



Braiding and Sequencing for Iowa Blueprint for Change Registered Apprenticeships, Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Day Habilitation and Supported Employment Services

Prepared by:

Abby Cooper – abbylindmancooper@gmail.com

Ashley Hazen – ashley.hazen@iwd.iowa.gov

Lin Nibbelink – lin.nibbelink@hhs.iowa.gov

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Summary

The document describes a pilot program designed to enhance employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities in Iowa. This initiative is a collaborative effort between the Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services' Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) grant—called the *Iowa Blueprint for Change (IBC)*—and the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Iowa Medicaid. The pilot targets participants in HCBS Day Habilitation and Supported Employment services, who express interest in Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) and the IBC's registered apprenticeship program. It focuses on developing braided funding strategies to improve service coordination, support workforce inclusion, and enable participants to transition into higher-paying, integrated employment roles.

Introduction

This pilot program is a small but important example of how different funding sources can be combined—or *braided*—to create better job opportunities for people with significant disabilities. A 2023 agreement between Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) and the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (Medicaid) shows how the two programs can work together to pay for the services people need.

Key points from the agreement include:

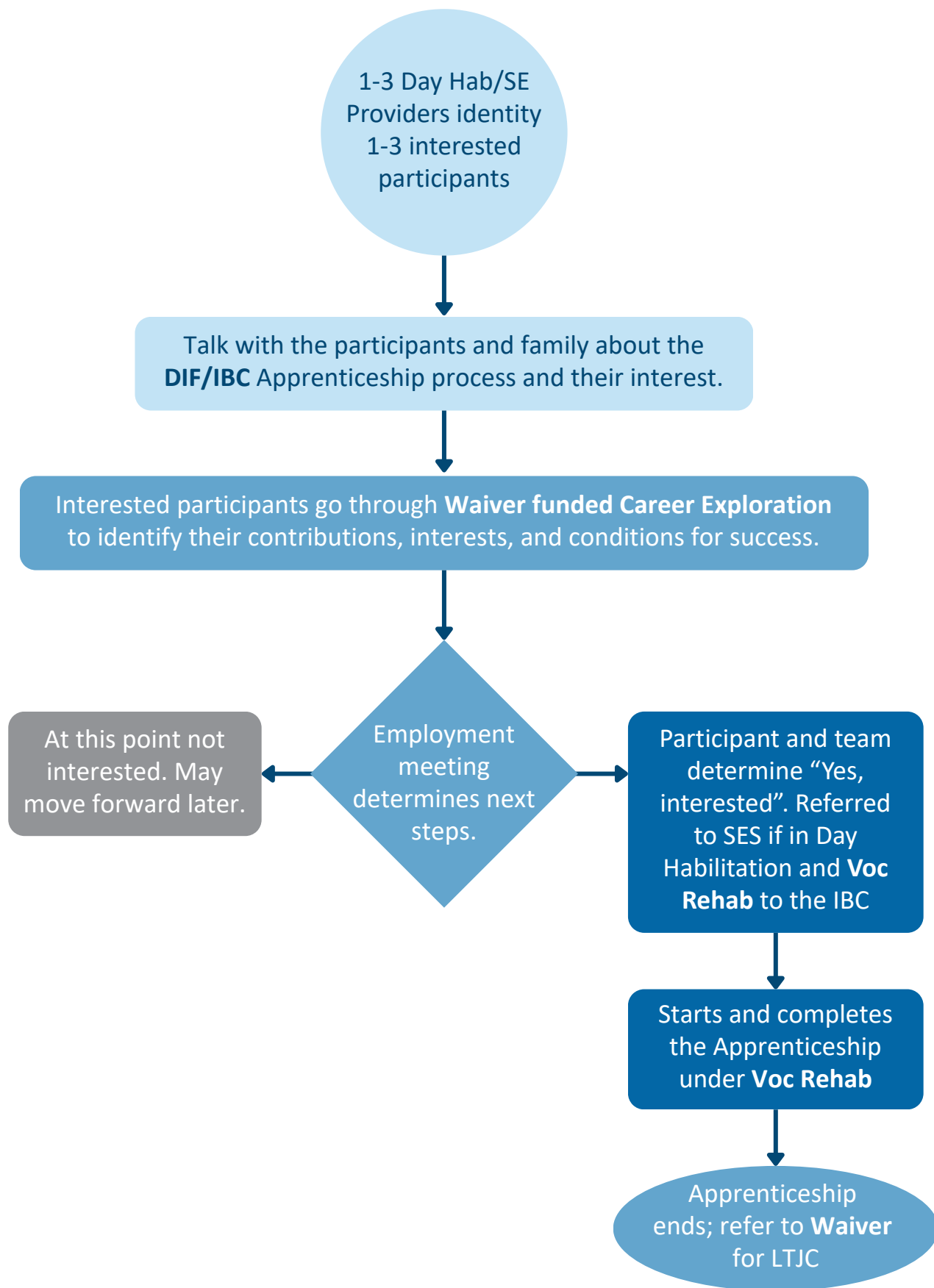
- Services will be coordinated with Medicaid to make sure people get the help they need without gaps.
- IVRS will be the first to pay for employment services for young people under 24. If they don't reach their job goal by age 24, or if work is no longer the goal, IVRS will stop paying, and Medicaid will cover medically necessary services identified in the participants' service plan.

