

# IMPACTING AN INDUSTRY:

## Aligning Trade Association Value With Member Need and Industry Demand

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### Background

Ohio Provider Resource Agency (OPRA) leaders desire for this trade association to be a relevant, valuable resource to organization members. Leadership identified that the required Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP) credential appeared to be associated with industry barriers, including customer wait lists and member agency hardships due to difficulties in staff obtaining the credential. OPRA leadership noted that the most significant hurdle to overcome was the overwhelming need for more information on the nuances of the complex problem.

#### Driving Research Question

How can OPRA secure its position as a significant resource, advocate, and source of information to its stakeholders by effecting change in employment specialist qualifications in the Ohio vocational rehabilitation industry to positively impact individuals with disabilities and employer workforce needs?

### Literature Review

An extensive literature review was conducted to understand the problem from multiple angles and focus further research. Critical conclusions derived from the review brought insight into the problem.

- While a federal standard for employment specialist qualification may not exist, only 10 states do not require some form of qualification (Reisen et al., 2022).
- Appropriate education, professional experience, and a national certification advance the profession of vocational rehabilitation counselors overall (Aliff & Sprong, 2020). These qualifications lead to higher quality experiences and outcomes for individuals with disabilities (Sherman et al., 2019).
- Quality of employment services can be measured in tangible outcomes, such as wages and hours, and in intangible outcomes, such as job satisfaction and service experience (Krause et al., 2018; Teixeira et al., 2020).

### Research Methods

An exploratory study was designed in light of the lack of information and complexity of the problem, utilizing quantitative and qualitative data.

- Quantitative dataset provided by OPRA with employment outcome data from member agencies
- Qualitative interviews were conducted with six agencies
- Thematic analysis of the data to identify themes

### Key Findings

- The CESP has a mixed impact on quality employment outcomes.
- The cost-benefit of the CESP varies by community rehabilitation provider.
- Community rehabilitation providers face varying barriers to enable employment specialists to obtain and maintain the CESP.
- Interactions with the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency negatively impacts views on the CESP.
- The CESP credential positively influences employment specialists.
- The dichotomy of opinions on the CESP suggests an opportunity to encourage dialogue and a broader understanding of the effects of this credential on the vocational rehabilitation industry for all stakeholders.

### Recommendations

The literature findings and research analysis led to an optimal solution that was a combination of actions for OPRA leadership:

- Offer one-day virtual trainings.
- Create a new CESP training track at semi-annual conferences.
- Pursue a synergistic relationship with the Association for People Supporting Employment First (APSE).

Offering virtual trainings and training at conferences would allow OPRA leadership to resolve the barrier of scarce availability of applicable trainings. Conferences would provide employment specialists opportunities to network and collaborate with peers. In offering these trainings, OPRA leadership increases opportunities for member engagement and professional development experiences. OPRA leadership also opens an alternate avenue for non-dues revenue. Finally, working with APSE would give OPRA leadership valuable insights into the types of training that qualify for continuing education credits and clarification on other barriers providers face in maintaining a credentialed workforce. The figure below depicts how the recommendations align with OPRA leadership's strategic focus on community, advocacy, resources, and experiences (CARE).



### Conclusion

In pursuing more information on the qualification requirement, OPRA leadership gained valuable insights into a complex problem. The literature review supported the viability of Ohio's qualification, the positive impact of adding a credential to an industry, and the tangible and intangible measures of quality employment services. The research findings increased OPRA leadership's understanding of the nuanced nature of the credential's impact, highlighting discrepancies in member agency experiences, a unanimous need for training, and a missing connection with APSE. Utilizing the recommendations, leadership can strategically position OPRA to add value to members by effecting change in employment specialist qualifications. The proposed recommendations meet an identified member need and an industry demand while simultaneously increasing non-dues revenue, member engagement, and member value for OPRA.

### References

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