Lesson 6 — Workplace Pathways to Employment (resources to assist you with your employment)

When we consider the various “pathways to employment” in this section, it’s important make the point that not all people with disabilities are the same. One size doesn’t fit all. The programs that are listed below may not be well-suited for some individuals with disabilities. For example, many post-secondary education (junior/community college, 4-year college, or graduate schools) options may not be available to some of our friends with disabilities. The entrance requirements may be restrictive or the instructional methods being used may not be effective for them. The same consideration about suitability may be said about most of the “pathways” or programs reviewed below.

Does that mean they have little value or few opportunities for some of our friends with disabilities?

Not necessarily.

Where such doubts arise or when little potential for help seems probable in these “pathways,” please dig deeper into them before giving up on them.

For example, some post-secondary education programs may offer courses for nontraditional students. Some have begun offering courses for students with intellectual disabilities who have never been accommodated before in post-secondary schools. Here’s one place to start your search for a post-secondary program which may have the needed accommodations in place: https://thinkcollege.net/college-search. And, if your area’s post-secondary college doesn’t have these adjustments in place, the examples in this website might encourage those that don’t to start such a program.

In addition, there are several variations in many employment services which may also open up the seemingly closed doors to the “pathways” or programs listed below.

The first is something called “supported employment.”

Supported employment is based on the principle that individuals with severe disabilities have the right to be competitively employed where they can earn comparable wages, work side-by-side with coworkers with or without disabilities, as well as experience all the same benefits as other employees. Supported employment assists people with severe disabilities by providing individualized supports that enable them to choose the kind of job they want and to become successful members of the workforce.

Supported employment programs offer job coaches who work directly with their clients to help ensure a successful placement and ongoing workplace performance. The coaching can include assistance with finding job opportunities, completing job applications, practicing interviews, organizing transportation, and providing supports with disability-related workplace needs and accommodations.

Accessing supported employment services may vary by state, but the typical path is either through county Developmental Disabilities programs or through federally-funded Vocational Rehabilitation...
agencies (possibly referred to as VR, DVR, DOR or DRS in your state). Some states have separate Vocational Rehabilitation agencies for persons who are blind.

Here is more information on supported employment: https://www2.ed.gov/programs/rsasupemp/index.html

Another employment program variation which may be more appropriate for some individuals with disabilities is “customized employment.”

Customized employment is a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both. It is based on an individualized match between the strengths, conditions, and interests of a job candidate and the identified business needs of an employer. Customized Employment utilizes an individualized approach to employment planning and job development: one person at a time and one employer at a time. Customized employment will often include:

- **Task reassignment**: Some of the job tasks of incumbent workers are reassigned to a new employee. This reassignment allows the incumbent worker to focus on the critical functions of his/her job (i.e., primary job responsibilities) and complete more of the central work of the job. Task reassignment typically takes the form of job creation, whereby a new job description is negotiated based on other current, unmet workplace needs.

- **Job carving**: An existing job description is modified — containing one or more, but not all, of the tasks from the original job description.

- **Job sharing**: Two or more people share the tasks and responsibilities of a job based on each other’s strengths.

Less common, though becoming more established throughout the country, is Self-Employment as a form of Customized Employment. Self-Employment allows for an individual to receive assistance in the creation of an independently-owned small business (typically a micro-enterprise with fewer than five employees) based on the strengths and dreams of an individual and the unmet needs of a local market, while incorporating the individualized planning and support strategies needed for success.

Here’s more information on “customized employment”: http://www.leadcenter.org/customized-employment

So, if at first your area’s disability-related and general employment programs, which appear below, are not suitable to your needs, think about how they might incorporate elements of the strategies above which would help. Since your area’s programs may not yet have been prompted this way before, start from the premise that they are committed (ethically and by law) to serve all eligible participants – then push them to change for the better. Advocacy to this end can be very effective, especially when these more general programs are shown examples of their counterparts (locally or in other areas) already making appropriate program adjustments.

With that said, here are the general “pathways to employment” to consider as you attempt to transition to the world of work.
Transition programs

At the high school or secondary school level, there are educational staff members employed who specialize in transition planning for students with disabilities and have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The purpose of these teachers or staff is to assist students with their transitional planning from school to either the next education level or a job and the workplace.

