



Florida  
Consortium  
on Inclusive  
Higher Education

## Florida IPSE Credential Guidance Brief: # 4 Partnerships toward Credential Development

The Florida Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) Credential Guidance Brief Series is comprised of a set of six stand-alone briefs developed by the **Florida Consortium on Inclusive Higher Education (FCIHE)** and a small workgroup, in consultation with a statewide steering committee. These briefs were written to provide guidance to Florida stakeholders regarding credential development for Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) programs for students with intellectual disability (ID).

**AUDIENCE:** This brief is directed to

- 1) college and university faculty and staff planning to build or expand sustainable and rigorous IPSE programs,
- 2) families and educators exploring and comparing IPSE programs; and
- 3) community agency and school district personnel to increase program understanding, recognition, credibility and increased options for individuals with ID.

A meaningful program credential is required to become a federally recognized **Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Program (CTP)** and a Florida recognized **Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program (FPCTP)**. Credentials increase students' employment outcomes and career opportunities in multiple ways. For example, credentials enable businesses to identify a student's expected skill sets upon program completion and to recognize credentialed applicants as qualified applicants. Credentials earned through IPSE programs or typical degree-seeking programs, *and* sponsored by the college or university, represent valid and rigorous programs of study. These Credential Guidance Briefs have several Florida-specific points of information as they were written for Florida, but those families, program staff, and faculty outside of Florida, may find the general IPSE information useful.

**SERIES:** The **Florida IPSE Credential Guidance Brief Series** includes:

- # 1 Background on Inclusive Postsecondary Education
- # 2 Programs of Study
- # 3 Exploring Existing Credentials
- # 4 Partnerships toward Credential Development
- # 5 FCIHE Credential Action Planning Tool (FCAPT)
- # 6 Credentialing Resources

**ABOUT THIS BRIEF:** In this **IPSE Credential Guidance Brief: # 4 Partnerships Toward Credential Development** the reader will find information on the importance of partnerships inside the institution between colleges, departments, or offices and the inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) program staff as well as partnerships with community members, organizations, and agencies. In this brief, the focus of these partnerships is on strategies for IPSE program and credential development. Once a program is on its feet, these same partnerships can facilitate the support and achievement of the students with intellectual disability, program sustainability, and transitions to post graduate employment.

In the first section, the importance of establishing an IPSE Advisory Committee and the stakeholders to include is discussed. The next four sections represent categories of partnerships, including institutional, business and industry, workforce development providers, and community agencies. Within each category are examples of

potential or suggested partners and brief explanations of each regarding their importance to an IPSE program and potential resources. The final section provides a list acronyms, terms, and resources. The many partnerships discussed in this document are just a beginning toward developing meaningful credentials. Each higher education community has its own culture and priorities. You may find additional partnerships not mentioned here that have helped you develop your IPSE program, credential, and/or plan for sustainability. Share those with us, so we can pass them on.

### Introduction



Partnerships are essential for IPSE program development. There are many existing campus and community resources that students with ID, families, and program staff should seek out when developing each student's circle of supports toward success in college, employment, and self-determined lives. While it may appear easier to develop a set of separate support mechanisms for college students with ID, it is often not sustainable and detracts from the students' options and belonging in the campus community.

Strategic partnerships facilitate access to and awareness of these resources and develop strong reciprocal relationships that can support sustainability. For an IPSE program to be truly inclusive, partnerships must be formed to encourage students

to access existing campus and community resources available to all students. When students graduate from the IPSE program to become self-determined, employed community members, it is the many community resources they have learned to access, that will support them toward responsible employment and life decisions. One mechanism IPSE program staff can use to develop and sustain these partnerships is an IPSE advisory committee.

