# Five Tiers of Economic Empowerment

Economic independence and security are critical to the safety and well-being of survivors, as such, many victim service agencies seek to develop programming that can empower survivors economically. According to the [Office of Victims of Crime Human Trafficking Task Force](#), economic empowerment is defined as assisting marginalized groups such as hum an trafficking survivors with obtaining "access to a reasonable and sustainable standard of living" by "strengthening skills, resources and confidence to financially support themselves and their families in the short- and long-term."[i]
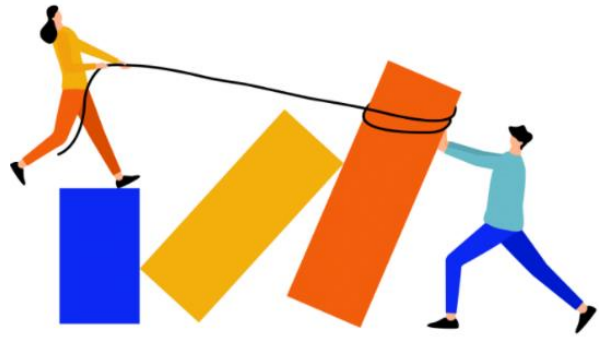
While the goals of economic empowerment programs are consistent, the process and key components to successful programming often remain ambiguous. This guide will illustrate five critical elements of economic empowerment that are needed to facilitate access to well-rounded workforce development opportunities for survivors of human trafficking.



Employment

Experience Building

Skill Building & Work Readiness

Career Exploration

Crisis Management

# 1. Crisis Management

Crisis management addresses the immediate and most basic needs of survivors in crisis. While stabilization and self-sufficiency are common goals for economic empowerment programs, there are many obstacles to achieving this goal, especially for survivors of human trafficking. **Stabilization** is defined as one's prospect for long-term social and economic self-sufficiency.[ii] The most critical conditions for stabilization are **safety needs, basic needs, and legal needs.[iii]** Survivors with obstacles in these three categories are often hindered in their ability to increase stability and reach self-sufficiency. As a result, initial case management must focus on addressing these areas before connecting survivors to education, career training, and job opportunities.

**Safety needs** are the first priority in supporting the short-term and long-term workforce development goals of survivors. During crisis management, service providers must immediately and consistently screen for safety.[iv] This includes, but is not limited to, assisting survivors with safety planning and securing safe emergency housing. According to a 2005 Maine Department of Labor study, up to 60 percent of domestic violence survivors have reported quitting their job or being terminated as a result of abuse and safety issues.[v] Furthermore, students with histories of child trauma are 2.34 times more likely to drop out of school and a survey of domestic violence survivors found that 17 percent dropped out of training programs as a result of their abuse, particularly education and employment sabotage.[vi] While these studies are domestic violence specific, the intersections of domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking allows the application of these findings to human trafficking. Therefore, in order to support employment retention and success in economic empowerment programs, service providers must prioritize these needs.

Some key resources for assessing and addressing the safety of survivors are:

1. National Human Trafficking Hotline Safety Planning Information
2. National Domestic Violence Hotline Plan for Safety
3. Stalking Prevention, Awareness, & Resource Center (SPARC)
4. Workplace Responds: Workplace Safety Card
5. Freedom Network Housing Project Training & Technical Assistance

**Basic needs** are the immediate survival necessities of human trafficking victims. This includes food, clothing, personal hygiene necessities, acute medical and dental assistance, language access/interpretation services, transportation, and advocacy.[vii] Many survivors lack these resources because of the abuse and control they face from their trafficker. They often find themselves navigating new systems and environments with neglected health conditions, limited connections in the community, and no financial resources to support these needs. During crisis management, service providers assist survivors with addressing barriers and obtaining basic necessities.  As these basic needs are met, survivors are able to shift "to recovering from the trafficking experience and begin to rebuild an autonomous life."[viii] And it is through this shift, that survivors expand their capacity for education and employment opportunities.

