



Brainstorm Bank: Putting IL in Employment Skills

A Brainstorm from IL Centers on Different Ways to Work with Consumers on Employment Skills

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Introduction

Centers for Independent Living (IL) across the country have the skills and the ability to support people with disabilities in all phases of employment, including preparing for work, attaining work, and maintaining employment. The following brainstorm list came from a peer support group with Centers for Independent Living brainstorming together some potential ways that IL could support individuals through this process. These lists are not exhaustive, but hopefully they are helpful in helping your organization begin the daunting task of deciding where you can start. When looking at jumping into employment work, sometimes starting small and looking within your organization for the resources and skills you already have is the best place to start. We hope this brainstorming bank helps you get excited about the world of employment and the possibilities for your organization. Happy program developing!

Preparing for and Gaining Employment

Preparing for employment includes the skills and information needed before an individual starts seeking employment opportunities. Centers for Independent Living may support individuals preparing for employment in the following ways:

- Looking at an individual's skills and interests to match with potential employment sectors (i.e., career exploration).
- Understanding job descriptions and finding jobs to apply for that fit their skills and needs.
- Helping with resume writing and support printing resumes.
- Writing a cover letter.
- Understanding how substantial gainful activity might affect an individual's benefits such as social security, subsidized housing, and Medicaid.
- Offering computer labs and technical assistance for individuals filling out online job applications.
- Offering support in understanding online portals such as Indeed, how to post resumes, and other ways to seek available jobs online.



- Building soft skills:
 - Public speaking, such as holding Toast Masters chapters for people with disabilities.
 - Dressing for Success, such as a loan closet for professional attire where community members can donate business attire, they no longer use.
 - Time management, such as Independent Living Skills training around using technology and other supports to get to work on time and to organize time management for tasks that need to be completed.
- Facilitating peer support groups, such as holding job clubs or other peer support groups for those seeking employment to share tips, tricks, and struggles with one another.
- Understanding rights in employment, such as how to ask for accommodations and if and how to disclose a disability.
- Hosting reverse job fairs in which consumers develop resumes and posterboards of their skills and invite employers to the event to find people to fit their needs.
- Building interview skills, such as:
 - Mock interviews give consumers opportunities to practice answering questions. You may even consider bringing in real community employers to assist.
 - How to ask meaningful follow up questions in an interview.
 - Strategies for interviewing in a one-on-one situation versus a panel style interview.
 - Tips for virtual interviews such as requesting accommodations for a virtual interview and navigating online systems, such as Zoom.
 - Practice answering ‘trick’ questions:
 - ◆ Where do you want to be in five years?
 - ◆ What is one of your weaknesses?
 - ◆ Describe a time you had a conflict with others at work and how you handled it?
 - ◆ Tell us about a time you had a conflict with a company policy.
- Practicing professional body language for interviews.
- Practicing how to follow up and send thank you messages.
- Working with potential employers in the community to see the value in employees with disabilities and understand how to build an inclusive culture.

Maintaining Employment

Maintaining employment includes skills and practices that help an individual to be successful in the workplace. Centers for Independent Living may support employees in the following areas:

- Building organizational skills, such as how to complete tasks in a sequence (e.g., what to do first, next, last).



- Reading and understanding pay stubs.
- Practicing how to ask for time off.
- Getting comfortable with asking clarifying questions.
- Communicating professionally and writing professional emails.
- Accepting constructive feedback.
- Working in a small group or team dynamics.
- Learning about job accommodation needs and requesting them after hire.
- Using appropriate social skills for a work environment.
- Finding and using transportation to and from work.
- Understanding employer expectations, codes of conduct, and other policy manuals.
- Self-care and holistic wellness:
 - Using healthy coping strategies.
 - Setting boundaries at work.
 - Having healthy reactions to setbacks or disappointment.
 - Dealing with conflict.

Summary

Centers for Independent Living have a unique opportunity to get both the community ready and excited about employing people with disabilities and prepare people with disabilities to meet those employers' needs. There are many ways IL can be a part of the employment conversation. Consider meeting with others in your organization to do an internal search for talent. There are probably people already working for you who have skills such as computer skills, public speaking, or an interest in teaching or offering peer support such as in utilizing public transportation. Do not forget, no matter what you do, to gather evaluations, testimonies, and success stories from both consumers and employers to use in your expansion and funding seeking efforts.