This agreement shows how important it is to share the costs of services between programs. It sets an example for future efforts to better support people with disabilities by planning how funds are used.

The flowchart that follows explains how this takes advantage of a new opportunity offered through the *Iowa Blueprint for Change (IBC)*. Until now, people in Day Habilitation and few individuals in Supported Employment services had access to programs like Registered Apprenticeships. Registered Apprenticeship is a paid, industry-driven career pathway that combines on-the-job training with classroom instruction, allowing individuals to earn while they learn. Apprentices benefit from progressive wage increases, mentorship, and a nationally recognized, portable credential—all while building valuable skills and a direct route to a stable, rewarding career with long-term growth opportunities. These apprenticeships can help them start careers and earn higher wages.

If this pilot program works well, it could open up more job opportunities for people who are often left out of work discussions. This pilot helps spread awareness of Registered Apprenticeships within the disability community, where employment opportunities are often overlooked. Many case managers and service providers aren't familiar with apprenticeship pathways, let alone the benefits they offer. By increasing visibility and demonstrating success, the pilot could lead to the creation of more inclusive apprenticeship programs, especially in geographic areas or industries that haven't been explored yet. Creating more shared funding plans like this will help build a stronger support system for everyone.

Flowchart for Braiding Waiver Employment Services and Iowa Blueprint for Change Apprenticeship



Role of the Day Habilitation

This pilot project uses Day Habilitation (Day Hab) to help people take part in personalized, interest-based activities in the community. Day Hab services focus on supporting the member to participate in the community, develop social roles and relationships, and increase independence and the potential for employment. Day Hab is a service that helps individuals build the skills they need for community involvement, recreation, volunteering, and future employment. It supports people in learning how to socialize, handle daily tasks, and become more independent. It also gives them chances to participate in community life.

The pilot project's braided model for Registered Apprenticeship focuses on providing services that match each person's unique interests and strengths. The goal is to make sure people are doing meaningful activities that help them grow and prepare for jobs they enjoy.

The official definition of Day Habilitation is in the 1915(c) waiver applications IA.0242 and IA.0299 and the 1915(i) State plan HCBS Attachment 3.1–C, and it is included in the Appendix at the end of this document.

How Day Habilitation ties to the Registered Apprenticeship

Day Hab can illuminate a person's interests, skills, and strengths which might guide them toward Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE), where people with and without disabilities work together in the community and earn fair wages. As people build independence and skills in Day Hab, they become more prepared to move into formal career planning.

Across the U.S., states are working to create clearer paths from Day Hab to CIE. One new approach being tested in this pilot is the *Registered Apprenticeship (RA)*. This gives participants in Day Hab the chance to get a good job with the support they need to succeed.

Before joining the RA, each person will go through a process called Discovery (if funded through Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services [IVRS]) to see if the apprenticeship is a good fit. Discovery helps identify the person's interests, strengths, and what support they'll need. It may include:

- Informational interviews
- Job shadowing
- Classes on benefits and money management
- Assistive technology assessments

These services are also covered by the Medicaid State Plan HCBS Habilitation program and HCBS BI and ID waiver *Career Exploration and Individual Supported Employment* services. If the person decides to move forward, they'll be referred to both IVRS and a Supported Employment provider who will help them during the apprenticeship.

This pilot will begin with three individuals. Since Day Hab already supports personalized growth and skill-building, Registered Apprenticeship is a natural next step toward long-term employment in the community. The RA will take a minimum of one year, but can be longer if needed. Participants are paid by their host agency. The RA is currently funded by DIF, and when DIF ends IVRS will sustain the program.

