

2021
ACRE Competencies:
Employment Services
Certificates



Association of Community
Rehabilitation Educators

Understanding the ACRE Vision for Employment Services

ACRE members believe that the quality of employment services to individuals with disabilities can be improved by ensuring that the training available to provider staff is of a high quality. To quantify high quality, ACRE uses 4 domains (following APSE's domain model) and 39 competencies to evaluate curricula and training approaches, as well as requiring documentation of trainer qualifications and experience.

Establishing Competencies

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*). Since then, there have been occasional updates made as needed. The first was in 2013 when APSE made significant changes in their competencies; thus ACRE followed suit.

The following is an overview of the timelines for updates to the competencies, as well as the names of the key ACRE members involved in suggesting the revisions to the ACRE membership:

The 2013 ACRE Employment Services competencies updates and revision work was led by Judi Goldston. Included in the committee were: *Bethany Bilodeau, Gayann Brandenburg, Rebecca Cook, Vicki Ferrara, Laurie Ford, Liz Fussell, Martha Garber, Cecilia Gandolfo, Melanie Jordan, Sheila Mahon, Amy Scott, and Dale Versteegen*. Their proposed changes were approved by the ACRE Board and membership.

The 2021 ACRE employment competencies updates and revision work was led by Laurie Ford and SueAnn Morrow. Included in that committee were: *Patty Cassidy, Emily Harris and Adele Patrick*. These recent revisions are in alignment with the 2019 National APSE Universal Employment competencies, reflecting current language and best practices. The proposed 2021 competency changes were approved by the ACRE Board and membership.

ACRE Certificate Programs and Curriculum Review Process

ACRE competencies are the basis for two levels of employment services certificates: the Basic Employment Services (requires a minimum of 40 hours of training), and the Professional Employment Services (requires a minimum of 20 additional hours of training, plus one year of experience in the field). Based on the certificate level, each competency is assigned either knowledge (K) or skill (S) as a required outcome of the training.

Organizations wishing to provide training that bears the ACRE seal of approval must become ACRE members and submit their curriculum to ACRE for review. Instructions for submission are located on the ACRE website:

www.acreducators.org

Basic Level	Prof Level	Competency
K	K	1. Perceives 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.
K	K	2. Appreciates the underlying values, ethical guidelines, definitions, and philosophy of community employment. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Define “normalization” (social role valorization) and its guiding principles. Identify how support strategies can enhance or detract from the image of an employee with a disability. Discuss the benefits of inclusion at the workplace for people with disabilities. Differentiate between individual and group approaches to employment. Identify strategies for incorporating disability etiquette instruction in employment settings specific to individuals. Discuss the use of person-first, identity-first, and the evolving language of inclusion in all interactions, including those with employers. Discuss multicultural impacts and considerations in services delivered.
K	K	3. Understands informed choice, self-determination, and active participation throughout the employment process, emphasizing job seeker strengths, interests, and talents.
K	K	4. Understands the foundational concepts of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Motivational interviewing techniques Customized employment Use of natural supports Supported employment Evidence-based practices Transition and school-to-work school-to-postsecondary practices
K	K	5. Recognizes rights and responsibilities of all individuals in community employment, including the right of individuals with significant disabilities to be employed in their community without having to demonstrate pre-employment readiness.
K	K	6. Is familiar with the history and status of community employment services in your state.
K	K	7. Is 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, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Rehabilitation Act, the Ticket to Work And Work Incentives improvement Act (TWWIIA), the 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	K	8. Is familiar with state/federal funding streams that support employment services (e.g., vocational rehabilitation (VR), mental health, developmental disabilities, Medicaid waivers, Ticket to Work).
K	K	9. Is knowledgeable about local and national resources including the discrimination complaint process in your state as it relates to the ADA and amendments, Independent Living Centers, and Disability Rights Network.
K	S	10. Understands professional standards for employment specialists: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Interact with job seekers, family members, employers, potential employers, and other providers in a respectful, non-judgmental, and professional manner. Dress in a manner that fits the environment and occasion. Write reports, case notes, emails, etc. that are purposeful and concise while also neat, objective and easily understood.