The legal framework establishing and guiding these transition services is the set of implementing regulations of the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). (https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/) These regulations say:

The purposes of this part are “To ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living;” [34 CFR §300.1(a)].

Transition services are designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation” [34 CFR §300.43 (a) (1)].

According to a study by Asselin, Todd-Allen and Sharon deFur, published in the Teaching Exceptional Children Journal, the following list shows the types of duties and services which transition coordinators often provide a local school system. Of course, there will be variations from school district to school district.

School Activities

- Disseminate transition information to teachers/administrators
- Assist families, parents, and students to access transition services
- Serve as a liaison between vocational/trade schools and special education teachers to monitor student progress
- Facilitate appropriate referrals to school-based programs
- Assist school staff in interpreting assessment results and recommending appropriate placements
- Assist vocational teachers in adapting curriculum

Interagency/Business Linkages

- Identify, establish, and maintain linkages with community agencies and businesses or local employers
- Facilitate student referrals to other agencies
- Link students with postsecondary special support coordinators

Assessment and Career Counseling
• Identify and refer students for vocational assessment within the school
• Identify and refer students for vocational assessments at regional centers
• Coordinate the development of career awareness and explore activities as part of the career counseling process

Transition Planning

• Identify transition services provided by other community agencies
• Attend/participate in team and IEP meetings
• Assist in planning and placement decisions
• Identify appropriate assistive technology
• Monitor adherence to federal laws

Education and Community Training

• Train special education teachers and employers to understand the need for self-advocacy
• Coordinate school and community work-based learning opportunities
• Identify job placements
• Develop community-based training and sites and school-based training
• Implement job support services for work adjustment and success
• Manage/coordinate job coaches
• Coordinate community-based instruction
• Coordinate teaching of daily living skills
• Examine/identify postsecondary training and education options

Family Support and Resource

• Develop and provide parent training
• Promote understanding of laws, eligibility requirements, availability of services
• Assist students/families in understanding the system and accessing services

While you’re in high school, it’s extremely important that you take advantage of these services in order to get your career planning efforts underway. These services can not only help with employment: they can assist and guide you to further educational opportunities.

Post-secondary education

Higher, post-secondary, tertiary or third-level education is the stage of learning that occurs at universities, academies, colleges and institutes of technology. Higher education also includes certain college-level institutions, such as vocational schools, trade schools, and career colleges, which award academic degrees or professional certifications.

After high school (secondary school), there is whole array of additional education opportunities available for you to consider. It’s always a good idea to begin to think about these options while you’re in high school. Of course, many people wait and may work for some time after high school before they consider their options for a post-secondary degree. Whenever you begin to consider these options, there are at least two important strategies to follow.
First, think about what type of work you might want to pursue. Examine your vocational or career interests. Some ways to do this is to consider what kind of work seems most appealing to you. Obviously, if you like certain types of work, you’ll be both happier and more successful in them. Explore Think about your favorite subjects in school and which careers they might point towards, or take summer or online courses in a sampling of areas to test your true interest in them. You may also want to take various vocational or occupational tests or assessments to see how you do (never let the results of these test make the decision for you – make it for yourself). Or you could simply surf the internet for jobs and careers and see what seems to interest you. In short, engage in various career exploration activities like these. If you’re not sure, that’s fine: most people don’t know which types of jobs or what fields they would be happiest working in, and many people discover new interests while in post-secondary education that lead to successful careers.

Second, with some broad understanding or preferences learn by you, seek more information from others who know more about the fields and occupations you may have identified. Ask people in those fields to tell you more about them. Ask your school or career counselors for information about them. You might even seek summer jobs, part-time work or internships in these fields to test your interest in committing to a particular occupation.

The Career Plan which is in the next Lesson below will further help with these considerations or thoughts.

It’s important that you do this preliminary work before you explore your post-secondary education options. Post-secondary schools cost money (unless you get a generous scholarship and/or help from Vocational Rehabilitation). As always, you should not buy something you don’t want or need. The same is true with the spending of your money for tuition and fees for a postsecondary program.

