



VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELOR COMPETENCIES

INTRODUCTION

Listed below are competencies intended to serve as a general guide for the professional development of knowledge, skills and abilities needed by Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) serving individuals with a brain injury (BI) as they re-enter the workforce. These draft competencies are not intended to encompass the full range of job duties related to working with individuals returning to work, but are to be broadly reflective of current research and practice in the field. This document is a FY 2018-2019 work product of the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) State Partnership Program's Transition and Employment Workgroup member states; Indiana, Nebraska, North Carolina and Vermont.

CLIENT SERVICE-LEVEL COMPETENCIES

BI Medical and Rehabilitation Concepts:

- Understands medical and rehabilitation terminology pertaining to BI
- Understands how BI screening tools (e.g. OSU-TBI ID, BISQ, HELPS) may assist in the identification of potentially undiagnosed BI
- Able to implement and interpret agency-sanctioned BI screening tools
- Understands that BI may be categorized along a spectrum from mild to severe, and that categorization of initial injuries may not predict long-term outcomes
- Understands that categorization of initial injuries may not predict long-term outcomes
- Understands that recovery from BI, and long-term outcomes are individualized and based on many variables
- Understands how BI affects the following functional systems:
 - Cognition (memory, attention, executive skills, problem solving, etc.)
 - Speech and language production and comprehension
 - Physical, motor, and sensory abilities (strength, endurance, range of motion, vision, perception, hearing, balance, etc.)
 - Behavior and mood regulation (awareness, adjustment, mood, interpersonal skills, etc.)
- Recognizes how symptoms (fatigue, reduced auditory comprehension, impaired attention, impaired memory, decreased executive skills, and more) of BI can affect work performance in a variety of ways (e.g., interpersonal interactions, personal and home independence, and community re-entry)
- Understands the importance of individual education in preventing secondary BI
- Understands the risks of substance use disorders
- Knows the resources to support abstinence from substance use



- Understands the prevalence, effects, and support needs presented when a person has co-occurring disorders (such as a mental illness or substance misuse)
- Able to identify the range of specialists, professionals, and services in their state (e.g. home and community-based waivers, county- or regionally-funded programs, resource facilitation services, etc.) that may address BI needs, challenges and impairments.
- Understands the implications of BI as a chronic condition, including aging with BI, and the implications for future rehabilitative and community-based employment supports, and is familiar with the long and short term rehabilitation needs & life care planning
- Stays abreast of best practices/research related to treatment approaches (Motivational Interviewing, Person Centered Planning, etc.), pharmacology, and more, and is able to refer to specialists for same

Employment concepts:

- Understands and accounts for factors, such as reduced self-awareness and memory impairment, that must be considered with other functional skills information in determining eligibility for Vocational Rehabilitation services
- Understands how BI may impact an individual's ability to participate in, and benefit from, vocational rehabilitation services
- Partners with the individual to identify and employ accommodations to ensure success in vocational rehabilitation services
- Understands factors that contribute to poor employment outcomes in persons with BI
- Understands the importance of integrating support persons and professional recommendations in employment planning and goal development
- Understands and identifies appropriate workplace supports to help a worker with BI
- Understands the similarities and differences between the following concepts:
 - accommodations,
 - restoration,
 - assistive technologies, and
 - demonstrates skills in triaging for same
- Recognizes when an individual with a BI requires an accommodation, titration (gradual return) to return to work activities or post-secondary or other training
- Understands how BI may impact an individual in the work setting and understands how to pair necessary and reasonable accommodations with individual challenges or impediments
- Understands how post-injury interventions and compensatory strategies must be tailored to an individual's needs
- Able to facilitate access to employment-related advocacy, legal remedies, resources, etc.
- Understands how public benefits may be impacted by employment



SYSTEMS-LEVEL COMPETENCIES

State and Local Systems, Resources and Service Coordination:

- Understands state-specific initiatives and mandates related to employment (Governor proclamations, priorities, goals, etc.)
- Able to explain State Vocational Rehabilitation services available for persons with disability
- Understands how BI services are delivered by the VR system, including state policies and procedures
- Understands the vocational rehabilitation role is to identify, coordinate, and provide services to the individual
- Understands the importance of case management and system's navigation to facilitate goal attainment
- Understands the importance of resource facilitation to facilitate goal attainment (if it exists in the state)
- Knows state, district, and local community employment support resources and associated referral processes
- Knows funding resources to support pre-employment and employment activities
- Possesses skills in developing and sustaining collaborative relationships to benefit individual clients
- Understands the importance of providing BI resources to employers and other partners in the employment process, based on individual client disclosure preferences
- Stays abreast of BI specialty certification opportunities
- Holds specialty certification such as Certified Brain Injury Specialist (CBIS)

National Systems, Research and Best Practices:

- Understands relevant federal legislation, including but not limited to, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), and any state-specific legislation related to return to work and work supports
- Understands a wide variety of evidence-based vocational rehabilitation models and return-to-work approaches for persons with BI

REFERENCES

The Essential Brain Injury Guide Edition 5.0, 2016, Brain Injury Association of America
Traumatic Brain Injury Rehabilitation: Practical Vocational, Neuropsychological, and Psychotherapy Interventions, Robert T. Fraser, David C. Clemmons, 2000 by CRC Press, LLC