Basic Level	Prof Level	Competency
S	S	11. Understand how to assist job seekers with making decisions about disclosure, considering both the benefits and risks of disclosing and providing approaches to disclosing.
K	K	12. Understand the effectiveness and limitations of traditional vocational evaluation practices for people with significant disabilities.
S	S	13. Understand the personal career profile development process: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the active participation and decision-making of the person served in the career planning process. Interview the individual and others familiar with their abilities and work history. Identify the impact of an individual's cultural and social background, including socio-economic status, race, gender, ethnicity, native and spoken language, and sexual identity, as well as their role in the family, religious organization, and community. Review the individual's records and collect pertinent information related to employment. Observe the individual in their current daily routines and environments. Explore non-work needs that may impact the achievement and maintenance of employment, as well as work-life balance (money management/banking, social/recreational needs once employed, getting up and ready for work, and scheduling appointments so they don't conflict with a person's work schedule). Assess the individual's preferred style of learning, environmental tolerances, and preferred modes of communication, as well as their expressed interests in jobs, careers, or specific tasks. Use informational interviewing, job shadowing, and other work-based opportunities to explore careers and identify possible job tasks based on a job seeker's skills, interests, and strategies for support.
S	S	14. Understand how to identify opportunities for new activities that will inform the initial career planning process such as situational assessments, paid work trials, job tryouts, volunteer work, and job shadowing, including assistive technology and other accommodations: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop career exploration sites aligned with the interests and desires of each individual. Explore environments that are both familiar and novel to the individual. Assess needed environmental or job task modifications for the person to succeed in their choices of employment settings. Explore tools and supports that would foster a person's independence (both low and high tech). Assess the availability of community supports and transportation. 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. Understand Department of Labor guidelines regarding unpaid work. Identify techniques and resources to address business concerns about liability risks associated with situational assessments/job tryouts. Ask the job seeker's opinions about the tasks, skills, and business setting being sampled.
S	S	15. Demonstrate how to synthesize relevant information into a comprehensive, non-evaluative document that provides sufficient information to assist a 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.

Domain 2: Individualized Assessment and Employment / Career Planning

K: Knowledge S: Skill

S	S	16. Demonstrate how to develop and facilitate a career planning meeting that includes the job seeker and other individuals who are invested in a positive employment outcome, such as the VR counselor, the employment specialist, family members, and other professionals or service providers; and which results in the articulation of targeted job tasks and a listing of specific potential employers.
K	S	17. Understand the basics about Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits and the impact of earned income: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Understand the difference between Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Medicaid, and Medicare. b. Identify strategies to reduce or eliminate dependence on benefits, specifically Social Security work incentives such as Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS plans), Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWEs), Ticket to Work, Medicaid Buy-in, Continued Medicaid Eligibility (1619B), Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE), Trial Work Period (TWP), and Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE). c. Be able to identify local and national resources for benefits planning information and know when to access them.
K	K	18. Understand the basics of self-employment/entrepreneurial business development for people with disabilities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Examples of self-employment b. Local and national resources c. VR's role in self-employment
K	K	19. Understand how to make referrals to appropriate agencies, organizations, and networks based on individual career plans.

