

Defining Supported Employment and IPS

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (federal law, Section 7(38) of the Rehabilitation Act) uses the term “supported employment” to describe the types of services, including customized employment, provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities to obtain, maintain, and advance in employment. This often includes strategies such as career exploration, job search, customizing job duties or work schedules, and designing coping mechanisms to reduce stress and anxiety as the individual transitions into the work environment.

Individual Placement and Supports (IPS) is a highly successful, evidenced-based model of supported employment that promotes a “recovery through work” philosophy whereby individuals with severe and persistent mental illness and co-occurring disabilities achieve competitive, integrated employment when assisted with ongoing support services. IPS is the most researched and best described model of supported employment. The effectiveness of IPS teams and their integration into host agencies can be assessed by a scientifically validated 25-item fidelity scale. The core principles of IPS include: A focus on competitive employment, rapid job search, eligibility based on client choice, attention to client’s preferences in employment services and supports, the integration of employment and clinical services, time-unlimited support, and systematic job and employer relationship development.

An individual’s potential for supported employment must be considered as part of the assessment to determine eligibility for the Title I Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) State Grants program. A State VR agency may support an individual’s supported employment services solely with VR State Grant funds or it may use in whole or part funds under the SE State Grants program. Most states use braided funding from two or three sources to fund IPS. These sources may include state VR funds, Medicaid, or state set aside funds.