*What is “Customized Employment”?*

As defined by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Customized Employment (CE) **“is a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job seeker & an employer in a way that meets the needs of both”.** Employment occurs in **integrated**, **individualized** work situations in the community or in a personal business, and wages are competitive/living wage.

This differs from other approaches in that the aim is not to place the job seeker within the competitive hiring process or to match them to existing job openings, but rather **negotiate a customized job** that is an optimal fit between job seeker, the job tasks, the supporting environment, & the employer. CE creates employment instead of finding employment. Possible outcomes of CE include: wage employment (carved, negotiated, or created), resource ownership, microenterprise/self-employment, or a business-within-a-business. The outcome is a personalized job description and/or employer expectations that did not exist prior to negotiation. **The outcome of CE is learned, not targeted.**

*Changing the Way We Think*

**CE assumes the employability of every individual**, as well as the presence of competencies that, if not readily apparent, can be discovered.

The traditional labor market approach, matching people to existing job openings, has not typically resulted in jobs for people with more significant disabilities. When required to compete against applicants without disabilities for a job opening, or having one’s skills & abilities compared against an existing job description, people with more significant impact of disability don’t measure up (Callahan, 2002). However, if an **individualized approach** is used to represent a person’s contributions to an employer needing those contributions, skills, abilities, & personal characteristics, **employment becomes a reality** for all people.

*The Essential Components of CE*

Discovery

Job Search Planning

Job Development & Negotiation

Post-Employment Support

*Keys to Success*

CE is both a concept & a process. This process is not a single strategy or service, but rather a flexible blend of strategies & services designed to increase options for job seekers with complex needs & many barriers**. It is the implementation of an array of strategies that allows job duties to be tailored to satisfy both the job seeker & employer needs (& unmet needs).** Another key to success is taking the time to get to know the job seeker and their contributions and conditions for success, which occurs during Discovery, while observing the job seeker in different environments where they are at their best. This looks different than the traditional labor market approach in that time is spent up front getting to know the job seeker and prior to job development.

**Resources/Links for Customized Employment Strategies**

*Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation*

<http://www.ivrs.iowa.gov/CustomizedEmploymentStrategies.html>

*Iowa APSE*

<http://iowa-apse.org/index.htm>

*Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC*

<http://www.griffinhammis.com/customizedemployment.html>

*Mark Gold & Associates*

<http://www.marcgold.com/Publications/whitepapers.html>

*Office of Disability Employment Policy* <http://www.dol.gov/odep/categories/workforce/CustomizedEmployment/what/index.htm>

*University of Montana-Rural Institute*

<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/careerplanning.asp>