

# Supported Employment Guidance

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## COVID-19

### Employment service requirements that remain unchanged due to COVID-19:

- Decisions to continue or return to work should always be made by the individual with assistance from their team, taking into consideration the individual's interests, preferences, needs, choice, workplace conditions and any health and safety risk of the individual or those they live with.
- A provider staff member can not attend work in place of an individual employed in a competitive integrated setting.
- Employment specialists must still meet all training requirements to demonstrate competency to deliver employment services. We encourage staff training to be provided virtually.
- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) funding should still be utilized in full before requesting new funding from DSPD.
- Recommendations for workplace accommodations vary based on the individual employment situation. In all cases, the individual should be supported to coordinate an accommodation directly with the employer. See below for general information on Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations during COVID-19:
  - <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/pandemic-preparedness-workplace-and-americans-disabilities-act>, <https://askjan.org/topics/COVID-19.cfm>
  - If the individual has an open VR case, questions about accommodations should be directed to the VR Counselor.
  - Anyone, regardless of status or VR eligibility, can contact the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR) Business Relations Team at: <https://jobs.utah.gov/usor/vr/employer/contact.html>

### Changes and adjustments to employment services due to COVID-19:

- Opportunities in essential jobs are now in high demand. DSPD encourages interested individuals to first utilize VR and then DSPD employment supports to explore and gain experience in these jobs when it is safe for the person to do so.
- The 60 hour limit for re-placement and pre-placement services is temporarily removed. The timeline for this temporary adjustment follows the Appendix K approval.

### Temporary COVID-19 Telehealth service recommendations:

For information about general criteria for using telehealth services and appropriate platforms, please see "[Telehealth Expansion COVID-19](#)" on the [DHS Provider COVID-19 FAQ](#) under the "Additional DSPD Specific and Telehealth" heading.

Job Coaching

- Individual job coaching supports that utilize virtual methods are approved and should be used whenever possible.
- Providers should seek the input of the employer when deciding whether to provide virtual or remote job coaching.
  - Workplace conditions, accommodations and the individual's ability to access and use technology all impact how job coaching supports are implemented.
- Virtual job coaching activities could include modeling a work task through a virtual platform and then observing task completion for accuracy; role playing interactions with customers or co-workers; or prompting and remote monitoring of quotas or assignments through a video or voice check-in.
- Telehealth is not a replacement for in-person support when the physical presence of the job coach best meets the individual's needs. Provider organizations may utilize any combination of in-person and telehealth job coaching supports for the individual.

#### Pre-placement/Re-placement activities

##### Intake

- Providers can utilize telehealth to hold intake meetings.

##### Vocational Assessments

- VR services should be fully exhausted before using DSPD waiver supports for a Work Strategy Assessment (WSA).
- Creativity of providers and job coaches to deliver vocational skill and interest based activities through virtual platforms has already been successful and is encouraged to continue.
- Services must be provided in-person or virtually in real-time, not through a video or audio recording unless both staff and the individual are present to view a recording as a training activity.
- If a requirement of an assessment, such as a situation assessment in a community setting, can not be performed virtually or safely in person, it should be postponed.
- A few examples of virtual assessment activities include: virtual observation of an at-home hobby/interest, resume edits over a shared document, sessions to observe transferable skills that can be completed in the home, conversations with natural supports and home visits observed by a job coach through cell phone, tablet or laptop.

##### Job Development

- Examples of remote job development include: providing support for virtual job tours and interviews, scheduling virtual meetings with business professionals, hosting online interviews, doing an O\*NET search inquiry, completing an online occupational credentialing program and updating resumes.

