



Association of Community  
Rehabilitation Educators



Certified Employment  
Support Professional



# APSE/ACRE State Guidelines for Employment Services Personnel Training Certificates or Certification

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Offered by a collaboration of the ACRE Board of Directors and the APSE Certification Council (ESPCC). Both organizations would like to acknowledge David Mank for his role in the creation of this document.

State agencies have the opportunity to support professional development of Employment Support Personnel in the interest of Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) outcomes for people with significant disabilities. The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for consideration in state agencies' decision making about requiring employment support personnel to acquire certificates of training, or certification as Employment Support Professionals. The professional development expectations in states is often happening in a broader context of multiple systemic changes to promote the expansion of CIE.

There are two, complimentary approaches to professional development designed for job coaches, job developers, transition specialists, job placement personnel and employment specialists or consultants who serve a wide variety of groups including individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health diagnosis, persons with sensory impairments, physical disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, or autism spectrum disorders.

The Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE), offers two types of Certificates: an Employment Services Certificate and an Employment Services Certificate with an emphasis on Customized Employment. Each of these certificates may be offered at a basic level (40 hours of training), or at professional level (an additional 20-40 hours of training). These Certificates are awarded based on individual successful completion of all training requirements. Since 2005 ACRE Training providers have awarded certificates to more than 14,000 professionals across the USA who have obtained a certificate in either Employment Services, or Customized Employment, at a basic or professional level.

<http://acreducators.org/>



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The Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) offers a Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP) credential recognizing individuals who have demonstrated a sufficient level of knowledge and skills to provide integrated employment services to a variety of populations of people with disabilities.

There are currently more than 3,150 Certified Employment Support Professionals in the USA. <https://apse.org/cesp-central/> CESP examinations are now offered on a bi-monthly basis in all 50 states. The Employment Support Professional Certification Council (ESPCC) announced that the Certified Employment Support Professional™ Certification was awarded its 5-year accreditation in August 2019 by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). CESP™ Certification was awarded its initial 5-year accreditation in 2014.

The NCCA's Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs, were the first standards developed by the credentialing industry for professional certification programs. The NCCA Standards were developed to help ensure the health, welfare, and safety of the public. They highlight the essential elements of a high-quality program.

The NCCA standards are consistent with The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing. (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999) and are applicable to all professions and industries. Certification organizations that submit their programs for accreditation are evaluated based on the process and products and not the content; therefore, the Standards are applicable to all professions and industries. Program content validity is demonstrated with a comprehensive job analysis conducted and analyzed by experts, with data gathered from stakeholders in the occupation or industry. <https://apse.org/reaccreditation-awarded-certification/> In addition, ACRE reviews curriculum and trainers for approval to provide competency-based training. While APSE oversees the certification examination, for individuals to demonstrate their competency to provide employment supports in inclusive workplaces to individuals with disabilities.

It is important to note a distinction between ACRE Training and CESP as Certification. ACRE Certificates are awarded based on completion of the required training. CESP certification is awarded based on passing the CESP Examination, showing a sufficient level of knowledge and skills to provide integrated employment services. APSE's CESP credential is a certification, which requires ongoing training in order to maintain the CESP certification. Please see the CESP/ACRE comparison at the end of this document.

State Agencies responsible for providing employment services for people with disabilities have begun to address the training and competency needs of employment support personnel.

This includes state: Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities agencies, Mental or Behavioral Health agencies, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Departments of Education. At this time, 14 states are requiring ACRE Certificates and/or CESP Credentials for disability support personnel. The primary goal is an increase and improvement in CIE outcomes, by developing personnel with sufficient knowledge and skills to provide quality CIE services.

In the experience of these states to date, it has been important to consider training on CIE in the broader context of systemic reform. It has been useful to identify funding sources for both training organizations and resources for training of staff members of provider agencies. Some states have also set requirements for accreditation of provider agencies (e.g. CARF), in addition to staff certificates or certification. In addition, it has been useful when states create this requirement in the context of coordinated delivery of training statewide.

In some circumstances, challenges have been encountered:

- When states have set a certificate or certification requirement without considering the training resources needed or the availability of such training statewide (both the capacity to deliver training, and the funding necessary to sustainably support delivery);
- When the requirement timeline makes it difficult to deliver the needed training; when personnel selected for training are not clear on how this training relates to their job duties, or may not meet work experience requirements for certification; or,
- When there is not a plan for continued training or mentorship.

