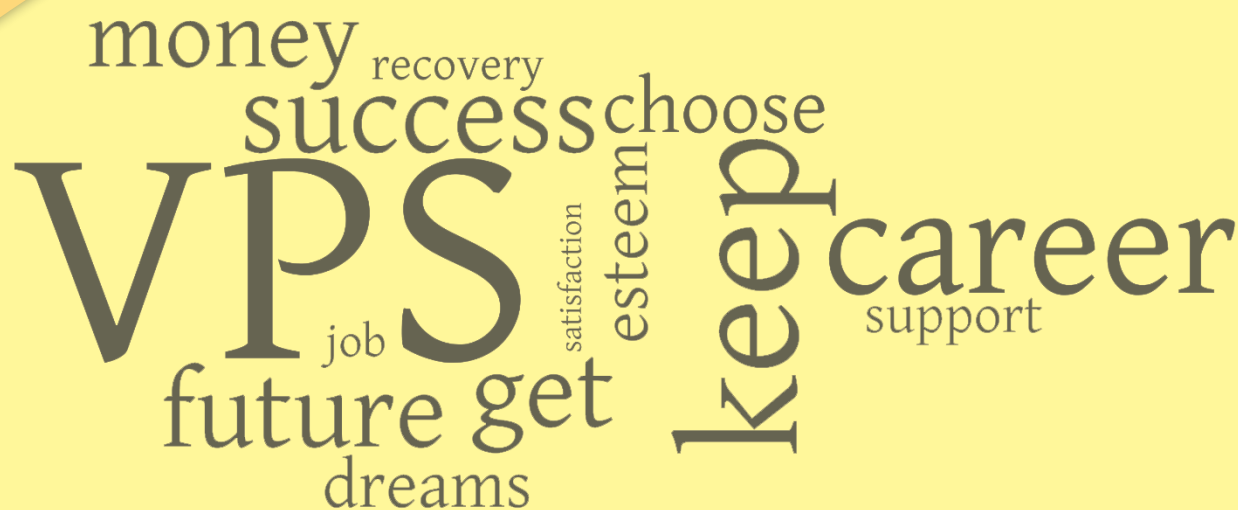


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Vocational Peer Support

Implementation Guide



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Debbie Nicolellis, Marianne Farkas, Lyn Legere

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Introduction to the Implementation Guide

What is the Implementation Guide? The Implementation Guide is a supplement to the:

1. Vocational Peer Support Trainee Handbook and Toolkit and
2. Vocational Peer Support Trainer's Guide

Who is the Implementation Guide for? Administrators, program managers, supervisors, and peer support personnel may find the content of this Implementation Guide useful in their work to support the vocational aspirations of people in recovery.

Why use the Implementation Guide? The Implementation Guide includes information and tools designed to support the use of Vocational Peer Support (VPS) in agencies and organizations. By informing the culture of organizations, supporting, and evaluating the effective use of Vocational Peer Support, including the elements of a relevant job description and other materials, the Implementation Guide is intended to provide advice for the incorporation of Vocational Peer Support into peer services currently delivered in your organization. The Implementation Guide does not supplant VPS training, rather it supplements the efforts of administrators and supervisors as they consider operationalizing ways to support individuals with vocational aspirations through the use of peer support.

When should the Implementation Guide be used?

- **Before VPS training:** The Implementation Guide presents a method of helping organizations assess their readiness for a training program in Vocational Peer Support by providing examples of program characteristics and resources that make it possible for VPS training to be delivered effectively.
- **During VPS training:** The Implementation Guide components, such as the Practice Checklists, may be useful for supervisors to support trainees as they learn and practice new skills within their roles at the organization, and as the program is developing its capacity to deliver VPS supports. In addition, VPS-trained peer staff may use these elements to enhance their own practice using VPS within their agency roles.
- **After VPS training:** Once staff are trained, an organization that implements certain program characteristics, will be more likely to deliver VPS-informed supports effectively. Continuing to develop a culture that both supports vocational recovery and is prepared to support VPS-trained staff is necessary, but not sufficient. The Implementation Guide offers guidance and support to organizations as they continue to use the skills, tools, and information of Vocational Peer Support by providing examples of additional program characteristics critical to implementation of VPS, along with a method of evaluating the extent to which the organization has such characteristics in place.

Concepts in Vocational Peer Support

What is VPS? Vocational Peer Support is an approach to providing employment and educational supports through peer-to-peer mutual support. VPS is designed for trained and/or certified peer specialists who want to support the vocational aspirations of the people they serve.

VPS is not meant to duplicate or take the place of other employment support approaches, such as vocational rehabilitation or supported employment; rather, it was designed to be a complementary approach that utilizes peer supports as the primary supporter of vocational changes. Vocational Peer Support builds on core peer support skills and knowledge by adding VPS concepts, skills, and tools.