How Supported Employment Service ties to the Registered Apprenticeship

Supported Employment services are intended for individuals who struggle to obtain Competitive Integrated Employment. Even with excellent strategies, many individuals are not on a pathway to financial stability and often remain among the working poor. The Registered Apprenticeship provides an opportunity to change that trajectory.

The process for individuals in HCBS funded Supported Employment services will follow the same structure as the individuals in Day Habilitation with the one exception that they will not be referred to a Supported Employment provider (because presumably, they are already engaged with one).

Role of Iowa Blueprint for change (IBC/DIF) funding

Iowa Blueprint for Change (IBC) provides funding and support to expand access to Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs for individuals who are Most Significantly Disabled (MSD). Through this initiative, IBC can cover the cost of related technical instruction (RTI), including tuition, adaptive learning materials, and assistive technology. The program also funds supportive services such as job coaching, transportation, personal care assistants, and necessary accommodations to ensure full participation and success in both training and employment settings.

IBC can also give money to employers to help pay the wages of apprentices or make workplaces more accessible. IBC often works with IVRS to make sure apprentices get the support they need. Together, they help people with disabilities learn skills, get jobs, and build long-term careers.

Role of IVRS funding

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) can help fund Registered Apprenticeships (RAs) for individuals with disabilities by covering costs related to both training and support services. This can include paying for tuition, tools, uniforms, transportation, and other items needed to participate in the program. IVRS may also provide job coaching, workplace accommodations, and other supports to help individuals succeed in both the classroom and on the job. By working closely with employers and training providers, IVRS helps create a clear path from training to employment for people with disabilities.

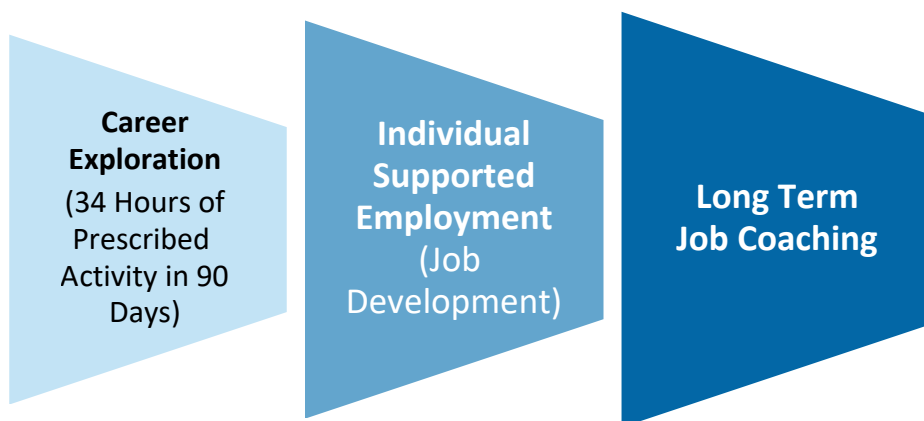
Role of Medicaid funding

If a Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) offers Supported Employment (SE), a typical customer's journey starts with an internal referral from the CRP's Day Hab program to their SE program. After that, the case manager should get authorization for HCBS Career Exploration services.

While the customer is still participating in Day Hab services, Medicaid HCBS funds can pay for Career Exploration or Individual Supported Employment service activities. When a customer chooses to pursue a Registered Apprenticeship (RA), they will be referred to Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS), which may cover eligible services and supports needed to successfully participate in the apprenticeship.

Once the customer is stable in their apprenticeship, the Medicaid waiver can pay for Long-Term Job Coaching (LTJC) based on the Tier level for which the customer qualifies.

People receiving Medicaid-funded HCBS) may follow this pathway:



Career Exploration leads to a personalized career plan based on the customer's real-life experiences and their informed choice about work in the community. The expected outcome of the career exploration activity is a written career plan that guides employment services which lead to community employment or self-employment.

Career Exploration is authorized for 34 hours within 90 days. Career Exploration activities take place in the community and may include:

- Meeting with the customer and important people in their life to explain supported employment and discuss job goals
- Visiting businesses, attending industry events, and going to career fairs
- Conducting informational interviews
- Job shadowing
- Taking classes on benefits and managing money
- Assessing assistive technology needs
- Participating in job exploration events

Long Term Job Coaching

Long-Term Job Coaching (LTJC) services are for people who need ongoing support because of their disabilities and who might have trouble keeping or advancing in Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) without help.

LTJC provides personalized and regular support, at the level needed, to help individuals keep their jobs and grow in their roles.