Basic Level	Prof Level	Competency
K	S	<p>20. Understand the importance of marketing plans targeted to business, including methods of researching opportunities and organizing information gathered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Explore local and national labor market information for employment trends via the internet, market surveys, interviews with businesses and networking with business groups/organizations. b. Develop and maintain a system (print or electronic) for organizing information on businesses and business contacts, including new area businesses, and types of jobs available in local area. c. Analyze the gathered information to inform the job development process. <p>Skill at Pro level: Analyze local labor market information, identifying employment trends.</p>
K	S	<p>21. Understand effective marketing tools for community employment, including appropriate content and use of these tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop and use tools such as employment brochures, fact sheets, cover letters to businesses, business cards, and testimonials. b. Use personal and professional networks of job seekers and employment staff, including targeted use of social media. c. Plan and deliver presentations to groups of individuals and parents, advocacy groups, local civic organizations, service providers, and business groups/organizations. d. Participate in community business organizations (Chambers of Commerce, Rotary, etc.). e. Consult with businesses on diversity and inclusive workplace topics. <p>Skill at Pro level: Develop a marketing tool (brochure, fact sheet, cover letter, business cards, etc.) designed for a specific audience.</p>
S	S	<p>22. Demonstrate the use of effective marketing messages for community employment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promote the agency as a resource to help businesses meet their hiring needs. b. Explain the various ways (including supported employment) employment services agencies can support businesses in hiring, training, and maintaining employees with disabilities. c. Target messages to audience needs, rather than offering only one generic presentation or brochure. d. Use language and images that highlight skills, abilities, and interests of job seekers. e. Use appropriate business language and terminology. f. Use language and images that respect the job seeker’s disclosure choices. g. Share information about incentives to businesses when hiring job seekers with disabilities (e.g., tax credits, on-the-job training, diversity goals).

Domain 3: Community Research and Job Development

K: Knowledge
S: Skill

S	S	<p>23. Demonstrate how to develop relationships with businesses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Target and identify businesses to contact based on job seekers' needs, interests, and personal networks. Use informational interviews, tours, and observations to better understand the business and build a relationship. Provide information about disabilities, inclusive hiring, accommodations, etc. to potential employers. Respond to businesses' concerns about job seekers' abilities, interests, and challenges in the workplace. Maintain the business perspective, emphasizing to employers the benefits of hiring a diverse staff. Conclude employer contact with clear next steps (interview, job offer, situational assessment, etc.).
S	S	<p>24. Demonstrate a variety of 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.</p>
S	S	<p>25. Demonstrate a variety of ways to assist job seekers in their job search process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identify potential employers, schedule tours or informational interviews, complete job applications, and arrange job interviews, including working interviews. Support job seekers' disclosure decisions and advise about the best disclosure practices. Use social media/electronic media, as well as traditional job search resources.
S	S	<p>26. Demonstrate how to implement multiple job matching strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identify/clarify existing job descriptions. Identify/clarify unmet employer needs. Understand workplace cultures and climates. Consider transportation options. Evaluate the fit between the targeted business' needs and the job seeker's profile
K	S	<p>27. Understand employment proposals based on business and job seeker preferences and needs, outlining job details such as hours, wages, tasks, work area, and breaks, as well as the availability of necessary supports.</p> <p>Skill at Pro level: Write an employment proposal that includes the details listed above.</p>

Basic Level	Prof Level	Competency
S	S	28. When support is required on the job, be able to partner with the job seeker to negotiate a support plan with the employer that offers 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	K	29. Understand resources for identifying and arranging transportation to and from work: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate transportation planning to and from work (natural supports, paid transportation agreements) Provide travel training as needed; or connect employee with other resources for travel training. Explore creative transportation solutions.
K	K	30. Understand how to ensure that the employee enters the job (onboards) in the most inclusive manner possible: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Maximize the employee’s hours on the job, including natural social times (breaks and lunch). Support worksite personnel in introducing the new employee to coworkers. Maintain adherence to typical new employee orientation and training procedures. Make sure that necessary modifications and accommodations are in place. Establish clear employer and employment service expectations.
S	S	31. Know how to complete a comprehensive job analysis: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Create strategies for identifying jobs that make use of integrated and natural supports. List in sequence the duties and requirements of the job as well as the approximate time required to perform each task. Describe job skills needed for an employee to perform the job functions. Create/design solutions for gaps in skills. Understand when task analyses might be required and appropriate. Identify cues and reinforcers that are natural to the work site (e.g., praise from a coworker or boss; taking a break). Create a specific task list based on the new employee’s skills and support needs
K	S	32. Demonstrate approaches to support individuals in meeting the social/behavioral expectations of the workplace culture: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identify cultural norms of the workplace. Where needed, develop a performance improvement approach that includes describing behaviors in measurable and observable terms, identifying antecedents and consequences, and assessing the communicative functions of behavior. Evaluate options before implementing behavioral interventions. Design appropriate, non-stigmatizing strategies to support individuals in developing positive professional relationships
S	S	33. Demonstrate strategies for developing workplace supports and developing a job training and fading plan: Explore workplace/culture for natural supports and how to implement them. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Model solution focused interactions with the employee from which other workplace personnel may learn. Facilitate training of the employee by his/her coworkers. Facilitate supports that promote inclusion and positive social interactions rather than those which may be stigmatizing or stereotyping. Facilitate mentor relationships between the employee and his/her coworkers. Facilitate training of coworkers/business on diversity and inclusion if needed. Systematically fade supports as task mastery occurs and natural workplace supports are established.

