



# Understanding and Implementing the Career Pathways Approach with Individuals with Disabilities in VR Settings

## STRATEGY GUIDE

This strategy guide describes the Career Pathways approach and how VR agencies can implement and use this approach to serve VR clients or consumers. The guide also provides resources that may be helpful to VR agencies.

### What Is the Career Pathways Approach?



The Career Pathways approach helps individuals obtain training and employment in jobs that are in demand, pay family-sustaining wages, and provide opportunities for career advancement. Career pathways are the sectors, or fields, such as manufacturing, health care, and information technology, that individuals can pursue. The Career Pathways approach bridges the vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies with partners such as adult education, workforce development, community partners, and employers.

Project CASE in Kentucky was created to increase the participation of individuals with disabilities in career pathways. To achieve its goal of training and placing more individuals with disabilities in select high-demand sectors, Project CASE reduces gaps in services and resources and identifies and develops flexible, innovative training and postsecondary approaches to skill attainment. This strategy guide provides information and tips about how VR agencies can implement the Career Pathways approach with individuals with disabilities.

#### Components of an Adult Career Pathway<sup>1</sup>

- **Personal needs** — Receiving support for medical interventions, transportation costs, and material needs such as clothing
- **Academic skills** — Receiving support to gain academic skills such as literacy, numeracy, or computer skillsthrough adult education, VR, workforce development boards, or other entities
- **Career focus** — Receiving guidance on career options and setting and achieving career goals
- **Employability skills** — Receiving support to gain skills, such as good communication, reliability, patience, and following instructions, that prepare clients for employment
- **Career and technical skills** — Receiving support to gain career and technical skills, such as software proficiency, project management, or programming, that are specific to certain industries

1 Components of an adult career pathway adapted from Hinckley, R., Mills, D., & Cotner, H. (2011). *Adult career pathways: Providing a second chance in public education* (2nd ed.). CORD Communications.

#### About PROJECT C.A.S.E.

Funded by the U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Creating Access to Successful Employment (CASE) Project in Kentucky intends to **increase participation in Career Pathways for individuals with disabilities** in three targeted sectors: Information Technology, Manufacturing and Industrial Technology, and Healthcare/Nursing & Allied Health. To learn more, visit <https://kcc.ky.gov/Vocational-Rehabilitation/projectcase>

## What Is the Career Pathways Approach? con't.

### Components of an Adult Career Pathway<sup>1</sup> con't.

- **Job entry skills** — Receiving support to gain job entry skills in areas such as administrative service, customer service, or data entry
- **Advanced skills** — Receiving support to gain advanced skills to help clients advance their career pathways

#### Tip:

**Invite career pathway partners to attend VR agency staff meetings.**

They can bring their staff, materials, and resources to share with VR agency staff and can discuss eligibility of their programs to promote co-enrollment.



### Components of a Career Pathway for Students Preparing for Life After High School

- **Career exploration** — Getting an introduction to job exploration and specific career pathways (i.e., industry sectors)
- **Work-based learning** — Getting exposure to sector-specific employer presentations, workplace tours, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) camps, and work site analysis
- **Work readiness skills** — Receiving assistance with job applications, learning how to write résumés, and developing interview, communication, and self-advocacy skills
- **Work site experience** — Participating in opportunities such as job shadowing, volunteer work, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training

## How to Use the Career Pathways Approach With VR Clients

**S**everal points are important to consider when you use the **Career Pathways approach to develop and execute an individualized plan for employment (IPE)**. The key information and tips in this guide, many of which come directly from the experiences and expertise of Project CASE staff, can help VR agency staff effectively use the Career Pathways approach while working with VR clients.

- **Use the Career Pathways approach when you are developing an IPE, and discuss the following points with your client:** career options based on labor market data, full possible lifetime educational or training advancement in the career pathway, and the many options within an industry sector or career cluster available to achieve a client's career goals. Such a discussion ensures informed choice and helps a client prepare for work as soon as possible.
- **Chart the possible career pathways based on the client's goals.** Consider a range of options, from short-term training to an advanced degree. Universities can be a great way to achieve a career goal; however, 4-year college is not the only way, and a more appropriate option may be available. For instance, a 4-year college can be expensive, so

consider whether a community technical college certification or apprenticeship program could help advance a client's career more quickly and in a more financially responsible way. In some cases, the workforce partner may offer free short-term training to obtain industry-recognized credentials.