### The IPSE Advisory Committee and Credential Development

Establishing an IPSE advisory committee is a Quality Indicator within the Think College Standard related to sustainability. This committee serves to support collaboration between the IPSE program, the institute of higher education and community agencies and businesses. Community agencies and businesses are important stakeholders as they will be the recipients of the graduating students either by providing community living or employment supports or by employing them (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). Grigal and colleagues recommend your advisory team include individuals from the following four stakeholders' categories:

1. Institution of higher education (IHE), including
  - Administrators (deans, provosts, department chair)
  - Faculty (physical therapy, communication, education, psychology and any number of others)
  - Disability services office
  - Other institutional services and supports (see below)
2. Businesses and community agencies, including
  - Disability-specific agencies
  - Relevant community agencies
  - Local business leaders
  - Workforce development providers
3. Families
4. Students

Advisory Committee membership can facilitate strong partnerships with campus and community organizations that may serve or impact the students enrolled in an IPSE program. Inviting these partners to serve on your advisory committee is a proactive step to developing reciprocal relationships and spreading awareness of the goals of your IPSE program and students. The advisory committee may serve a number of needs; student supports, internship locations, employee pool, collaborative relationships, evaluative program input, strategies for growth, community outreach, credential development and/or alignment to local business's needs. For more information on forming advisory committees, go to "Tips for the Creation of a Program Advisory Board" (2018) at <https://thinkcollege.net/resource/program-development/tips-for-the-creation-of-a-program-advisory-board>.

### **Institutional Partnerships**

**A Credential Home.** Developing campus 'community' partnerships and accessing campus administration, faculty, and resources should be the first steps in developing an IPSE program. Administration and faculty are two key partners in this process and equally important. From the administration, you will need to find a home for the credential. We identified limited options when exploring credential development and the college or department in which it could be housed. The office of the Provost or Academic Affairs and the individuals who deal with accreditation will be key players, depending upon the size and organization of the institution. Identify your institution's accreditation requirements, regarding credential development. If there are concerns regarding accreditation and credential approval, a second option is to contact the office of Continuing Education to inquire about a home for a new credential. Once you have identified where the credential will be housed, you have a base from which to begin. Faculty can serve to champion the program to the administration as well as to peers when advocating for credential development. Finding champions for the IPSE program who are willing to negotiate the hurdles, is crucial and an important aspect of each partnership.

There are numerous departments and resources available for students on every college campus. Exploring these existing resources and developing partnerships should be an early step in developing an IPSE credential and program. Developing inter- office or departmental partnerships within your institution will go a long way in 1) identifying existing credentials and resources, 2) informing and providing awareness to your institutional community of the IPSE credential and program, and 3) supporting student belonging within the campus communities. Accessing existing credentials (most often at technical colleges), student supports, and services is invaluable for engendering belonging among a diverse student population. It is important to remember that students enrolled in an IPSE program are members of the institution; they are authentic college students paying the same student tuition and fees for the same courses and campus resources. This section provides a few examples of potential on-campus partners and resources to engage when developing and IPSE credential and program.

The **Financial Aid Department**, at your institution, should be one of your first partners. This office will be crucial for obtaining Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Program (CTP) and Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program (FPCTP) approvals. A strong working relationship and understanding of financial aid will ensure student access to Federal Work Study and student scholarships, if applicable. Further, IPSE programs should work with the financial aid department with regard to any programmatic fees that may be associated with the IPSE program.

The **Disability Services Office (DSO)** on your campus, is another important partnership as there is an expectation that students with intellectual disability will need support to access their texts and

coursework, and complete assignments. Your DSO already provides academic support services to students with disabilities and will be a key partner in developing individualized academic and social supports. Develop a strong alliance to facilitate a collaborative stance on your campus. The DSO and IPSE program can equally speak to disability as diversity and provide clarity about the complementary roles played by each. Think College features an online course related to the IPSE and DSO collaborative partnership, called “Accessing Disability Services” available at <https://thinkcollege.net/think-college-learn/accessing-disability-services-0>.

**Career Development Centers** (also called career services, employment centers, etc.), provide valuable planning, assessment, placement and job development opportunities for all enrolled students. This is a crucial resource for students enrolled in IPSE programs who may have had fewer work experiences from which to understand some of the hiring nuances and employment cultures. Students should be encouraged to attend the many workshops and job fairs sponsored by your career development center.

