



## Informed Choice Analysis and Recommendations April 12, 2021

**Background:** The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires that Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) assist individuals with disabilities receiving vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to exercise informed choice throughout the VR process. 34 CFR 361.52 outlines OOD's specific responsibilities in doing so.

**Activities:** OOD has completed several activities to gather feedback about the current informed choice process with the goal to enhance current practices. These activities included:

- Surveying current program participants by phone;
- Conducting refresher training with local field staff and holding discussions about their experience with the current process;
- Conducting targeted case reviews of case documentation surrounding informed choice;
- Holding discussions with the OOD Council and the OOD Council Policy Subcommittee to obtain feedback; and
- Obtaining public comment on the Informed Choice Policy

### Results:

**Participant Surveys:** During the month of November 2020, OOD field office support staff (other than counselors) contacted individuals with disabilities currently receiving services and reviewed survey questions via phone or other appropriate mode of communication. The survey questions were designed to gather information about their experience in exercising informed choice while working with OOD. Each VR team randomly selected 3 participants from a variety of caseloads to be surveyed for a total of 143 surveys completed. Themes from the results of the survey included:

- An overwhelming majority (99%) of the participants surveyed indicated that they were given an opportunity to choose their employment goal based on their strengths, concerns, and abilities.
- The majority of responses (81%) indicated that when working with their counselor, they were given information to help them choose a service provider.

- Participants generally were satisfied with the support, contact, and guidance from their counselor when making decisions about their services. They described their counselors as patient, supportive, and helpful. Of the survey results, 93% were satisfied, 3% were not satisfied, and 4% were indifferent or did not respond.
- Participants commented that their counselors were informative about resources available to them, such as Work Incentives Planning and OOD's ability to assist with work related items, such as uniforms and shoes.
- Scorecard usage appears to be somewhat limited during the provider selection process. Of the survey results, 18% indicated that they received information from the scorecard, 40% did not receive information from the scorecard but knew about the existence and purpose of it, and 42% did not seem to have knowledge of the scorecard.

Field Staff Feedback: In July of 2020, OOD's Policy and Training Unit shared helpful tips, reminders, and resources with all staff regarding informed choice. This information was then discussed at local team meetings for review and feedback. As a result, Supervisory staff provided input on ways to enhance current practices with informed choice throughout the VR process. Field staff provided the following observations about the informed choice process:

- A more participant friendly version of the provider scorecards should be developed so the information is easier to present and understand.
- Additional information should be made available to participants to aid them in making provider selections. Specific suggestions included: more qualitative information about providers, a narrative about their services (developed by the provider), employer partnerships, available Community Based Assessment sites, etc.
- Providers could make available user-friendly websites about services, digital brochures, success stories, etc. that could be linked in OOD's Provider Management Portal (PMP) or otherwise shared with participants.
- Additional tools need to be available for people with limited computer skills or access.
- A survey or some other way to collect participant's experience in working with providers (by service and overall) should be developed and shared to aid in the decision-making process.
- An additional statement in the individual's rights information should be considered to make sure they know about informed choice and what they can do if they feel they are not being given the opportunity to exercise it.
- More information about provider capacity should be made available and the accuracy of information in Provider Search about the provider's availability to deliver services in a specific area should be improved.

OOD Council and Public Comment: Discussion about the Informed Choice Policy and the Vocational Rehabilitation Selection of a Provider Information Sheet was held at the February 10, 2021 OOD Council Policy Subcommittee meeting. Committee members

suggested providing more specific guidance to participants on where to find information about available providers. In addition, it was suggested that it be made clear to participants how the counselor, as well as other representatives, can help support them in making informed choices and that OOD should encourage participants to seek help in making decisions if they need it. Committee members suggested short videos that could help people understand the information that is available to them as well as an information sheet about informed choice in selecting an employment goal.

OOD requested public comment on the Informed Choice Policy from 3/2/21 to 3/11/21. Two comments were received and based on these comments, OOD revised the policy as follows:

- Added clarity and expectation that the provision of information be presented in a fair and equitable manner, and that VR staff shall not interject personal bias into the informed choice discussion;
- Included language supporting the involvement of an individual's authorized representative in the decision-making process; and
- Included language surrounding the availability of support services for those who require assistance in exercising informed choice

**Next Steps:** Based upon analysis of the feedback received, it is recommended that OOD take the following steps to enhance the ability to support individuals with disabilities to exercise informed choice.

- 1. Work with the OOD Council to update the Vocational Rehabilitation Selection of a Provider Information Sheet. Update agency policy and procedure and provide training to staff.** The suggestions from the OOD Council Policy Subcommittee meeting were used to draft an update to the Vocational Rehabilitation Selection of a Provider Information Sheet that will be discussed with the full OOD Council at their April meeting. The Informed Choice Policy is currently going through the Agency's internal policy review process with an anticipated implementation date in July. Training on these policy changes will occur in May/June of 2021. This training will include philosophical perspectives of the facilitation of informed choice, policy/procedural requirements, and ethical considerations.
- 2. Enhance the Provider Management Portal, Provider Search, and Provider Scorecards to improve the information provided to individuals with disabilities who are selecting a vocational rehabilitation provider.** The creation of more user-friendly tools will improve customer service and strengthen the ability of individuals with disabilities to fully exercise their informed choice. OOD's Department of Information Technology is continuing to work on enhancements to these tools. OOD will engage in additional dialogue with the OOD Council and the provider community to continue the enhancement process.
- 3. Identify and implement a strategy to gather and make available customer satisfaction information regarding providers from individuals with disabilities.** The customer satisfaction of individuals who have previously received service from a provider is an important consideration for individuals currently selecting a provider. Federal regulations require OOD to provide

information about consumer satisfaction to aid individuals with disabilities in exercising informed choice. OOD will engage in additional dialogue with the OOD Council and the provider community to develop a strategy for collecting this information and making it available to individuals receiving services.

**4. Improve consistency of case documentation regarding informed choice conversations by implementing a new case noting structure for field staff.**

There is inconsistency in how staff document informed choice conversations with program participants within case notes. A consistent case recording structure will support increased quality of documentation by staff. Training on case documentation will coincide with the Informed Choice Policy training mentioned above. This training will include an adaptation of a case noting structure specifically developed for VR Agencies and will address when to use this case noting structure and examples on how to write these case notes.