Having said that, many people go on to a post-secondary education without a clear focus on a career goal. In fact, most young people just don’t know themselves well enough yet or understand the types of occupational options available to them, yet still go on to a post-secondary education program to get more education, take a range of courses, and continue to consider their career options. The truth is that most people can’t really make up their minds about what work they would most want to do for a long-term career until they’ve experimented with various jobs. For young adults, college internships and summer jobs are a great way to do just that. So going on to college and getting a degree will likely serve you well in whatever becomes your chosen field of work, especially because more job opportunities open up with a post-secondary degree or certification; taking on summer jobs and internships will only further build your resume and expand your career horizons.

In addition, going to college exposes students to new subjects and, in turn, new fields which may lead to answers about work might be interesting to them. So post-secondary education can work for you either way, with or without a career goal in mind.

Generally, the vocational or trade schools work better for you if they are related to your career goals, and colleges and universities may be a better course to follow when you’re still exploring career
possibilities or if your chosen career requires a “conventional” bachelor’s degree (or a graduate-level degree like a Master’s, PhD, medical degree, or a JD from law school).

In the end, talk to your school’s counselor, family and friends for advice on how best to proceed with this option. If you already have a job but want to go back to school, you may talk with coworkers or even your boss to get their thoughts. Whatever you do, don’t spend your post-secondary dollars on a program that doesn’t make sense for you. Make a good investment. Seek long-term value.

Speaking of value, here are some interesting facts about the value of a post-secondary education.

Of course, how much education you receive should always be based on your personal factors such as your abilities, desires, resources, and career ambitions. Still, you should understand the average potential earning gains associated with pursuing post-secondary education. You should never continue your education just for the money suggested by the data below; however, if you can and want to continue your education after high school, there are increased financial rewards possible around such an investment.

Consider these facts.

On average, college graduates earn $2.2 million during their careers versus $1.3 million for High School graduates with no college.

A college student’s focus of study (major and/or minor) has impacts on potential life time earnings. For example, on average, an education major has the potential to earn $1.8 million during their careers. Arts majors can expect to earn about $2 million. Financial majors earn $3.1 million.

On average, those with master's degrees earn $2.8 million in average lifetime earnings. Doctorate degree holders take home an average of $3.2 million. People with professional degrees (law, medicine, etc.) average $3.6 million.

Plus, know that during this nation’s last recession, even though the number of jobs lost has returned, most of these jobs now require some post-secondary education.

Another interesting fact about the last recession was that 7 percent of job seekers with at least a bachelor's degree were unemployed, while three times as many (24 percent) of those with only a high school diploma were unemployed.

In the mid-1970s, less than 30 percent of jobs in America required any education beyond high school. Today, the majority of U.S. jobs require a post-secondary degree or credential. This shift has happened quickly and continues to rise every year.

Again, don’t be driven by these facts alone; just be informed by them as you make your choice which educational options might be best for you.
If post-secondary is the right choice for you, know that how you take advantage of your educational experience has an impact on potential work earnings. Of course, grade and majors matter. But, there’s more to getting the most out of college.

A 2014 survey taken by the Gallup-Purdue Index of 30,000 college graduates attempted to identify factors which enhanced students’ potential for success in employment. This study identified the “Big Six” college experiences that “increase the odds the graduates will be engaged at work.”

Employers are becoming increasingly aware of these factors and might even ask you if you experienced them while you were in college. This is one more way for employers to predict your potential for success with their organizations and, in turn, for you to improve your competitive edge.

So, if you do invest in post-secondary education, be sure to try to experience some or all of these factors. The factors in the chart below are as follows: find a professor who made you excited about learning; have a professor who cares about you; find an encouraging mentor; work on a project that takes a semester or longer to complete; find an internship that helps you apply what you are learning; be extremely active on extra-curricular activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Big Six” Experience</th>
<th>Odds of being engaged at work if graduates had this experience</th>
<th>Strongly agree they had this experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had at least one professor who made them excited about learning</td>
<td>2.0x higher</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had professors who cared about them as a person</td>
<td>1.9x higher</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams</td>
<td>2.2x higher</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All of first 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.3x higher</strong></td>
<td><strong>14%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked on a project that took a semester or more to complete</td>
<td>1.8x higher</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had an internship or job that allowed them to apply what they were learning in the classroom</td>
<td>2.0x higher</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was extremely active in extracurricular activities or organizations</td>
<td>1.8x higher</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All of second 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.4x higher</strong></td>
<td><strong>6%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All 6</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.0x higher</strong></td>
<td><strong>3%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Remember, your decision about further post-secondary education should be based on personal factors such as your abilities, desires, resources and ambitions. If you enroll in post-secondary education, though, pursue these experiences: find good professors, seek out a mentor, start a long-term project, get an internship, and sign up for extracurricular activities and organizations. You don’t have to do all 6, but each one is likely to improve your career in the long-term.

