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Helping Clients Overcome Short-Term Barriers to Employment

Every day, employment professionals help clients overcome barriers that stand between them and meaningful work. But not every barrier can be addressed through employment services alone. The challenge is identifying which barriers practitioners can realistically reduce—and where coordinated support from other agencies is needed.

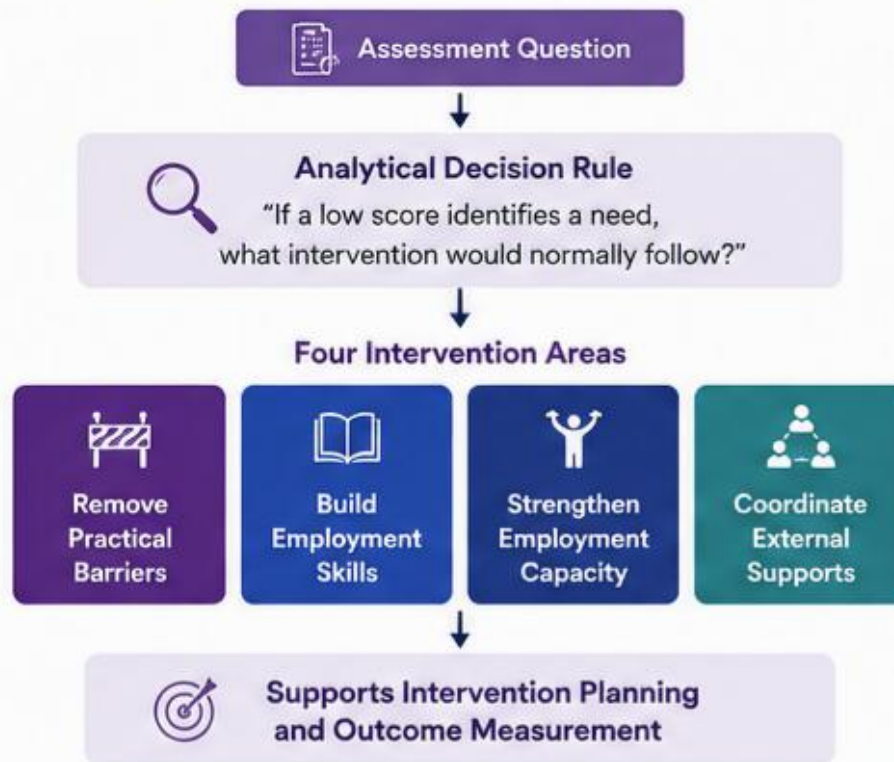
The Employment Readiness Scale™ (ERS) was designed to help answer exactly that question. Rather than asking only whether the assessment measures employment readiness accurately, we asked a different question:

If a client scores low on a question, what employment intervention would normally follow?

This simple question shifts the focus from measurement alone to practical service delivery. Figure 1 illustrates how the ERS moves beyond assessment by linking client responses to practical employment interventions and measurable outcomes.

Figure 1.

The Employment Intervention Framework (EIF)



Instead of viewing assessment questions only as measures of readiness, each question is viewed as information that can guide an employment intervention. In this way, assessment becomes the starting point for individualized employment planning rather than the end of the assessment process.

The review examined all 75 ERS questions using this intervention-focused approach. The results were encouraging.

Figure 2 summarizes the review. More than four out of every five ERS questions (83%) relate to areas where employment practitioners can realistically provide or coordinate interventions, reinforcing the ERS's value as a practical tool for supporting employment outcomes.

FIGURE 2. EIF CLASSIFICATION REVIEW OF THE 75 ERS QUESTIONS

Each of the 75 ERS questions was independently classified using the Employment Intervention Framework (EIF).

INTERVENTION AREA	QUESTIONS	% OF TOTAL
Remove Practical Barriers	21	(28%)
Build Employment Skills	21	(28%)
Strengthen Employment Capacity	20	(27%)
Coordinate External Supports	13	(17%)
TOTAL	75 QUESTIONS	(100%)

The distribution shows how the 75 ERS questions map across the four EIF intervention areas.

Source: Employment Intervention Framework (EIF) classification review of the 75 ERS questions.

In practical terms, this means the ERS does more than identify client needs—it helps practitioners focus on the barriers they can realistically address during the time a client is receiving employment services.

These include helping clients remove practical barriers, build employment skills, and strengthen their capacity to obtain and maintain employment. Only 13 questions (17%) primarily identify issues that typically require coordination with external organizations, such as housing, health, or other community services.

This distinction matters.

Employment practitioners work within a relatively short period of engagement with clients. Their greatest opportunity to improve employment outcomes comes from identifying barriers that can be addressed through practical interventions such as career planning, job search support, confidence building, skills development, transportation assistance, résumé preparation, interview coaching, or referrals to

community resources. The ERS helps identify these opportunities early, allowing practitioners to develop targeted employment plans and monitor client progress over time.

The review also highlighted another important role of the ERS. Some barriers—such as mental health concerns, unstable housing, or financial hardship—may require services beyond the mandate of an employment organization. Identifying these needs is equally valuable because it enables practitioners to coordinate appropriate supports while continuing to focus on employment-related interventions. This reinforces the importance of integrated service delivery rather than expecting employment programs to address every challenge independently. The practical value of this approach is reflected in more than 300,000 ERS administrations across Canada, the United States, and Australia. Over many years of use, the ERS has demonstrated that assessment can serve a much broader purpose than simply classifying clients. It can help practitioners prioritize interventions, document measurable progress, and provide evidence of outcomes for funders and program managers.

As governments increasingly emphasize accountability and measurable employment outcomes, employment readiness assessments are expected to do more than describe client needs. They must also help practitioners answer an essential question:

What can we do to help this client move closer to employment during the time they are receiving our services?

That is where the ERS adds value. By identifying short-term barriers that employment practitioners can realistically address—and by measuring progress as those barriers are reduced—the ERS becomes more than an assessment. It becomes a practical decision-support tool that helps employment professionals

focus their efforts where they can have the greatest impact on employment outcomes.

You can access and download the full research study here: [Measuring Short-Term Barriers to Employment Readiness](#)

Articles you may find of interest

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3. [The Impact of AI on the Early-career Labor Market](#) - nace, May 2026
4. [Hard skills make the difference in employment](#) - Job Development Pulse, Apr 2026
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