Domain 4: Workplace and Related Supports

K: Knowledge
S: Skill

S	S	<p>34. Be able to develop and provide systematic instruction:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Understand individual learning styles and needs, including cultural and generational nuances. Demonstrate effective use of the cues available in the environment and/or task. Demonstrate how and when to use prompt hierarchy as well as task analyses. Demonstrate how to collect and evaluate performance data. Understand how to employ different reinforcement approaches and then strategically fade when data indicates task mastery. Adjust or modify the tasks or duties only when data indicates mastery is not occurring despite provision of best practice systematic instruction.
S	S	<p>35. Maximize the employee's job performance and social integration to achieve job stability:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> In partnership with supervisor/coworkers, develop strategies to increase the employee's productivity/efficiency. Assist the employee in using self-regulation strategies. 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. Identify strategies to mitigate job stress and anxiety. Build collaborative relationships with family members and other service providers involved in supporting the employee.
K	K	<p>36. Understand methods for providing long-term support for individuals, families, employers, and coworkers, including how these supports are funded.</p>
K	K	<p>37. Understand strategies to provide support to the employee and employer in the event of a job separation or termination.</p>
K	S	<p>38. Know how to structure an ongoing process to facilitate self-assessment of job satisfaction and job performance by the employee, assess the supervisor's satisfaction with employee performance, and determine additional or different support needs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct onsite observations to evaluate job performance and workplace support. Gather input from the employee, employer, coworkers, and others as appropriate (e.g. family/residential, counselors, other professionals) about how the job is going. Work with employee and employer to determine any needed assistance and identify next steps, including possible opportunities for career advancement.
K	S	<p>39. Identify accommodations and universal design strategies that match the needs of the employee and employer:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identify commonly available and non-stigmatizing accommodations and modifications. Develop individualized adaptations, including low-tech and no-tech solutions. Explore universal design strategies for accommodations and solutions and explain their utility to the employer. Identify resources and options for assistive technology. Teach the employee to use the accommodation strategy selected. Evaluate the need for/appropriateness of accommodations on an ongoing basis.

Training Requirements: Employment Services Certificate

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	Basic Required Hours	Professional Suggested Hours
Application of Core Values & Principles to Practice * Rights, history, legislation, best practices, professionalism	4 hours	1 hour
Individualized Assessment and Employment / Career Planning * Assess strengths, skills, interests, situational assessment, career exploration, support plan, stakeholder involvement, work impact on benefits, accommodation plan, transition to work models	6 hours	5 hours
Community Research and Job Development:		
* Preparing 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, as well as conducting community research including labor market info, range of employers in the area and info on specific employers or industries)	5 hours	5 hours
* Job Acquisition (involvement of job seeker, disclosure decisions, accommodations, negotiations, job creation/carving and closing the deal)	5 hours	4 hours
Workplace and Related Supports * Job analysis, starting the job, implementing support plans, involvement in usual employer training, systematic instruction, natural supports, social inclusion, fading, positive behavioral supports, ongoing supports and funding, access to resources needed for long-term employment, opportunity for career advancement	10 hours	5 hours
Other (Specific Disabilities, etc.)	10 hours	
Total Hours	40 hours	20 additional hours
Experience Requirements	None	One Year