- **Academic supports, tutoring, and other services will be necessary for a consumer to be successful.** Overall, an IPE needs to fully reflect how VR agency staff will provide the full range of support services the client will need to be successful in their training and education endeavor. These services can include addressing personal needs such as transportation or childcare. Frequently, a consumer will need academic skills enhancement or development before starting a program, and VR agencies can work with adult education partners to provide this service. Consumers may need assistive technology to participate in postsecondary training. Ensure the client has supports in learning the assistive technology and is comfortable using it well before starting training.
- **Consumers need opportunities to participate in employability skills training.** Employability skills are as necessary as career and technical skills when it comes to starting a career after the industry-

## How to Use the Career Pathways Approach With VR Clients con't.

specific training is complete. Employability skills include communication, adaptability, problem solving, and other soft skills, as well as job-seeking skills. All consumers, regardless of educational attainment, will benefit from job readiness skills, such as résumé development and interviewing skills. Training for these skills is typically available from different workforce partner programs, including career centers. Finding opportunities for consumers to participate in this type of training should be intentional.

- **Summer work experiences, student work on campus, internships, and co-ops increase employability skills.** Try to find academic programs that offer an internship or co-op, to better prepare clients for the transition to work and to provide them with valuable work experiences that increase soft skills and build their résumés. On-campus student worker jobs help increase a student's engagement with school, expand social circles, and increase employability skills.
- **Use local labor market information to inform a client's career choice to support the plan you and the VR client developed together.** State and local workforce boards make free labor market statistics available online. Many national and local resources, including the following resources, supply labor market information:
  - **O\*NET OnLine** is a primary source for national occupational data. [www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org)
  - **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics** provides wage data by area and occupation. [www.bls.gov/bls/blswage.htm](http://www.bls.gov/bls/blswage.htm)
  - **Individual state tools** provide labor market information. For example, in Kentucky, the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet provides labor market information through the Kentucky Center for Statistics. <https://kystats.ky.gov/>
  - Local workforce areas may have **localized resources**, such as the Kentuckiana Works *Labor Market Intel* webpage that offers multiple tools. [www.kentuckianaworks.org/lmi](http://www.kentuckianaworks.org/lmi)

### Tip:

**Research the courses that local community colleges are offering** (e.g., Robotic Arms Program) and which jobs require industry-recognized credentials.



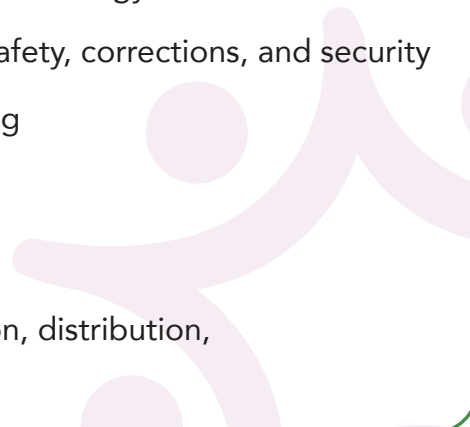
## Industry Sectors and Clusters in Labor Market Data

### Sectors

- Construction
- Health care
- Business services
- Information technology
- Manufacturing

### Career Clusters

- Agriculture, food, and natural resources
- Architecture and construction
- Arts, audio, and video technology and communications
- Business management and administration
- Education and training
- Finance
- Government and public administration
- Health science
- Hospitality and tourism
- Human services
- Information technology
- Law, public safety, corrections, and security
- Manufacturing
- Marketing
- STEM
- Transportation, distribution, and logistics



## How to Use the Career Pathways Approach With VR Clients con't.

### Tip:

**Check to see which local community colleges have workforce solutions coordinators** or other similar positions, and partner with individuals in those positions.



