



Keeping Your Focus on Employment During the COVID-19 Crisis: A Guide for People with Disabilities

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on people with disabilities and the services they receive. This brief is one in a series for individuals to help guide them as continue to work, seek employment, or participate in community-based day supports. We welcome your feedback and ideas as we all work together so that individuals can work towards their goals while staying safe and healthy.

ICI COVID-19 RESOURCES:
covid19.communityinclusion.org

Over the last few months, your life has probably changed a lot. You may no longer be doing things you used to do, such as:

- ▶ going to a volunteer or paid job
- ▶ going to your day program
- ▶ seeing program staff
- ▶ visiting potential employers
- ▶ going to activities in the community

You might be staying home a lot more and only seeing your family, housemates, or house staff. If you are able to go to work or out in the community, you're probably doing new things that feel strange, like wearing a mask and staying at least 6 feet away from other people.

All these changes are because of COVID-19, sometimes called "the coronavirus" or "the pandemic." We are all doing things so we don't make ourselves or other people sick.

Service providers understand how important it is continue working with you and to help you with your job and other goals. To do this, help is often being provided "remotely." This means staff are working with you by phone or over the computer or similar device, and not in person.

This publication explains how employment services are being provided during the pandemic. It also explains ways to make your meetings and activities helpful and interesting.

Can I still get help at my paid job, volunteer work, or community activity?

Yes. If you are still going to work, volunteering, or participating in an activity in the community, staff can still provide help. This might just be different from what you are used to. Here are some possible changes:

- ▶ They may still visit you at the job or community activity, but they may only stay for a short visit. They will probably be wearing a face mask and other items (like gloves) just like you are.
- ▶ They may not be able to visit you, but they can still talk to you on the phone and through the computer to do check-ins and provide help.
- ▶ They can do check-ins with your supervisor on the phone or using video to see how things are going at work.

What if I lost my job?

If you've lost your job, first off, understand that lots of people are out of work. Staff can help you deal with being out of work in a few different ways by helping you:

- ▶ File for unemployment benefits.
- ▶ Get other benefits to help you out.
- ▶ Report to Social Security about your changes in income.
- ▶ Stay in touch with your employer to see if and when you'll be able to go back to work.
- ▶ Search for a new job if your employer says they may not be able to bring you back.

Should I still be working on job goals right now?

Yes. Many businesses have either temporarily closed or have cut back on hours. Many people are now out of work. However, you should still keep working on your job goals. Here's why:

- ▶ Believe it or not, a number of employers have remained fully open and are hiring right now!
- ▶ Other employers are planning to hire new staff as soon as people can go out in the community more.
- ▶ At some point, the economy will improve, and it is good to be ready to find a job when that happens.

How is looking for a job different during COVID-19?

- ▶ Many employers are now meeting with people who want a job only by phone or by live video. This is different from going to a business in person. You need to practice how to make a good impression when you're meeting an employer this way.
- ▶ Using the internet is more important than ever in exploring jobs. However, be careful of spending lots of time just applying for jobs online. Personal connections with people you know (networking) are still the best way to find work. You can connect with people through phone, text, video, and email for job ideas and connections.
- ▶ Remember, there are a lot of people looking for work. It's more important than ever to stand out from other people applying for jobs and show what makes you especially valuable to an employer.
- ▶ With jobs less available, you may need to be a bit less picky about the type of job you want. In other words, you might have to choose a job that isn't your favorite. Don't worry—when the economy gets better, you'll be able to look for something else.

Make sure your support staff know that you want to keep working on job goals and looking for work. Tell your family and other team members what you would like to do. They can all support you to reach your goals.

If I'm exploring possible jobs, or doing a job search, what types of activities might I do remotely?

If you're receiving services remotely (not in person), here is a list of activities you might do related to employment with help from your staff. These are things you may have done in person before the pandemic. Share this list with your staff person and decide what you feel would be most useful. At the end of this publication is a list of resources that can help.

