

**Employment, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Ticket to Work Program:  
Perspectives of Latinos with Disabilities**

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**Executive Summary**

Despite a long history of disability employment policy, disabled Americans continue to struggle within the labor market. For people of color, these struggles are even more pronounced. Research indicates racial differences in vocational rehabilitation utilization and employment outcomes (Olney & Kennedy, 2002). Although many studies have examined the variables of race/ethnicity and vocational rehabilitation, to the authors' knowledge, no study has done so in an in-depth, rich manner. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the employment, vocational rehabilitation (VR), and Ticket to Work (TTW) needs of Latinos with disabilities.

Forty-five Latinos with varying types of disabilities participated in one of seven focus groups. Participants were of working-age (aged 18-64), and were either employed or seeking employment. Using a grounded theory approach to analyze the focus group data, the top barriers to employment were identified, and they included lack of adequate transportation options, difficulties with speaking the English language, inadequate levels of formal education, and negative employer attitudes toward disabled workers. Participants also expressed concerns with the VR system. Specifically, they reported that counselors failed to follow through with tasks discussed and were non-collaborative when developing work plans. To some extent, participants reported prejudiced attitudes on the basis of ethnic minority status among employers and VR counselors. Although over a third of the participants reported general awareness of the TTW program, very few had

accurate knowledge. For example, when asked to explain TTW in their own words, one participant thought it was a job bank and another thought that he needed to inform SSA if he was working. This lack of understanding led to a number of individuals throwing the Ticket away. Further, over a third of the participants, who reported general awareness of TTW, were unable to understand the program due to difficulties with reading English; they did not receive the Ticket and its accompanying materials in Spanish. Only one participant attempted to use his Ticket by contacting an Employment Network (EN). However, he was not offered services because his disability was considered too severe.

A model was developed to better understand the complex experiences of Latinos with disabilities as they sought work using three distinct pathways: 1) employment through informal networks (e.g., friends, family members); 2) employment through the vocational rehabilitation (VR) system; and 3) employment through ENs from the TTW program. Of the three pathways, participants utilized the first two to a great degree. However, the Ticket to Work program was largely ignored. To understand why TTW was not viewed as a viable option, it is important to understand participants' prior experiences with seeking work through informal networks and the VR system. More specifically, early in the job-seeking process, participants held *expectations* that their efforts would result in jobs that were well-paying, long-term, and meaningful. With time, they became *frustrated* with the job hunt when obstacles stood in the way. *Disappointment* set in when participants failed to find employment, despite concerted efforts toward this goal. Lastly, they became *discouraged* with the job market and VR system, and this general sense of discouragement transferred to new job initiatives (namely, TTW).

Based on findings from the focus groups, a quantitative measure was constructed to further research in this significant area. The Disability and Employment Questionnaire

(Download the Disability and Employment Questionnaire – English Version or Spanish Version) will allow researchers to collect data in a time-efficient manner from a large number of individuals, thus providing a comprehensive picture of employment concerns and needs.