**Counseling Services** may be available free-of-charge from your institution for enrolled students. As with any student, attending college can be stressful. Partnering with the college or department that provides services such as individual counseling, group therapy, educational workshops, crisis intervention and walk-in services, is an important collaboration for an IPSE program. Understanding how to attend to personal and mental health needs is an important self-determination skill for students who may not have been aware of these opportunities.

**Institutional Foundations** are an important partner to engage. The **Foundation** or a “Giving” department on campus may assist with enabling fundraising opportunities to support student scholarships and other sustainability opportunities.

The supports and organizations offered by each IHE vary tremendously based on a number of factors (IHE type, IHE size, student population, programs offered, etc.). Given this variance, IPSE program staff should communicate with each entity on campus to identify ways to partner and support engagement by the students with ID. Other sources to consider and engage for strategic partnerships include:

- Library learning commons (tutorials, computer access)
- Student Life and Leadership
- Student clubs and organizations

### **Business and Industry Partnerships**

Credential development begins with engaging local businesses and industry leaders. *Local Business Leadership Networks (BLNs)* and *Chambers of Commerce* are a few of the organizations where strong partnerships can assist in determining local community and employment needs. Partnering with these leadership networks enables your staff to establish a network of relationships with employers and specifically those seeking capable employees. Their feedback on the types of industry, skills and credential requirements is invaluable as you develop your credential(s) and corresponding program of study.

### **Workforce Development Providers**

**Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)** is a federal-state program that helps people with disabilities get and keep jobs that enhance their independence (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, 2019). VR assigns and trains counselor liaisons to work with the IPSE program in each region of the state. VR Liaisons work with both the secondary and postsecondary institutions to identify appropriate student referrals and

may serve on IPSE program selection committees. Florida VR can provide support to eligible students with disabilities to participate in IPSE programs. However, the supports VR provides depend upon a few variables including the student's status (i.e. whether they have exited high school), their individualized plan for employment (IPE), the best path or IPSE program to achieve that goal, and VR's identification of the student's individualized needs.

VR is a natural collaborative partner to support students with ID in postsecondary education toward employment training, job placement and job coaching. However, it is critical to coordinate with VR prior to IPSE program enrollment or at the very least, at the beginning of a student's IPSE program. VR may financially support a student's postsecondary education courses and internships, as long as they are aligned with VR's Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) for the student and the coursework and internships are requirements of the identified credential and corresponding program of study the student is seeking.

VR has identified most IPSE programs as providers of a vocational training service with employment at the intended outcome. To deliver any other service type (pre-employment transition or employment services-Pre-ETS), the IHE may need to apply to become a provider of the additional service type.

IPSE programs whose students with ID are concurrently enrolled in the K-12 school system and postsecondary education should coordinate with VR regarding potential support of job training and internships. Programs that include staff who are registered to provide VR Employment or Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) may offer Work-Based Learning Experiences or On-the-Job-Training which must comply with VR service requirements. Additional Pre-ETS, such as Self-Advocacy Training or Youth Peer Mentoring, may be offered by the appropriate provider type and VR service requirements will apply. VR does not have a cap on the amount of funding for the support of students participating in IPSE programs.

VR cannot support services that the school district provides under the auspices of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including the following:

- Dual Enrollment Courses
- Local Education Agency FTE delivered instruction
- Services supported with the McKay Scholarship (scholarship for secondary education)

VR may also support the following services for students who are not served under IDEA (applicable to those who have graduated without deferment or exited high school):

- Tuition and fees (Courses must align with the student's career goal on their VR Individual Plan for Employment- IPE)
- Books, supplies and equipment for approved coursework
- Assistive services and devices needed to prepare for or be employed
- Transportation assistance

**Best Buddies**, an organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, has many chapters on college and university campuses national and internationally that help promote social inclusion and facilitate relationships. Best Buddies now has an employment-focused component, **Best Buddies Jobs**, which secures jobs and provides job coaching for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Best Buddies Jobs focuses on finding work that matches the job seeker's interests and talents. For more information on Best Buddies Jobs, visit:

<https://www.bestbuddies.org/jobs/>.

