

CRP BRIEF



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National Standards for CRP Training

Many thanks to Laurie Ford, Director of the Region X CRP-RCEP at Western Washington University, and Dan O'Brien, Consultant with the Region VI CRP-RCEP at UNT, for authoring this brief. We also appreciate all the effort contributed by the leaders of APSE, ACRE, and the ten CRP-RCEPs in developing these national standards.

BACKGROUND

Research shows that people who are properly trained provide better services. In fact, the evidence is so strong that Congress requires that each state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency establish a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD). Mandated by the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, the goal of CSPD is to improve the quality of rehabilitation by emphasizing that qualified professionals provide services. This provision requires state vocational rehabilitation agencies to maintain a skill level that is "...consistent with any national or state-approved or recognized certification or licensing . . ." that applies to the rehabilitation services they are providing. While this statute refers to all professional and para-professional staff in state VR, the initial efforts have focused primarily on vocational rehabilitation counselors.

At present, there are no established competency areas, certification or licensing requirements for community rehabilitation personnel who work as employment consultants, job placement specialists, and job coaches. By any measure, the work of employment personnel is complex, difficult and, at times, frustrating; it requires a multi-front systems approach with families, the consumer, employers and co-workers. While there is currently no system in place for the professional development of state VR vendors (community rehabilitation programs and others), RSA encourages state VR agencies to

contract with CRPs that approximate the personnel development standards established by the CSPD.

Recognizing the need for qualified personnel at all levels, the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) has been proactively involved in defining and developing a set of competencies for the professional development of personnel at community rehabilitation programs (CRPs). ACRE is comprised of professional educators who provide continuing education to CRPs, including the Region VI CRP-RCEP at the University of North Texas.

Two years ago, ACRE entered into a dialogue with the Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE), a national organization that developed a system of employment service competencies, to explore how these competencies could be utilized in training CRP staff. ACRE used the APSE Employment Provider Competencies as a starting point for its own program development but revised and adapted the competencies to reflect not only supported employment but competitive and customized employment as well.

During 2005, the ACRE certification process begins with some of the training programs offered through the 10 CRP-RCEPs (the regional continuing education programs for community rehabilitation providers) across the country. These training programs have been reviewed and certified as meeting the ACRE established training criteria. Subsequent to this initial

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phase of the project, other training establishments will be able to submit their curriculum to ACRE for review and approval.

The result will be a national system of recognition for personnel who successfully complete the prescribed training. All training curricula offered by ACRE members will identify the competencies addressed in each training session or series of training.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSUMERS

As consumers with more significant disabilities opt for employment in the community, there is a need for more informed and better-trained employment specialists. Supported employment for today's market requires, at a minimum, some expertise in person-centered planning techniques, transition services, and assistive technology.

The benefits of a more-informed consumer base and a better-trained employment specialist are intertwined. For example, it is anticipated that increased competence levels among employment specialists will result in an increased perception of professionalism that leads to longer job retention. Since high turnover among employment specialists disrupts consumer's work supports and can lead to job loss, consumers benefit as well.

The ACRE approach standardizes and enhances the quality of service for CRP customers and can be used as an indicator of high-quality service provided by professionals trained using the curricula developed by ACRE members. The quality of training provided to personnel could be one of the benchmarks used by consumers in selecting their service provider.

RELEVANCE FOR CRPS

Several states currently require some level of training for CRP vendors, and, given the federal emphasis on qualified personnel, it is likely that this trend will continue. Training that is localized and inconsistent from state to state, while viable, does not meet any standardized system of professional development, and can result in a myriad of certifications that have no

widespread application.

ACRE members have addressed this dilemma by developing a series of competencies based on the skills needed to deliver effective employment services to individuals with significant disabilities. Participants in ACRE training can accumulate a specified number of training hours on specific topics and earn Certificates of Achievement at three levels: Basic, Intermediate and Advanced. At this point, only the requirements for the Basic Certificate have been well-defined.

The Basic Certificate of Achievement reflects a total of 40-hours of training in specific areas (see the Competencies and Hours chart in the accent box). This can be earned by attending one 40-hour training session or by combining a series of other training programs which meet the established criteria. UNT currently offers a wide variety of trainings that we feel will readily meet the Basic requirements as outlined by ACRE, and it is our intent to proceed to refine our training efforts to ultimately meet the requirements for ACRE Intermediate and Advanced Certificates. As this occurs, we will keep you informed. The issue of "grandfathering" is yet another concern. That is, should a CRP person who has already participated in a UNT training be given credit for doing so under the "new" rules? It is our intent to do so, and the process for that will also be forthcoming as we continue to clarify our involvement with the ACRE certification process.

While currently voluntary, the ACRE Certificate can be utilized by CRP staff to demonstrate their commitment and expertise in the field. The ACRE competencies can be a great tool for supervisors in formulating staff development plans and identifying staff training needs. As the process becomes more formalized, the UNT CRP-RCEP will develop a supervisor's corner and post that to our website in order to assist managers with the decision-making process.

The nationally-recognized training now available from ACRE could allow CRPs to operate in multiple states without meeting additional training requirements making service delivery portable and immediate. In Region VI, which includes the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, New

Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas, there are a number of areas along state borders where CRPs from one state can more easily provides services across the border in another state. Nationally-recognized ACRE certification makes this cross-border service possible and reduces the likelihood that a sub-state region will impose local training requirements on service providers. For CRPs, and their state VR agencies, this

- insures a well-trained, qualified workforce;
- expands the pool of qualified employment specialists;
- establishes the employment specialist as a stable profession;
- reduces turnover among CRP direct-service personnel, and
- enhances recruitment.

ACRE member organizations serve over 8,500 community rehabilitation programs across the nation. Through ACRE’s Employment Training and Education Certification process, thousands of employment professionals will receive competency-based education and training resulting in an increase in quality services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

SUMMARY

It is the position of ACRE that, to the greatest extent possible, all employment services contracted for and provided by the state-federal VR system should be delivered by individuals who have received training from a certified training organization. Some states have already mandated this requirement. This is the first step in ensuring that employment services are delivered by qualified professionals which will maximize the employment opportunities of people with disabilities.

The Region VI CRP-RCEP has participated in the development of the ACRE standards, and intends to pursue ACRE Certification at all levels (Basic, Intermediate, Advanced). We will continue to be mindful of local needs as we do, but it appears clear to us that there are many distinct advantages to adding the ACRE seal of approval to our own Certificates of Achievement. In this way, participants will have certificates that are recognized nationally while receiving

training that provides them the tools to employ persons with disabilities. Sounds like a win-win situation for all concerned!

References & Resources

For more information, visit the websites listed below:

- 1 ACRE Website: www.acreducators.org
- 2 APSE Competencies - <http://www.apse.org/Papers/APSE%20SE%20Competencies.pdf>
- 3 RSA link on CSPD - <http://www.ed.gov/students/college/aid/rehab/cspdintro.html>

ACRE Basic Certificate Competencies & Hours	
Topic	Hrs Needed
Introduction (Values, Ethics, Rights, Legislation, Best Practices)	4
Assessment & Career Planning	5
Marketing & Job Development	6
Job Acquisition (Decision-making, Impact on benefits, Preparation)	3
On-the-job Training & Support	5
Ongoing Support	2
Specific Disabilities	1
Other Topics (Specify)	14*
TOTAL	40
<i>* These can also be additional hours in above categories</i>	

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Meeting the continuing education needs of community rehabilitation providers

VISIT OUR WEBSITE!



The **CRP Brief** is published 3 times a year by the Region VI CRP-RCEP and is also available on our website:
www.crp.unt.edu

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