These services are based on the person's needs, which are described in their comprehensive service plan. Each person is authorized for a monthly Tier of service, depending on how many hours of direct support and activities they require each month to stay employed.

LTJC Tiers	
Tier 1 = 1 contact/month	H2024 U4
Tier 2 = 2-8 hours/month	H2025 U3
Tier 3 = 9-16 hours/month	H2025 U5
Tier 4 = 17-25 hours/month	H2025 U7
Tier 5 = 26+ hours/month	H2025 UC
Must be reauthorized every 90 days	

The administrative rules for Day Habilitation are in the Iowa Administrative Code (IAC) Chapter 441, section 78.27 (which covers definitions, amount, duration, and scope) and Chapter 77 (which covers provider qualifications).

Conclusion

This pilot program offers a promising and innovative approach to improving employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities in Iowa. By braiding funding from multiple sources—Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicaid, Title I, and the *Iowa Blueprint for Change*—it demonstrates how thoughtful coordination can create new, sustainable pathways to Competitive Integrated Employment.

The integration of Day Habilitation, Supported Employment services, and Registered Apprenticeship opportunities highlights how individualized support can lead to meaningful work and greater financial stability. The use of Career Exploration, Discovery, job coaching, and technical instruction ensures that participants are not only placed in jobs, but also equipped to succeed in them long term.

As this pilot moves forward, its success will depend on continued collaboration among service providers, funders, and employers. If proven effective, this model can be expanded to provide more equitable employment access statewide—and potentially serve as a blueprint for other states looking to better support individuals with disabilities in achieving their career goals. Ultimately, this effort reinforces a fundamental principle: with the right supports and planning, everyone deserves the opportunity to pursue a fulfilling, integrated career.

If you are interested or have a candidate for a Registered Apprenticeship, please contact Ashley Hazen at ashley.hazen@iwd.iowa.gov

APPENDIX

Definition of Day Habilitation

Iowa Administrative Code 441-78.27(8)

Day Habilitation means services that provide opportunities and support for community inclusion, and build interest in and develop skills for active participation in recreation, volunteerism, and integrated community employment. Day habilitation helps individuals gain, keep, or improve socialization, community participation, and daily living skills.

a. Scope

Day habilitation activities and environments are designed to:

- Build skills
- Encourage positive social behavior
- Support personal choice and greater independence

These services help participants:

- Engage in the community
- Develop social roles and relationships
- Work toward greater independence and employment potential
- Services are guided by each participant's comprehensive service plan and may also support someone who is already employed.

Examples of Day Habilitation Activities

1. Identifying the member's interests, preferences, skills, strengths, and contributions
2. Identifying conditions and supports needed for full community inclusion and the potential for competitive, integrated employment
3. Planning and coordinating individualized daily/weekly schedules
4. Building skills needed for competitive integrated employment
5. Participating in activities related to hobbies, health, and wellness
6. Participating in cultural, civic, and religious activities
7. Participating in adult learning
8. Volunteering
9. Learning self-advocacy and self-determination
10. Behavior management and self-regulation
11. Learning to use transportation and community resources
12. Developing natural relationships
13. Identifying and using natural supports
14. Accessing financial literacy and benefits education
15. Any other activity that supports full community participation, relationships, independence, and employment potential

Day Habilitation providers are encouraged to shift toward more individualized service models that emphasize community integration and personal development. This can be supported by strategies such as observing and tracking transferable work skills through daily documentation. However, several barriers to implementing individualized community opportunities have been identified. These include challenges related to staffing ratios and costs, limited funding, a lack of accessible community activities—especially in rural areas—and ongoing transportation difficulties. Addressing these barriers is essential for expanding access to meaningful, person-centered experiences that support independence and employment.

Definition of Career Exploration Iowa Administrative Code 441-78.27(1)

Career Exploration, also known as career planning, is a person-centered, time-limited service designed to help waiver participants explore and prepare for competitive or self-employment. This process involves identifying the participant's interests, strengths, and potential career direction, and results in the creation of a career plan aimed at achieving employment at or above the state's minimum wage. The main outcome of Career Exploration is a documented career plan that reflects the participant's stated employment goals and serves as a roadmap for future supported employment services. This written plan is used to guide individualized supports toward achieving competitive integrated employment.

For Information on Work Experience Programs (WEP):

Visit the Iowa Workforce Development site:

<https://workforce.iowa.gov/opportunities/work-based-learning/funding>

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