**CareerSource Florida** is the statewide workforce policy and investment board. They have local centers that support businesses and job-seekers to promote successful employment outcomes with the goal of connecting businesses with the talented workforce and the training needed to succeed and grow. CareerSource Florida is a good source for IPSE programs to inquire about local and regional workforce needs and trends. For more information, visit: <https://careersourceflorida.com/about-us/>.

### Community Agency Partnerships

**Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)** works in partnership with local communities and private providers to assist people who have developmental disabilities and their families by providing assistance in identifying the needs of people with developmental disabilities for supports and services. APD is part of the *Employment First Interagency Cooperative Agreement* and has several employment initiatives, including the *Abilities Work* web portal and help desk which helps connect Florida employers to a qualified workforce inclusive of people with disabilities. The *Employment Enhancement Project (EEP)* is another initiative intended to facilitate collaboration among APD, local school districts, local work force career centers, and other collaborating agencies and organizations to work together to assist young adults who are leaving school, and others who are currently on the *APD iBudget (aka Medicaid Waiver) Waiting List*, to secure competitive employment.

The EEP can be utilized for the following services:

- Supported Employment coaching to secure a good job match;
- Supported Employment follow-along services to help retain the job;
- Assistance with transportation needed for work and securing paid internships as pathways to competitive employment.

More information on APD's employment initiatives can be found at: <http://www.apdcares.org/customers/supported-employment/>.

**Disability-Focused Agencies & Organizations** vary in size and resources. Some may be able to provide resources and supports during the students' college program. IPSE programs should seek to partner with local agencies to both share the IPSE program as well as access any appropriate supports or services they may provide. These agencies are important resources for families and students as well, during and after their college program. Assisting students to become familiar with these agencies and the services and supports provides knowledge and access during and after their transition from college to increased self-sufficiency. A limited list of these agencies might include *Autism associations, the ARC, Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD), Centers for Independent Living, Division of Blind Services, Down Syndrome associations or foundations, Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, and Independent living and supported work agencies (such as Quest Inc. or the ARC)*.

**Local Educational Agencies (LEAs)** are your local school districts who are required to assist students with disabilities in planning for their transition from high school to the 'next steps' of employment, increased independence, needed supports, and/or community engagement. A number of Florida's IPSE programs have partnered with their LEA to develop and sustain their IPSE program. When an IPSE program partners with an LEA by enrolling current high school students with disabilities in a college program of study, these students are considered concurrently enrolled in both high school and college. If your program is engaged with your LEA to provide concurrent enrollment to students with disabilities, invite LEA personnel to participate in the credential development process. This partnership can facilitate a strong potential pool of applicants and insight into student strengths and support needs.

**Non-Disability-Focused Agencies** are an important resource and partnership opportunity to remember as well. These entities might include but are certainly not limited to literacy learning centers (Florida Literacy Coalition), libraries, YMCAs, Volunteer organizations (such as Volunteers of America of Florida), mental health agencies, and the Red Cross. One Florida IPSE partnered with a volunteer literacy organization to help increase students' reading skills and assist with tutoring on the college campus.

### Acronyms, Terms, and Resources

**AbilitiesWork:** An Employment First employment initiative, a web portal and help desk to connect Florida employers to a qualified workforce inclusive of people with disabilities.

<https://abilitieswork.employflorida.com/vosnet/Default.aspx>

**Accessing Disability Services web course:** a Think College free online course related to the IPSE and DSO collaborative partnerships, available at <https://thinkcollege.net/think-college-learn/accessing-disability-services-0>.

**Advisory Committee Development Tips:** <https://thinkcollege.net/resource/program-development/tips-for-the-creation-of-a-program-advisory-board>.

**APD:** The Agency for Persons with Disabilities. <http://www.apdcares.org/customers/supported-employment/>.

**APSE:** The Association of People Supporting Employment First, is the only national organization with an exclusive focus on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

**Best Buddies Jobs:** <https://www.bestbuddies.org/jobs/>.

**BLN:** Business Leadership Network

**CareerSource Florida:** a statewide workforce policy and investment board that supports businesses and job-seekers to obtain successful employee/employment outcomes.

