

CE Fidelity FAQs

What are the CE Fidelity Scales?

The CE Fidelity Scales are tools that ensure Customized Employment (CE) is delivered as intended, from start to finish. They are not about evaluating training programs or enforcing a single methodology — instead, they measure whether services align with CE best practices and result in quality outcomes for job seekers and businesses.

There are three scales, each focused on a different stage of the CE process:

- *The Discovery Fidelity Scale (DFS)*. The DFS evaluates how well Discovery identifies a person’s strengths, interests, and needs.
- *The Job Development Fidelity Scale (JDFS)*. The JDFS examines whether job development is carried out through negotiation and employer partnerships.
- *The Consultative Employment Training and Supports Fidelity Scale (CETSFS)*. The CETSFS ensures that, after hire, employees are trained primarily by coworkers and supported through natural workplace routines and relationships rather than traditional job coaching.

Together, these scales provide a consistent, research-based way to strengthen CE practices, improve quality across systems, and support better jobs and more inclusive workplaces.

What is the purpose of the fidelity scales?

The scales have two main purposes:

1. To define the core components of best-practice CE and provide a way to evaluate services on a “good, better, best” scale.
2. To create a consistent standard that allows research into both the quality of CE implementation and the relative importance of each CE tenet.

Research on the DFS and JDFS has focused on building consensus around key items and establishing the internal consistency of their core tenets. For example, the DFS highlights the home visit as critical. If research showed home visits did not significantly affect outcomes, the scale and related training could be adjusted. Likewise, if providers achieve excellent results using practices not yet captured, those practices can be incorporated. In this way, fidelity scales both safeguard CE’s integrity and support its ongoing growth.

Doesn’t Everyone Already Know What Customized Employment Is?

No. Even though CE demonstration projects began more than twenty-five years ago and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) codified CE into law, significant confusion persists about how Customized Employment differs from Supported Employment (SE). Many of the

service tenets on the CE Fidelity Scales overlap with strong SE practice, but CE involves a more nuanced and deliberate approach.

For example, job negotiation in SE often concludes with securing a job and setting a fading schedule for the employment specialist. In CE, negotiation is guided by vocational themes identified in Discovery and should include a “next career steps” plan. This sets expectations that the employer — with coworkers providing natural training, supported as needed by the employment specialist — will gradually expand the employee’s duties and skills. This trajectory secures the company’s commitment to its new hire and embeds the principle of career building into community employment, rather than relying on a short-term relationship to “the program.”

The fidelity standards serve to operationalize and clarify what CE is, helping the field better understand who is most likely to benefit from CE and how it fits within the broader array of employment services.

How were the Fidelity Scales developed?

The scales were created through a collaborative, iterative, research process. Input was gathered from leaders at Marc Gold & Associates, Griffin-Hammis Associates, Virginia Commonwealth University, and TransCen, along with focus groups of experienced practitioners nationwide. Researchers then used a three-round Delphi process to build consensus among national experts, including trainers, rehabilitation providers, funding agency representatives, and technical assistance staff. Nearly half of participants had over 20 years of CE experience, and all major training approaches were represented.

Most tenets reached strong consensus. Where opinions differed (for example, whether informational interviews belong in Discovery or only in Job Development), those tenets were kept for further research rather than removed. The scales continue to evolve as evidence grows, ensuring they remain accurate, relevant, and tied to improved outcomes.

What do the Fidelity Scales cover?

The fidelity scales cover the full CE process, from Discovery through job development and into long-term workplace supports. Each set of tenets identifies the practices research and experts agree are essential for quality outcomes.

- The DFS covers home and community visits, observations, activities, vocational profiles, and employment planning.
- The JDfs covers informational interviews, customized proposals, negotiation of roles, and alignment with both job seeker strengths and business needs.
- The CETSFS covers post-hire training and supports, ensuring coworkers take the lead in training, natural workplace relationships are fostered, supports fade appropriately, and long-term success is planned.

Each scale is divided into systems tenets and services tenets. Systems tenets address the infrastructure (authorization, funding, staffing, interagency supports) that makes quality CE possible. Services tenets describe the direct practices delivered to job seekers and employers at each stage.

How are the Fidelity Scales scored?

Each tenet is scored on a 0–3 scale:

- 0 (Unacceptable): Not consistent with best-practice CE.
- 1 (Good): Meets the minimum CE standard.
- 2 (Better): Exceeds the minimum standard.
- 3 (Best): Meets the highest quality expectations.

Scoring note: A score of “0” does not mean a practice is bad — it may reflect methods more aligned with supported employment or other services. Fidelity clarifies what CE is and what it is not.

Do we really need Fidelity Scales?