- ▶ Create or revise your resume and cover letter.
- ▶ Create a video resume.
- ▶ Explore jobs and businesses online.
- ▶ Apply for jobs online.
- ▶ Explore your local community (you can do this through Google maps and similar programs).
- ▶ Reach out to others to ask for help with your job exploration.
- ▶ Have informational interviews by phone or video with different people to learn about their jobs and businesses.
- ▶ Watch videos of people performing different types of jobs and discuss them.
- ▶ Practice your phone and video interviewing skills.
- ▶ Participate in a job search skills group.
- ▶ Watch instructional classes or videos related to job skills, and then practice what you have learned.
- ▶ Show your staff person how you perform some skills at home by asking someone in your house to take video or photos of you.
- ▶ Identify and learn a new skill at home that you could do at a volunteer or paid job.
- ▶ Improve your travel skills, including learning different ways to get places and how to manage your transportation.
- ▶ Learn about your public benefits and how working impacts them.
- ▶ Work on "soft skills." This means practicing how to deal with different situations and act appropriately at work.
- ▶ Learn about your employment rights.
- ▶ Find accommodations that can help you do your job well.

What other types of activities might I do while working with staff online?

In addition to employment, there are related areas that staff can work with you on remotely:

- ▶ Improving your skills on using technology (more important than ever!).
- ▶ Looking for and using apps that can help you on the job and in the community.
- ▶ Developing self-advocacy skills, including participating in self-advocacy groups.
- ▶ Money management.
- ▶ Community exploration.
- ▶ Participating in groups online.
- ▶ Finding online community activities and getting support to participate in them.

Conclusion

While there are challenges related to COVID-19, you can still work on your employment and career goals, and staff are still available to help. Share the ideas in this publication with your staff, and advocate to get the help you need. To learn more about using technology to get services remotely, see the publication:

- ▶ [Using Technology for Employment and Day Services: A Guide for Individuals.](#)

“It’s not our disabilities, it’s our abilities that count.”

—Chris Burke, Actor

Editorial assistance for this publication provided by Anya Weber of the Institute for Community Inclusion, and Cynthia Goldberg and Kamisha Heriveaux of Mass Advocates Standing Strong.

This COVID-19 publication series was produced by the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston and funded by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) as part of the DDS Employment First initiative.

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www.communityinclusion.org
www.employmentfirstMA.org

RESOURCES

Below are resources that can help you figure out what kind of job you want, how to find a job, and how to improve your skills. Check out these resources and share them with your staff.

Learning About Employment and How to Look for a Job

These resources can help you figure out what kind of job you want and how to find it.

- ▶ [Explore Work Curriculum](#) (Florida Developmental Disabilities Council)
- ▶ [Explore Prepare Act](#) (Massachusetts self-advocates)
- ▶ Materials from Project STIR:
 - [General site](#)
 - [Leadership Training](#)
 - [Road to Work Manual](#)
- ▶ [SCILS Group Materials](#)- Wide variety of materials on self-advocacy with support from the California State Council on Developmental Disabilities. Materials specific to employment include
 - ▶ Videos:
 - [Everybody Can Work](#)
 - [Work is for All](#)
 - ▶ Booklets:
 - [My Choice, My Future](#)
 - [How I Want to Spend My Time](#)
- ▶ [Youthhood](#) - While written for youth, parts of this website are also useful for all ages.
- ▶ [Information Brief: Start with Me: A Guide to Person-Centered Planning For Job Seekers](#) (Institute for Community Inclusion)

Video Resumes

A video resume can be a great way to market yourself to an employer. Check out these resources to learn more.

- ▶ [Information from Able Opportunities, Inc.](#)
- ▶ [Tips for Creating a Video Resume \(and When You Need One\)](#) (Balance Careers)

Exploring Jobs Online

On these sites, you can watch videos of different types of jobs to help you figure out what you want to do for work.

- ▶ [Able Eyes Virtual Employer Tours](#)
- ▶ [AG Explorer](#)
- ▶ [CareerOneStop Virtual Career Tours](#)
- ▶ [VocFit](#)
- ▶ [The Career Index](#)

Learning Skills

- ▶ [GCFLearnFree.org](#) has a wide variety of online video courses on topics that can be helpful with employment and participating in the community.