<https://careersourceflorida.com/about-us/>.

**Career Services:** Most institutions of higher education have a career services (career development center) office with assists students with the job search as they are finishing their program of study. These services often include employment-related workshops and seminars as well as job fairs.

**Competitive Integrated Employment:** Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE), real work for real pay is the gold standard of transition outcomes for students with disabilities. The work should align with the post-school employment goals of the student and is the desired transition outcome for all students with disabilities who choose to work, regardless of disability or needed accommodations or support. CIE should be a realistic and desirable expectation for all students.

**Concurrent Enrollment:** Also referred to as dual enrollment, where students with intellectual disability are still enrolled in high school while also enrolled and taking college classes at a college or university. Concurrent enrollment guidelines for students with ID vary somewhat from the dual enrollment guidelines for students without intellectual disability.

**CTP:** Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Program; a set of federal guidelines, set out in HEOA of 2008, that defines an inclusive postsecondary education program for individuals with intellectual disability. Students attending institutions of higher education, who apply for and receive CTP approval, may access specific Federal Student Aid. See [CTP requirements](#) or the [FCIHE Brief 1.17](#) for more information.

**DSO:** Disability services offices, most institutions of higher education have a DSO, to assist students with disabilities to succeed in college through assistive technologies and other needed supports.

**Employment Enhancement Project (EEP):** an initiative intended to facilitate collaboration among APD, local school districts, local work force career centers, and other collaborating agencies and organizations to work together to assist young adults who are leaving school.

**Employment First:** means that employment in the general workforce should be the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities receiving assistance from publicly funded systems. Simply put, Employment First means real jobs, real wages. See <http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/> for more Florida specific information.

**FCIHE:** Florida Consortium on Inclusive Higher Education, [www.FCIHE.com](http://www.FCIHE.com)

**FCSUA:** Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities, [www.FCSUA.org](http://www.FCSUA.org)

**FPCTP:** Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program

**HEOA:** Higher Education Opportunity Act (2008)

**iBudget:** The Medicaid iBudget Waiver provides home and community-based supports and services to eligible persons with developmental disabilities living at home or in a home-like setting, utilize an individual budgeting approach, and provide enhanced opportunities for self-determination.

**IDEA:** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

**ID:** Intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18. Generally, an IQ test score 70 or below indicates an intellectual disability.

**IHE:** Institution of higher education; a university, state, or technical college

**IPSE:** Inclusive Postsecondary Education Program; enrollment in an on-campus college program, in which students with intellectual disability attend academically inclusive college courses, engage in campus clubs and activities with their peers without disability, increase personal development and life skills, earn a career focused credential with the goal of integrated competitive employment upon graduation.

**IPE:** Individual Plan for Employment. An individualized plan developed by a VR counselor for and individual eligible for VR services and who wants to work.

**IPSE:** Inclusive postsecondary education

**LEAs:** Local Education Agencies

**Medicaid Waiver:** Medicaid Waiver programs help provide services to eligible individuals who require significant long-term support to live in the community. This means they can stay in their own home or a community setting (such as a relative's home or a supported living community) instead of going into a nursing facility.

**Pre ETS:** pre-employment transition or employment services funded through Vocational Rehabilitation

**ThinkCollege:** Think College is the National Coordinating Center for the Federal TPSID projects, [www.ThinkCollege.net](http://www.ThinkCollege.net). See Think College for a list of the National TPSID programs.

**TPSID:** A federal discretionary program to increase and enhance inclusive postsecondary education for students with intellectual disability. Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability. See [www.FCIHE.com](http://www.FCIHE.com) for a list of Florida's TPSID programs and contacts.

**VR:** Vocational Rehabilitation, Florida Department of VR, <http://www.rehabworks.org/>



**WIOA:** The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Acts (2014) is a comprehensive federal law, intended to streamline, consolidate, and improve workforce development and training services for various groups, including youth and workers with disabilities.

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