Lastly, if you do choose to enroll in a post-secondary education program, most of these programs have student career counseling centers which you should use to your advantage. Go and visit your campus’s Career Center and learn what they have to offer. Most college career centers sponsor both “Career Fairs” and internship programs which are of great value. When you get involved with career fairs and Internship programs, here are tips on how to get the most out of these post-secondary employment resources.

**Tips to get the most out of career fairs**

Career fairs are special events (often once or twice a semester) which bring employers on campus to meet students who are beginning their search for employment. These employers are interested in meeting you because they know you are likely to have the basic skills they are looking for in their job applicants. They are looking to meet students about to graduate to fill full-time positions, or students earlier on in their education who may be interested in internships, summer jobs, or simply networking for employment when they finish school. Career fairs have a similar look wherein each employer has a table, room or exhibit where they will be ready to meet students like you.

Do your homework and come prepared.

Before the fair, go to the sponsor’s website (usually your Career Center) and review the online directory of employers who are coming. Note their job opportunities. If you spend a little time getting some background on the organizations that will be present, then you can ask very focused and specific questions. This will impress the employers you’ll meet because it shows a genuine and thoughtful interest in them.

Dress appropriately. First impressions are very important. While campus attire may be acceptable for fairs, you will probably be more impressive if you at least dress in "business casual." Go early, and if you notice you’re under-dressed, go back home and enhance your outfit to match or exceed what you see other candidates or students wearing. Remember, this is a competition.

Allow yourself adequate time. Again, come as early as possible. Typically, fairs are less crowded in early hours and are busiest during the lunch hour and at the end of the event. Come early, while traffic is light and the employers are fresh and attentive. That way, you’ll get more of the employers’ time and attention.

Also, when you go to a career fair, be sure to bring a dozen or more copies of your resume to give to the employers you may meet. Your resume will help the employer remember who you are and how to reach
you later. Because you will be handing out your resume to a range of employers, you may want to include diverse types of skills and experiences – or even have multiple versions of your resume ready (for example, one version focused on technical skills and project work for scientific jobs, and one showing more community and student-group experiences for political or public-service work).

Upon arriving at a career fair, take a moment or two to get your bearings straight, as it's likely to be a loud and busy place. Review the map or directory for the fair. You may feel more comfortable first walking around and locating the employers you want to meet. This will confirm their location and alert you to any crowds or lines of students waiting to talk to the employer(s). This will help you manage your time better.

Prioritize the employers you're most interested in meeting. If your schedule allows, you may find it easiest to start with the least promising employer. This will give you the chance to practice your comments, which will make you more relaxed and confident when you approach the employers you're especially excited about meeting. Be sure to balance this practice tip with the reality that you may have little time and that many other students may be interested in the same employers you want to visit.

Be flexible. Some positions may no longer be available and other openings may have just emerged. No single employer representative is likely knowledgeable about all the positions available, especially in a large organization. If the employer does not know specifically about jobs/internships of interest to you, ask for the name of someone who can help you. If you have other questions or concerns, be sure stop by the Career Center's information table or booth to ask.

When you meet an employer, introduce yourself using your workplace presence skills (Lesson 1). Smile, extend your hand, say "hello" and introduce yourself (state your name, major and job question). Welcome the representative to your school or campus. Have your resume ready to give to them when that moment might arise.

Take notes when you inquire about next steps and the possibility for follow-up with an employer. Try to learn about any information sessions, on-campus interviewing visits and projected hiring dates that they have planned.