What is the approach? Vocational Peer Support uses the Choose-Get-Keep approach to employment support, which uses the Psychiatric Rehabilitation approach (Anthony, Cohen, Farkas & Gagne, 2002; Anthony & Farkas, 2011) as a basic framework. Applied to the domain of work, Choose-Get-Keep (Danley & Anthony, 1987) upended the traditional approach of *assessment, placement, and follow-along* and created a person-directed approach in which the person chooses the vocational direction he or she wants to move in, the person gets the desired position, and the person keeps desired jobs or other vocational roles with supports as needed and wanted.

The original Psychiatric Rehabilitation approach included a component to support people to determine for themselves whether or not they were prepared and willing to make the change implied by choosing a goal (Farkas et al, 2000; Farkas & Nicolellis 2003). Based on this original Psychiatric Rehabilitation component, VPS added the concept of “Considering” work to the vocational process of Choose-Get-Keep and called the techniques used to support someone considering work “Motivational Foundations.” Considering whether or not to Choose, Get, or Keep work allows people who are unsure about work to explore factors, such as their need for a change, their beliefs about working, information about themselves, their options, and whether or not they have enough supports for making a change now.

What is Vocational Recovery? Vocational Recovery in VPS is defined as “*an individualized journey of claiming or reclaiming one’s right and capacity to choose, get, and keep vocational paths.*” This definition affirms the basic *right* of people with psychiatric disabilities to both have and go after their vocational dreams. Research over the past few decades clearly has indicated that psychiatric diagnoses are not good predictors of people’s *capacity* to work, or even the types of work that people can do (Rogers & MacDonald Wilson, 2011).

Training in Vocational Peer Support

Introduction. VPS training may assist programs that are considering adding VPS to the repertoire in order to increase participation of service participants in employment and education.

Structure. Vocational Peer Support training is a 5-6 day class through which participants are exposed and have experience with concepts, skills, and tools of VPS. The core training is five days, with an optional sixth day of Social Security Work Incentives overview. Each day is composed of six hours of actual training time, with an additional 1.5 hours of breaks throughout the day.

VPS training involves community-based assignments that allow for in-vivo practice of new skills between training sessions. The assignments allow trainees to explore community employment support resources as well as opportunities to explore VPS concepts, tools, and skills with people served in their own workplaces.

Trainers. VPS trainers have expertise in peer support, psychiatric rehabilitation, recovery, and employment support. Lived experience of recovery and peer support is an important characteristic of those who offer the training. It is expected that at least one half of the training team is made up of people with lived experience of recovery and peer support.

VPS Trainees. VPS training works best for Peer Support Specialists, i.e. people with lived experience of recovery from the impact of mental illnesses and/or the public mental health system/addiction services:

- Who have full training and/or certification in the information, skills, and ethics of providing peer support
- Who are currently providing peer support

It should be noted, however, that experience shows that VPS training is best utilized in organizations that also train supervisors and other supporters of peer staff in VPS.

Training Style. VPS trainers engage trainees in learning in a variety of ways, by engaging active participation of the class in dynamic class discussions, showing examples, demonstrating skill performance, and leading active exercises to teach people how to perform key VPS skills. Trainers work to attend to a variety of learning styles throughout the training to accommodate auditory, visual, kinetic, and other learners.

Skills and Tools of the VPS Training Curriculum

Vocational Peer Support adds competencies for peer support specialists so that they are able to support people who want to Consider, Choose, Get, and Keep jobs, training programs, and careers. Throughout the training, participants learn how to “scaffold” people’s efforts to move forward in their vocational lives through a variety of ways.

The following list describes the major VPS Training Modules (Nicolellis & Legere, 2015):

- **Partnering** offers enhanced orienting, listening, and sharing skills that peer specialists need to work effectively with people who are interested in exploring their vocational lives.
- **Building Motivational Foundations** enhances skills that Certified Peer Specialists need in order to support people who are considering a change in their vocational lives to explore and build the foundations for a meaningful vocational life.
- **Supporting Choice in Work and School** allows peer specialists to learn how to support people to identify their work preferences, research potential job options, and make choices about a best match.
- **Scaffolding Getting into Jobs and School** gives peer specialists new ways to think about supporting people as they go after the jobs of their choice.
- **Keeping Work and School** teaches peer specialists additional competencies needed to support the new or potential worker in identifying strengths and areas that need to be built up to increase the likelihood of success and satisfaction on the job (or in training).
- **Coordinating with Employment Services Providers** gives peer specialists the information, skills, and tools they need to support access to and utilization of vocational services.
- **Supporting Informed Decisions about Benefits** provides basic information peer specialists may need about Social Security benefits and work to enhance the CPS’s ability to support people to utilize benefit specialists and programs in their communities.