- Use labor market statistics, localized to where your client lives or plans to live, to help ensure informed choice about the career pathway. Labor market information can give a helpful snapshot that includes the jobs available in specific industries, the salaries for those jobs (i.e., wage data), occupation profiles (description, education level), industry profiles, and more. This information can help the client decide what will be best for them for advancing in the chosen career.
  - Be mindful that labor market information or data are typically organized by industry sectors. When you speak with employers or work-force development staff, they may use industry sectors to categorize jobs or careers.
- **Review labor market information to help you implement the Career Pathways approach.** Labor market information can help you and the consumer identify the demand for jobs they are considering in the area where they live, as well as what the educational requirements and average wages are. This information opens the door to discussions about whether the career goal is realistic and whether the opportunity to find employment is unlikely or a job provides below family-sustaining wages.
- **Anticipate and provide supports needed to access the chosen career pathway.** Facilitating well-connected education, training, support services, and credentials helps a client successfully progress along the chosen career pathway, learn job skills, and achieve employability. Supports provided to adults and students with disabilities may be different.
  - To provide supports to an adult client in a career pathway means supporting personal needs, academic skills, career guidance, employability skills, career and technical skills, job entry skills, and advanced skills.
  - To provide supports to a student with disabilities in a career pathway means supporting career exploration, work-based learning, work readiness skills, and work site experience.

- To provide supports also means providing help to a client through assistive technology and accommodations, benefits planning and personal finance education, educational supports, job readiness and employability skills training, and/or mentoring and family supports.
- By providing these supports, you can help a client obtain the appropriate education, training, work-based learning experiences (e.g., internship, apprenticeship), and industry-recognized credentials in a timely manner.
- Partner with education, community, and workforce development agencies. Partnerships can help maximize the VR agency's ability and capacity to provide employability and job readiness training for clients with disabilities. Such partnerships expand VR agency or office capacity to better serve these clients.
- **Gather information to determine the specific supports that each partner can provide, and create access to those supports for your clients.** For instance, a partnership with workforce development agencies can support clients with employability skills training, work experience opportunities, and short-term credentialed training, as well as job placement. An employer partner has sector-specific knowledge related to employer hiring needs and training requirements and can help VR agency staff and their clients learn about the employer's work and necessary industry-recognized credentials.
  - **Example partnership.** Project CASE partnered with the local Youth Career Center, which helped clients with job readiness skills. The center arranged and supported youth through academic skill enhancement for GEDs (general equivalency diplomas) and coordinated paid work experiences and other opportunities.
- **Allow for multiple entry and exit points while working with clients.** The Career Pathways approach can work for all clients and can start at any stage in their VR process, from new applicant to someone in training or just completing training and job ready. Similarly, clients will need to be able to have multiple exit points so that they can enter the workforce at various milestones and easily return to their education when they are ready (between jobs or while they are working).





## How VR Agencies Can Implement the Career Pathways Approach

### Tips for VR Agency Staff to Learn How to Implement Career Pathways

- **Go on tours.** Going on tours of businesses will help VR agency staff learn about local industries and the credentials employers are looking for. Tours are also opportunities for VR agency staff to establish and build workforce relationships. For more information about tours, please see the Project CASE strategy guide on employer engagement.
- **Meet with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners.** The workforce partners include local workforce investment board programs and adult education programs that provide free remedial education, job readiness training, and job placement. WIOA requires that local workforce investment boards oversee the implementation of America's public workforce system in local communities. Meeting with your WIOA partners to learn about programs they offer is critical to implementing career pathways.
- **Reach out to the educators.** Advising and admissions staff are ready to help. But it is also possible to meet instructors, shadow for a day, and look at the classrooms and equipment. Local community technical colleges will provide tours to VR staff and/or consumers.
- **Talk to employers.** Engaging with employers is important for learning about local workforce sectors and is crucial to building relationships. Conversations with employers can help highlight the value of VR services and how employers can also benefit from VR services. For example, VR can pay for tuition or education for clients and for clients to be trained with industry credentials, which would assist their employees in becoming ready to work in a particular industry or sector. For more information about working with employers, please see the Project CASE strategy guide on employer engagement.
- **Capture the career pathway services, along with other VR services, you provide to the client, through the case management system in your state.** It is important to capture industry-recognized credentials and the measurable skills gains (MSGs) that support career pathways for VR clients in the case management system.