Ask the employer representative for his/her card, and then promptly send a thank-you e-mail or note to him or her to keep the relationship building.

Respect employers' materials/sample items at their table or booth. Always ask employers before taking any materials from their tables.

Be courteous. In addition to representing yourself, you also represent your department and the college. Demonstrate sensitivity to other students waiting to speak with employers by keeping your questions brief and offering to continue your conversation at a later time.
Tips to get the most out of internships

The biggest regret or lament that recent college graduates tell us after they’ve left school and have been looking for that first job is: "While in school, I really should have taken a job or an internship in addition to my course load."

Well, unfortunately for them, this lesson was learned too late. However, you can benefit from their mistake by not making it yourself.

Get an internship!

Many students tell themselves that, because they’ve worked hard all school year, summer is a time for a well-earned rest. While they’re resting, however, their fellow college students are engaged in summer internship work experiences which are building their skills and resumes, as well as helping them meet potential employers who often use the internship experience to decide who they want to hire permanently after graduation. Meanwhile, back at home, the relaxing students are not only resting during the summer break: they are also falling farther and farther behind the job competition race because the people who they’ll be competing against are working during the work-week while still getting their rest on weekends. (That’s not to say that students with summer jobs don’t take a week or two between final exams and starting an internship to relax – but by working for most of the summer, they are getting ahead.)

Consider the fact that having professional work experiences, like an internship (or two or three), is a prerequisite for many employers when deciding who to hire in entry-level jobs. Having work experiences helps build the employers’ confidence that you will be successful in your first job. You might be thinking, “Hey, the first job is my first job, and prior work experience seems illogical.” A more accurate reaction is to re-define the idea of your first job as something other than full-time work after graduating. Think of your first job as your first internship, summer job or evening job. Add to that understanding the advantages of having several internships or summer jobs to be able to show your readiness to compete for your first permanent job.

At the very least, get any type of summer job. Even waiting tables will teach you those all-important workplace skills and values which can increase your attractiveness to a future employer. If you do wait tables, take a moment to chat with your customers about your work ambitions after college (of course, without interrupting their meals). That’s networking – remember, employers love to dine out.

Plus, consider taking on internships associated with what you’re studying in college. They can give you very relevant work experiences as well as academic or course credits for working.

Most of all, understand that internships are becoming the major pathway to employment for college graduates. A survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers showed that internships are an integral and critical part of getting your first job out of college. The survey finds that employers draw approximately 40 percent of their new college hires from the internship ranks and co-op programs.
These figures demonstrate the central role that internships play in the overall college recruiting and hiring process.

Now, if you’re serious about your future career, start looking for internships as soon as possible. Begin during your freshman summer vacation and continue every summer until graduation. Start beating your competition.

**State Department of Rehabilitation**

Every State and Territory has a State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR, DVS, or DOR). Many states (currently 15) have separate State Departments of Rehabilitation for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

These programs provide their state’s residents with disabilities with a wide range of services designed to help them prepare for and engage in gainful employment consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

Eligible individuals are those who have a physical or mental impairment that results in a substantial impediment to employment, who can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services for employment, and who require these services. If a state is unable to serve all eligible individuals, priority must be given to serving those individuals with the most significant disabilities (this is called an “order of selection”).

Under these programs, an applicant for these services must first apply and be admitted based on various State criteria for eligibility. To determine your State’s current DOR eligibility criteria, contact your nearest office. To locate your nearest office, go to your State’s Department of Rehabilitation and look for their link to find it. Begin with either one of these links:

http://wdcrocabolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/org_list.cfm?category_cd=SV

https://askjan.org/concerns/State-Vocational-Rehabilitation-Agencies.cfm

Here is a sample listing of the kinds of employment-related services your State Department of Rehabilitation may be able to offer you should you qualify for their services:

- Employment counseling and guidance
- Referrals and assistance to get services from other employment agencies
- Job search and placement assistance
- Vocational and other training services may be provided or supported
- Evaluation of a disability with respect to employment potential
- On-the-job personal assistance services
- Interpreter services (for deaf or hearing-impaired persons)
- Rehabilitation and orientation/mobility services
- Assistance with getting occupational licenses, tools, equipment and initial supplies
- Technical assistance for self-employment
- Rehabilitation- or employment-related assistive technology
• Supported employment services (job coaches)
• Services to family members
• Transportation assistance as required to enable clients to participate in their services
• Post-employment services to help you maintain your employment
• Transition services helping students from school to work