There are a number of factors to consider, and decisions to be made, as state agencies review the requirements of employment training certificates or certification. These include issues of scope, capacity, financial resources, timelines for implementation and more.

1. What is the goal of requiring certificates or certification of related personnel?
2. How can ACRE certificates or CESP credentials help meet this goal?

3. Which state agencies should be involved or responsible for related professional development?
4. What is the current, and needed commitment, to CIE, or the provider agencies whose staff will receive training?
5. How does such training relate to the roles and responsibilities of the staff members who will participate?
6. Is there potential for ongoing training, technical assistance and mentoring available to staff who receive initial employment services training?
7. How many individuals will need training in the next few years, and on an ongoing basis in subsequent years?
8. What training organizations are available to provide the needed training and ongoing support?
9. Who should pay the related training costs? State Agencies? Provider Agencies? Individuals? Or some combination?
10. What incentives can be offered to support agencies whose staff are trained (e.g. higher reimbursement rates), or to individuals (e.g. higher pay)?
11. Is it possible to develop or incorporate a data system to document training, costs, and CIE outcomes?
12. Consider possible consequences (intended and unintended) of requiring certificates or certification. To people with disabilities? To employment support personnel? To provider agencies?

#### Guidelines for State Agencies

1. Establish goals for Professional Development of employment support personnel.
2. Decide on Professional Development expectations and requirements, including minimal standard requirement and any required ongoing professional development.
3. Develop interagency commitment and collaboration on ACRE/CESP requirements (e.g. VR/DD/MH/ED).
4. Specify the personnel audiences in provider agencies for whom a national certificate will be required.
5. Assess the volume of training needed based on estimates of the number of individuals in the workforce in need of training.
6. Identify training and professional development organizations who can provide related training, and assess their capacity to meet the professional development needs. Create a Registry of Training Organizations, with their capacity and availability.

7. Encourage Provider Agencies to recruit and hire employment support personnel with a preference for applicants listed in the ACRE Certificate Registry, or those who hold a CESP credential.
8. Promote continuing education of employment support personnel beyond initial ACRE/CESP, including further training on CIE, and mentoring.
9. Consider a mix of training methodologies, including on-line and in person training.
10. Promote technical assistance to provider agencies that provide CIE services.
11. Develop a financial plan of needed resources to provide training, including costs for Training Organizations and for individuals' cost to participate.
12. Discuss, and possibly develop incentives for provider agencies and employment support personnel.
13. Establish a plan and timelines for professional development and for requiring ACRE or CESP statewide.
14. Investigate the possibility of a data system to document training, certification, and related outcomes.

It is also important to note that continued research is needed, about the impact and effectiveness of professional development investment, including CIE outcomes, staff retention, and staff turnover.

For additional information please contact:

APSE Employment Support Professional Certification Council (ESPCC)  
Contact APSE directly at 301-279-0060 and the ESPCC at [espcc@apse.org](mailto:espcc@apse.org)

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	<b>Certified Employment Support Professional™ Certification (CESP)</b>	<b>ACRE Certificates: Employment Services or Customized Employment (Basic or Professional)</b>
<b>Education Requirements</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High School Diploma or equivalent.</li> <li>2. At least 9 months Work Experience (with a qualified training) or 1+ year (working 20+ hours/week in CIE supports). See website for more information.</li> <li>3. Sign code of conduct.</li> </ol>	<p>Basic Level training has no pre-requisites or requirements.</p> <p>Professional Level training requires 1 year of work experiences in employment support services.</p>
<b>Training</b>	N/A	<p>Basic Level: 40 hour training minimum.</p> <p>Professional Level: additional 20-40 hours of training</p>
<b>Assessment</b>	Assessed through 3 hour examination.	Competency based training to enhance knowledge and skills.
<b>Certification or Certificate</b>	Nationally Accredited Professional Certification.	Certificate of Completion.
<b>Availability</b>	Bi-Monthly at testing centers nationwide.	Training offered by ACRE approved training organizations nationwide. Available: in person, online, and hybrid models of training.
<b>Cost</b>	\$199 per examination attempt. \$125 Recertification Fee.	Cost varies by training organization. Average range: \$500-\$900 per person.
<b>Ongoing Professional Development Requirements</b>	Credential holders must recertify every 3 years by: retaking CESP Examination, OR submitting documentation of 36 hours of continuing education credit related to employment supports.	<p>No requirements to retain Certificate.</p> <p>Certificate of completion does not expire.</p> <p>No continuing education requirements.</p>