

Written Standards for Workforce Development Services in the Austin/Travis County CoC

Introduction

These standards are designed to provide a minimal framework for service providers within the Austin/Travis County HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) to implement effective vocational services for individuals experiencing homelessness. Workforce development is a term used to describe comprehensive career-related services delivered to individuals who are seeking to improve their earning potential and career options by increasing skill levels, educational levels, or obtaining industry-relevant certification or licensure.

Adhering to these standards ensures consistency, accountability, and high-quality service delivery across the continuum.

By adhering to these written standards, service providers within the Austin/Travis County HUD Continuum of Care will ensure that services are effective, equitable, and tailored to the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. These standards are intended to foster a collaborative, supportive environment that empowers clients to achieve sustainable employment and improve their overall quality of life. Regular review and updates to these standards will be conducted to ensure they remain relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the community. *These standards do not supersede the requirement of a program's funder.*

Purpose

The purpose of these standards is to establish a baseline for vocational services, which promotes best practices in engaging and supporting homeless individuals in achieving sustainable employment. These standards can provide a shared language and practice, to enhance coordination among service providers.

Eligibility: Any individual experiencing homelessness, housing instability or is enrolled in a permanent housing program, who wants or needs support obtaining or maintaining employment.

Standards for Vocational Services

1. Theory of Service

- **Person Centered Services:** Programs must prioritize the individual's unique needs, interests, and goals when assisting them in finding and maintaining employment, allowing for a more individualized approach that increases the likelihood of successful job placement and overall quality of life, while empowering clients to act autonomously and take control over their career path.
- **Engagement Strategies:** Use a variety of outreach methods to engage clients, ensuring that they are informed about available services and resources. Outreach

teams, day centers and shelters must be aware of available services and have reliable referral methods in place, especially for those who may quickly exit homelessness through workforce reengagement.

- **Non-Discriminatory Practices:** Ensure services are accessible to all individuals, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other factors. This can be accomplished by identifying service matching tools, such as assessments and prioritization strategies.
- **Culturally Competent Services:** Staff must understand and respect diverse backgrounds and experiences. Programs must explore provider and service preferences and make good faith efforts to match clients to culturally competent programs. Programs must offer language resources including translation, ASL interpretation and access/referral options to ESL classes, as the client requests.

2. Service Matching

- **Individual Assessment:** Conduct a client centered comprehensive assessment of each client's skills, interests, barriers, and goals.
- **Personalized Service Plans:** Develop tailored vocational service plans that include clear, achievable objectives aligned with individual goals. Encourage clients to take an active role in their workforce development journey, fostering self-advocacy and personal responsibility. Plans should include, at a minimum, a pathway to achieving Austin area's living wage (\$21.63/hr in 2024-2025).
- **Coordinated Entry:** Coordinated Entry data points, specifically designed for Workforce Development services, should be used as a tool to prioritize, service match and outreach to possible participants when possible.

3. Definitions of Service Types:

- Transitional Jobs are designed to overcome employment obstacles by using time limited, wage-paying jobs that combine real work, skill development, and supportive services to transition participants successfully into the labor market.
- Sector Based Training engages multiple employers and other industry leaders in the development of industry-specific training programs linked to employment opportunities and workforce needs in a sector. The approach offers participants education and hands-on training to match in demand job openings in a specific occupation or industry sector.
- Alternative Staffing aims to develop a quality ready-to-work labor force for employers while helping job seekers learn workplace skills, build experience and confidence, earn an employment record, and leverage temporary placements to permanent jobs.
- Disability Contingent Service Types:
 - Supported Employment is an evidence-based practice model that helps people with disabilities find and keep jobs in the community for clients with disabilities. SE programs provide ongoing support, including job skills training, vocational assessment, and job coaching. Job coaches work with the employee to identify job modifications, learn job tasks, and solve behavioral or social problems.

- Individualized Placement Support - evidence-based model of supported employment for helping individuals with a mental illness find and keep a regular paid job in the competitive labor market with at least a minimum wage.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services are a range of services that can help people with disabilities prepare for, find, and keep a job. Vocational services include employment training, skill development, placement, on the job support and coaching, operating business for training and employment of consumers, activities to improve job seeking skills, benefits counseling, and other services.