In order to increase your chances of being accepted into your State’s DOR program, of course you must have a disability; but also, the more focused and determined you appear to be about your intentions to seek employment, the greater your potential for acceptance into their program. In addition, don’t be discouraged if you feel your disability isn’t severe enough. Let them decide that for you. Many people with disabilities assume that they would not qualify for these services and, after being encouraged to apply, are pleasantly surprised when they are determined eligible. Always ask. They can’t say “yes” unless you ask.

Other community-based programs
In addition to the state-run public Department of Rehabilitation programs described above, there are many private and public community employment programs, including Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and business to assist people with disabilities. Many of these community programs are run by non-profit organizations. They serve to help their customers get ready to live independently, find and secure jobs. Many of these programs are supported, in part, by the state Departments of Rehabilitation and/or other funding supports.

Here are some key programs to consider.

Centers for Independent Living
There are over 400 Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and 300 more branch offices across the country. Some of the services they may offer are:

• Peer counseling/advice
• Systems Change or Disability Advocacy
• Independent Living skills training
• Information and referral
• Assistive technology
• Employment services
• “Living well” supports
• Accessible residential housing
• Personal attendant referrals
• Youth services

To locate a CIL near you see: http://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory
Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programs
Some major CBRs are Goodwill Industries of America, National Industries for the Blind (NIB), National Federation for the Blind (NFB), SourceAmerica (formerly “NISH”), Committee on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) or The Arc (serving people with intellectual disabilities). In addition to these major national organizations, many local independent community-based rehabilitation programs exist. To locate them in your area, contact your State’s Department of Rehabilitation and ask them for a listing or search the internet for one near you.

Here’s a broad listing of the possible services which might be available with CBR programs. Each one may be different.

- Medical, psychiatric, psychological, social, and vocational services
- Testing, fitting, or training in the use of prosthetic and orthotic devices
- Recreational therapy
- Physical and occupational therapy
- Speech, language, and hearing therapy
- Psychiatric, psychological, and social services, including positive behavior management
- Assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs
- Rehabilitation technology
- Job development, placement, and retention services
- Evaluation or control of specific disabilities
- Orientation and mobility services for individuals who are blind
- Extended employment
- Psychosocial rehabilitation services
- Supported employment services and extended services
- Services to family members when necessary to the vocational rehabilitation of the individual
- Personal assistance services

American Job Centers ("Career One Stop" centers)
American Job Centers, sometimes known as “Career One Stop” centers, are the places to visit to access the nation’s various state and federally funded public employment training and placement programs. They are sponsored by the US Department of Labor. These Centers identify themselves as:

- Your source for employment information and inspiration
- The place to manage your career
- Your pathway to career success
- Providing tools to help job seekers, students, businesses and career professionals

American Job Centers or Career One Stop products include:

- America’s Service Locator connects individuals to employment and training opportunities available at local American Job Centers. The website provides contact information for a range of
local work-related services, including unemployment benefits, career development, and educational opportunities. ([www.ServiceLocator.org](http://www.ServiceLocator.org))

- The Career One Stop Toolkit helps individuals explore career opportunities to make informed employment and education choices. The website features user-friendly occupation and industry information, salary data, career videos, education resources, self-assessment tools, career exploration assistance, and other resources that support talent development in today's fast-paced global marketplace. ([www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit](http://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit))
- mySkills myFuture helps laid-off workers and other career changers find new occupations to explore. Users can identify occupations that require skills and knowledge similar to their current or previous job, learn more about these suggested matches, locate local training programs, and/or apply for jobs. ([www.mySkillsmyFuture.org](http://www.mySkillsmyFuture.org))
- Competency Model Clearinghouse provides the business community with a means to communicate its skill needs to educators and the workforce system in a common industry-driven framework. The models and other competency-based resources support development of curriculum and increased awareness of careers in high-growth industries. ([www.CareerOneStop.org/CompetencyModel](http://www.CareerOneStop.org/CompetencyModel))
- Worker Re-Employment provides employment, training, and financial assistance for laid-off workers. The website includes a Job Search tool with job listings for all fifty states updated daily. Users will also find resources for getting immediate help with unemployment insurance, healthcare, and other financial needs; job searching and resume tips; changing careers and understanding transferable skills; and upgrading skills through education and training. ([www.CareerOneStop.org/ReEmployment](http://www.CareerOneStop.org/ReEmployment))
- Veterans Re-Employment is a “one-stop website for employment, training, and financial help after military service.” The website includes the Military-to-Civilian Job Search tool where veterans and service members can search for jobs based on the skills and experiences they gained in the military. The site also includes tips for job searching and links to national, state, and local resources specifically for veteran job seekers. ([www.CareerOneStop.org/ReEmployment/Veterans](http://www.CareerOneStop.org/ReEmployment/Veterans))