### Tips for VR Leadership to Implement the Career Pathways Approach

- **Understand the relationship between career pathways and performance goals.** MSGs and industry-recognized credential achievement are important measures of performance success. Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA) set MSGs as a performance goal for VR agencies and their staff. Implementing career pathways helps document and ultimately achieve MSGs. The Career Pathways approach offers a strong model for why this documentation is important and how to promote MSGs and industry-recognized credential achievement in individual caseloads.
- **Learn how to encourage your staff to implement the Career Pathways approach.** VR leadership should support staff to go on industry tours; collaborate with WIOA partners and employers; and attend job fairs, employer events, and postsecondary training tours. These learning opportunities help VR agency staff learn first-hand information about sectors or industries in which VR clients might be interested in pursuing a career. Through these opportunities, staff can also learn which organizations and individuals are important to work with and why. VR leadership should encourage and support staff in implementing career pathways as best as possible. The staff will feel more engaged and connected to their partners and will provide better case management.
- **Encourage VR agency staff to use data-sharing tools to facilitate partnership.** Promoting the use of data-sharing tools with workforce partners can help to facilitate seamless service delivery through the system and referrals into partner programs. These tools ultimately result in a better experience for the customer or better customer service.
- **Invite partners to your staff meetings.** Including partners in your meetings can help leadership and staff stay current regarding what partners are doing. Partners can talk to staff about their services, and VR agency staff can refer clients to partner organizations. In addition, including partners in staff meetings can help staff understand partner program eligibility criteria to promote and support co-enrollment activities and foster relationships among staff across agencies.

## How VR Agencies Can Implement the Career Pathways Approach con't.

### Training for VR Agency Staff and Leadership

- **VR agency staff and leadership should receive training in the Career Pathways approach.** The training can help them understand why the Career Pathways approach is a powerful way to guide VR consumers to receive the training and work-based learning experiences they need to start and sustain a career. The training can also help VR staff understand the importance of partnerships and how best to advise the consumers on obtaining in-demand credentials. The training should include comprehensive information about the Career Pathways approach, WIOA, RSA requirements (e.g., reporting RSA-911 data), and local partners and why working with partners is important. The training should also emphasize that it is critical for VR staff to promote and record credentials and supportive services to consumers.
- **Example career pathway training resources:**
  - Career Pathways Explained: A Multimedia Overview  
<https://www.clasp.org/career-pathways-explained-multimedia-overview>
  - The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the One-Stop Delivery System  
<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R44252.pdf>
  - Shared Vision, Strong Systems: The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Framework Version 1.0 [Full Report]  
<https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/files/aqcp-framework-version-1-0/AQCP-Framework.pdf>
  - Shared Vision, Strong Systems: Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Framework Version 1.0 [Summary]  
<https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Alliance-WIOA-CP-Summary.pdf>
  - Side by Side: Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Framework 1.0 & the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA)  
<https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/side-by-side-2-1.pdf>



### Tips for VR Leadership to Implement the Career Pathways Approach

- Policy Brief: Career Pathways in Career and Technical Education  
[https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019/01/2019\\_careerpathwaysincte.pdf](https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019/01/2019_careerpathwaysincte.pdf)
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion  
<https://askearn.org/>
- Career Pathways Toolkit: A Guide for System Development  
<https://lincs.ed.gov/professional-development/resource-collections/profile-841>
- Career Pathways Toolkit: An Enhanced Guide and Workbook for System Development  
[https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/Enhanced\\_Career\\_Pathways\\_Toolkit](https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/Enhanced_Career_Pathways_Toolkit)
- U.S. Department of Labor: Office of Disability and Employment Policy: Diversity and Inclusion  
<https://www.dol.gov/odep>





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