4. Standards for Specific Interventions

Regardless of service types or intensity, the following array of interventions must be made available either directly by a provider or through partner referral:

- **Skill Development:**
 - Job Readiness Training: Provide training and workshops focused on job readiness, including digital literacy training, resume writing, interview preparation, and soft skills development.
 - Education and Training: Coordinate access to GED programs, vocational training, and apprenticeships, with a focus on high-demand sectors.
- **Job Placement Services:**
 - Provide access to job listings, assist with applications, and facilitate connections with local employers.
 - Facilitate connections with local employers and job openings that align with client skills and aspirations.
 - Job placements should be striving for the Austin area's living wage (\$21.63/hr in 2024-2025).
- **Supportive Services:** Offer additional resources such as case management, transportation assistance, childcare services, and mental health support to address barriers to employment, either directly or through partnership.
- **Benefits Counseling:** Ensure clients are informed of the risks to entitlement benefits, as it pertains to their employment. Reference [Fact Sheet Benefits Counseling](#)
- **Holistic Approaches:** All programs must acknowledge the unique needs of the population, by addressing both employment and basic needs:
 - Transportation expenses
 - Storage solutions
 - Health-related expenses
 - Work clothes, tools and equipment
 - Fees for vital documents
 - Pending legal charges/expunction opportunities
 - Financial and computer literacy training
 - Mental health/stress management support.
 - English as a second language classes.
- **Sector based training:** All programs providing workforce development services must have a working knowledge of available sector based training programs and referral pathways.

5. Collaboration and Partnerships

- Direct providers of workforce development services must establish formal partnerships with their local workforce development board, community college, and/or vocational training providers, to successfully execute identified service types.
- Coordinate with local employers to create job placement opportunities and internships. Portfolios must be maintained through employment support staff checking in with employers at a minimum monthly.
- Referral Systems: Establish clear referral pathways to connect clients with additional services, such as housing assistance, English as a second language programs, and the other sections of the continuum of vocational training.

6. Data Collection, Outcome Measurement and Evaluation

- **Data Collection:** Utilize the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to track participant program enrollment, UDE's, employment status, total income and sources of income.
- **Performance Metrics:** Develop and track key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the effectiveness of workforce development services. Recommended KPIs include:
 - Number of participants placed in jobs within 6 months of program entry.
 - Income levels of participants pre and post service delivery.
 - Job retention rate at 6- and 12-months post-placement.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regularly review program outcomes and client feedback to identify areas for improvement and adapt services accordingly.

7. Staff Training and Development

- **Ongoing Training:** Provide regular training for staff on best practices in workforce development, motivational interviewing, and trauma-informed care.
 - o [Job Readiness Training Curriculum](#)
 - o [Re-Entry Workforce Development - On-Point](#)
- **Supervision and Support:** Ensure staff receive adequate supervision and support to address the complex needs of clients.

8. Policy and Compliance

- **Adherence to Regulations:** Ensure compliance with all local, state, and federal regulations related to employment services and homelessness. (See full attached reference list). No worker shall be paid below the Texas minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour.
- **Data Privacy and Security:** Implement policies to protect client information and maintain confidentiality in all interactions and documentation.

Reference list of Applicable Laws and Standards

State Regulations (Texas)

- [Texas Workforce Commission Rules](#): These rules govern employment services and workforce development programs across Texas, including those aimed at assisting individuals facing barriers to employment.
- [Texas Minimum Wage Act](#): Establishes the minimum wage requirements for employees in Texas.
- [Texas Workers' Compensation Act](#): Provides guidelines for workers' compensation coverage for employees who sustain injuries during work.

Federal Regulations

- [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#): This act supports workforce development programs that help individuals, including those facing significant barriers such as homelessness, gain employment.

Local Guidelines (Travis County)

- [Travis County Guidelines for Hiring Ex-Offenders](#): This policy aims to promote the reintegration of individuals with criminal histories by providing employment opportunities within Travis County and the private sector. It delays the request for criminal history information until later in the hiring process and considers various factors before disqualifying an applicant based on their criminal history.