Yes. Fidelity scales ensure CE is delivered as designed and is not implemented in diluted or altered forms that weaken results. Too often, practices are labeled “evidence-based” without supporting research or without fidelity in implementation. Fidelity measures close this gap by showing whether CE is being practiced with integrity, making it possible to link outcomes directly to the service.

Other fields, like Community Mental Health, have used fidelity scales for decades to strengthen services such as employment, housing, and peer supports. Disability employment services have lagged behind, even though employment rates for people with significant disabilities remain extremely low. Fidelity scales help ensure CE is both effective and accountable, so services lead to better jobs and better lives.

What is the difference between the Essential Elements of CE and the Fidelity Scales?

The Essential Elements of CE define what CE is and how it should be practiced. They describe the guiding principles including job negotiation, Discovery, customized planning, representation, and mutual benefit that distinguish CE from traditional employment approaches.

The Fidelity Scales are measurement tools. They translate the Essential Elements into observable practices that can be scored for quality. For example, the DFS doesn’t just track whether a home visit occurred; it evaluates the quality and depth of information gathered. In short: the Essential Elements explain what CE is and why it matters, while the Fidelity Scales measure how well CE is being implemented.

What is the difference between a fidelity scale and an implementation checklist?

An implementation checklist tracks whether specific steps or tasks were completed, but it does not measure the quality of the work. A checklist might confirm that a home visit happened, but not whether it revealed meaningful insights.

A fidelity scale measures how closely services align with CE best practices, using criteria for “acceptable,” “good,” and “exemplary” practice. Fidelity scales and checklists can complement one another: a provider may use a checklist to ensure its internal process is followed. If that process consistently produces strong fidelity scores, the provider knows their process works. Both are valuable, but they serve different purposes.

Do the fidelity tenets apply for providers trained by someone other than GHA?

Yes. A common concern is that only those trained by Griffin-Hammis Associates (GHA) can pass the scales, but this is not true. The scales do not assess a particular training method; they measure whether services align with CE best practices. An employment specialist could follow GHA’s approach and still fall short if quality was lacking, while someone trained elsewhere could pass if their work reflected CE standards. The scales are universal and trainer-agnostic, and they are already being used internationally, with only minor adjustments for local systems.

Do the fidelity scales evaluate training programs?

No. They do not measure the quality of a training program or compare effectiveness of existing training programs. Instead, they focus on whether the services delivered to job seekers and employers align with CE best practices.

Are fidelity reviews about compliance?

No. Fidelity reviews are not audits. They are learning tools that show how closely services align with CE best practices. The goal is to improve services and outcomes, not to penalize providers.

Does use of standardized fidelity criteria stifle creativity?

No. Fidelity scales are not about limiting creativity, they are about protecting the integrity of Customized Employment (CE). The scales define the minimum standards of quality so that services called “CE” are truly CE, not diluted versions that risk poor outcomes and undermine the credibility of the field.

In fact, fidelity scales can enhance creativity. By setting clear expectations for what best practice looks like, they free providers to innovate within that framework — tailoring Discovery, Job Development, and workplace supports to the unique strengths of each job seeker and the needs of each business. Creativity thrives when it builds on proven, evidence-based practices, because providers can trust they are investing their time in approaches that work.

Without fidelity, it becomes impossible to know whether disappointing outcomes are the result of CE itself or of weak implementation. With fidelity, the foundation is solid and innovation can flourish on top of it.

Are the fidelity standards too high given field challenges (like high staff turnover)?

No. The scales define the minimum standards for delivering CE. Any provider delivering CE should score at least a “1” on the service tenets otherwise, the service is not truly CE. This does not mean the services are bad, only that they are inconsistent with CE.

Standards define what must happen to achieve quality outcomes. They should not be lowered to accommodate field challenges. Instead, barriers, such as funding gaps, staffing shortages, or referral shortages, must be addressed so providers can deliver services with fidelity. The solution is not to lower the bar, but to fix the barriers.

What is the benefit of using the CE Fidelity Scales?

The CE Fidelity Scales establish a universal, research-based standard for delivering CE with quality and integrity. They ensure providers and funders focus on strategies that work, rather than wasting time on those that don’t.

For decades, the IDD and VR fields lacked employment interventions suited for people with the most significant barriers. If we do not measure how CE addresses this gap, those individuals risk being left behind again. Families, counselors, and job seekers with significant barriers consistently recognize the value of Discovery and CE. Complaints usually arise only when CE is misapplied to people who could succeed in an entry-level job through traditional placement.

By focusing on what truly works, providers and funders can build collaborative systems that open doors for more people with significant disabilities to become valued, contributing members of the workforce — enriching individual lives while strengthening businesses and communities.