworkers. e) Incorporate fading strategies in all workplace training plans f) Systematically fade supports as task mastery occurs and natural workplace supports are established
S	S	37. Maximize worker job performance and social inclusion to achieve job stability: a) Develop strategies to increase worker productivity/efficiency. b) Assist the worker in using self-management strategies. c) Identify strategies to increase the employee's tolerance to workplace changes such as new or multiple supervisors, added job duties, scheduling adjustments, and coworker assignments. d) Identify strategies to mitigate job stress and anxiety. e) Build collaborative relationships with family members and other service providers involved in supporting the worker.
K		38. Understand methods for providing long-term support for individuals, families, employers, and coworkers, including possible funding resources for all employment outcomes including wage employment, resource ownership, and self-employment.
K		39. Understand strategies to provide support to the employee and employer in the event of a job separation or termination.
K	S	40. Structure ongoing review of the both employee's performance and their satisfaction with the job, to determine additional or different support needs and explore opportunities for career advancement: a) Identify/develop tools, resources, and strategies to determine employer's satisfaction with employee performance. b) Identify/develop tools, resources, and strategies to determine employee's satisfaction with their employment.

Basic: 6 K, 6 S
Professional: 8 S

This grid provides guidance on the number of hours of training required for each of the domains. The information will help organizations preparing to create curriculum or submitting curriculum for review.

Topic Area	Required Hours: Basic	Suggested Hours: Professional
Domain 1: Application of Core Values & Principles to Practice * Rights, history, legislation, best practices, professionalism	4 (11 K)	2 (3 K, 2 S)
Domain 2: Discovery/Individualized Assessment and Employment / Career Planning * Discovery activities, assessing strengths, skills, interests, situational assessment, career exploration, support plan, customized employment planning, work impact on benefits, self employment, written comprehensive plan	10 (6 K, 3 S)	6 (1 K, 7 S)
Domain 3: Community Research and Job Development * Marketing approaches and materials for job developer and job seeker (brochures, resumes, profiles and other materials, planning job seeker involvement and decision making, assistance with disclosure and accommodations requests, networking, development of skills for outreach and interactions with employers to explore their needs, conducting community research including labor market info, range of employers in the area and info on specific employers or industries) * Job acquisition activities (establishing relationships with business, tours/informational interviews, job matching, employment proposals)	10 (3 K, 5 S)	6 (8 S)
Domain 4: Workplace and Related Supports * Support plans, starting the job, involvement in usual employer training, job analysis, universal design strategies, systematic instruction, natural supports, social inclusion, fading, positive behavioral supports, ongoing supports and funding, access to resources needed for long-term employment, support for job separation, assessing employee & employer satisfaction.	10 (6 K, 6 S)	6 (8 S)
Other (Specific Disabilities, etc.)	6	
Total Hours	**40**	**20**
Experience Requirements	**None**	**One Year**