On July 22, 2014, the current law overseeing these programs was passed. It’s called the “Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act” (WIOA). Here are the enhanced supports for people with disabilities in this program:

- American Job Centers (AJCs) will provide physical and programmatic accessibility to employment and training services for individuals with disabilities.
- Youth with disabilities will receive extensive pre-employment transition services so they can successfully obtain competitive integrated employment.
- State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies will set aside at least 15 percent of their funding to provide transition services to youth with disabilities.
- A committee will advise the Secretary of Labor on strategies to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.
Vocational Rehabilitation state grant programs will engage employers to improve participant employment outcomes.

As you can see, a new and higher emphasis has been placed on providing employment support services to people with disabilities, especially youth with disabilities moving from school to employment.

To find the American Job Center nearest you search: http://www.servicelocator.org/

Self-employment and the Small Business Administration (SBA)
What if you’re interested in working for yourself?

There are many advantages with self-employment. You can set your own work times and avoid some of the complexities of the regular workplace. Of course, it’s still work. In fact, many self-employed individuals actually work longer and harder than those in the general workplace. Plus, most small businesses fail, which can leave their owners in difficult financial situations. So, it’s not the easy way out; however, it may be both more interesting and better employment option for you and your disability.

Be sure not to move in the direction of opening your own business without a great deal of thought and analysis, both about your business idea (especially its potential for success) as well as what might be most productive or best option for you.

There is a federal government agency that can assist you with this, if you wish to consider it. It’s the Small Business Administration (SBA).

The SBA helps Americans start, build and grow businesses. Through an extensive network of field offices and partnerships with public and private organizations, SBA delivers its services to people throughout the country. The SBA and its nationwide network of resource partners help millions of potential and existing small business owners start, grow and succeed in the marketplace.

Whether your target market is global or just your neighborhood, the SBA and its resource partners can help at every stage of turning your entrepreneurial dream into a thriving business. If you’re just starting out, the SBA and its resources can help you with business and financing plans. If you’re already in business, you can use the SBA’s resources to help manage and expand your business, obtain government contracts, recover from a disaster, find foreign markets, and make your voice heard in the federal government.

In addition to SBA’s district offices which serve each state and territory, the SBA works with a variety of local resource partners to meet your small business needs. SCORE chapters, Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), and Women’s Business Centers (WBCs) are all part of this network of supports. More than 13,000 business counselors, mentors and trainers are available through over 900 Small Business Development Centers, 110 Women’s Business Centers and 350 SCORE chapters. These professionals can help with writing a formal business plan, locating sources of financial assistance, managing and expanding your business, finding opportunities to sell your goods or services to the government and recovering from a disaster.
You can access general SBA information at [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov) or visit one of their local offices for assistance.

The SBA also offers guidance for veterans who acquired a disability during their service through the “Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business program.” If you acquired a disability while in the military, they can assist you in several ways such as: starting a business, financing a business, tax information, and trade and professional resources. The federal government also sets aside a certain number of contracts for qualifying small businesses “at least 51% owned and controlled by one or more service-disabled veterans.” For more detail on this program, go to: [https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs/service-disabled-veteran-owned-small-businesses-program](https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs/service-disabled-veteran-owned-small-businesses-program)
“Part II: Pathways to Employment” from Make It Work: Disability & Competitive Employment