#### **Recommendations to assist individuals who have lost their job due to COVID-19:**

While COVID-19 continues to pose unique challenges for providers, individuals and businesses, the process for responding to situations where an individual has lost their job remains unchanged. Job loss should be addressed on a case-by-case basis with the support from local offices of DWS, USOR, DSPD and other community resources. For more information visit: <https://jobs.utah.gov/covid19/index.html>

During COVID-19, employment supports may be used to assist individuals with securing unemployment benefits. Additional state resources for employees who have lost their jobs and require child care, unemployment benefits or other assistance due to COVID-19 can be found at: <https://jobs.utah.gov/covid19/covidui.html>

### **Recommendations to assist individuals working in essential positions during COVID-19:**

DSPD is committed to remaining flexible in meeting the needs of individuals in essential jobs. Support Coordinators and providers should consider the following questions when checking in with the individual:

- What is the preference and risk of the person? And what is the perspective of their family?
- Is this worksite still the right fit for the individual?
  - If not, can additional employment supports be used to explore other vocational interests?
- How have the individual's work hours or schedule been affected by COVID-19?
  - Are any changes temporary or permanent?
- Do the current supports meet the individual's needs?
- Does the individual have the information to make decisions about their employment?
  - How is the individual's health and safety affected by COVID-19 or related changes at the worksite?
  - Is the individual able to correctly use PPE?
  - Is the individual able to social distance appropriately?
  - Does the employee have any concerns about their worksite?
  - Does the employee need help to advocate in the workplace?
- Do COVID-19 changes at the worksite mean that other services need to be adjusted?

Specific to Support Coordinators:

- Is the provider still willing and able to provide the employment supports needed?
  - If not, please initiate and support the person in searching for a provider who is willing and able to provide the needed supports.

### **Recommendations to assist individuals that are furloughed due to COVID-19:**

If the individual is furloughed due to COVID-19, employment supports may be used to assist the individual to maintain skills, investigate new interests and in negotiations with their employer to ensure the continuity of their job. Any employment supports used at this time will act as a replacement to job coaching and should not exceed the level of support needed prior to the furlough.

### **Considerations to return to work in any phase of [Utah's color-coded health guidance system](#):**

- **Providers and Individuals** should review [Protecting High Risk Individuals](#) and the [Workplace Safety Checklist](#) documents **carefully**, to learn more about how providers and employers should be protecting high-risk staff and individuals who choose to return to work.
- Each industry will respond differently depending on the risk. Providers and individuals may need to adapt and prepare for frequent on-the-job changes. As individuals return to work, support staff should be familiar with how employers are responding to different risk levels. The [“Phased Guidelines for the General Public and Businesses”](#) gives business recommendations divided by risk level, industry or job title.

### **Recommended questions for discussion when considering a return to work:**

#### Individual considerations

- What is the preference of the person? And what is the perspective of their family?
- Does the person, or someone the person lives with, have any risk factors identified by the [CDC](#)?
  - If so, does the benefit of returning to work outweigh the risk?
  - Are measures in place for when the person returns home from work to minimize any further risk of exposure (wash hands upon return, change clothes, etc..)?
- If the person is unable to return to work, how does the decision impact their life (mental health, supervision needs, etc..)?
- Can the person, with training if needed, protect themselves and others by washing their hands often; avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth; cover their coughs and sneezes and wear protective mask or cloth face covering and follow social distancing recommendations?

#### Work environment

- What efforts can be made to help the individual to prepare for unknown changes on the jobsite?
- What are the anticipated or present impacts of temporary changes to quotas, shift length, work requirements, customer traffic, etc for the individual?
- Are the unavoidable workplace risks equal for non-disable peers performing the same work?
- Can the individual maintain requirements if adjustments to the pace and schedule of the job continued for an extended period or became permanent?
- What routines can be developed while supporting the individual in settings outside the workplace that could improve work performance?

#### Support needed for success on the job

- Should workplace accommodations be sought for high risk individuals to modify workspaces, physical proximity to co-workers, length of shift and settings?
- Should employment supports focus on new skills or responsibilities to improve business productivity and efficiency?
- As workforce transitions to a “new normal”, what adjustments can be implemented for job coaching supports to address any differences in workplace performance?

## Transportation

- How have the options for transportation to a work site changed during COVID-19?

## Financial considerations

- Does the individual and/or their household have pressing financial needs?
  - If so have Benefits Counseling through Utah Work Incentive Planning Services been sought? Resources can be found at: <https://jobs.utah.gov/usor/vr/services/uwips.html>