**Legal needs** are also critical to employment and economic empowerment programs. Some survivors may need restraining or protective orders, child custody support, criminal advocacy (vacatur), and immigration support. The barriers resulting from these legal issues can hinder a survivor's ability to obtain employment or participate in certain education programs. For example, in order to qualify for Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) job training, paid internships, employment opportunities, or apprenticeships, participants may need a valid ID and legal work authorization. Collaboration
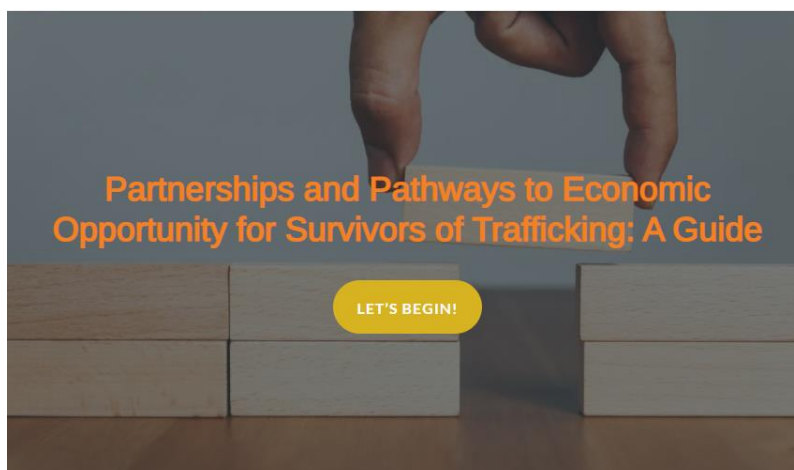
with legal service providers will help eliminate legal barriers and expand education and employment options for survivors.

Some resources for addressing legal needs include:

1. Freedom Network Survivor Reentry Project
2. Workable Solutions for Criminal Record Relief Report
3. USCIS: Victim of Human Trafficking and Other Crimes
4. The United States Department of Justice: Pro Bono Legal Services
5. National Legal Aid & Defender Association

Crisis management is often facilitated by an interdisciplinary team of case managers, legal advocates, collaborative groups, community resources, and public partnerships. Through consistent communication and collaboration between these networks, survivors are better equipped with critical resources for stability, employment, and success in economic empowerment programs. It is important to note that although the needs listed above are widely acknowledged among service providers, survivors are the experts of their needs. Therefore, it is so important to continuously check-in and empower survivors to identify their immediate needs in crisis. It is also important to connect survivors with community resources to assist in meeting those needs. To learn more about building cross-sector collaboration visit: https://collaborativeresponses.com/.



Partnerships and Pathways to Economic Opportunity for Survivors of Trafficking: A Guide

LET'S BEGIN!

4

# State of Mind:
## Survival Brain vs. Learning Brain

When in crisis, one's brain is hyper-focused on survival. A person in "survival brain" is continually assessing potential threats, may feel panicky or fearful, tends to withdraw and doubt their abilities, is stressed by ambiguity, and is focused on the present and not what may be ahead.

When in survival brain, individuals often struggle to fully engage in education or employment activities. Individuals are best positioned to succeed when in a "learning brain." With a learning brain, a person is able to see the big picture, feels calm and confident, is curious and open to new information, and is comfortable with ambiguity. In this state, they are able take in information, process complexity, take calculated risks, plan and execute tasks, whether related to developing a new skill in a job training program or completing a work assignment.

By having their safety and basic needs address, survivors can have a greater sense of stability and begin to shift from a "survival brain" to learning brain."
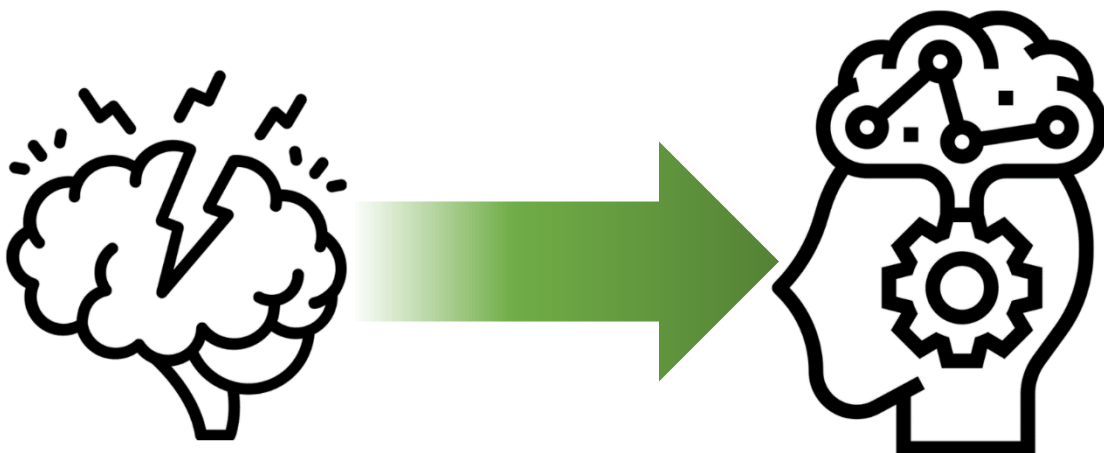
## 2. Career Exploration

Career exploration is the process of learning about work-related interests, values desired most on the job, personal skills, and characteristics that allow job-seekers to recognize and pursue relatable occupations.[ix] Through career exploration, participants are able to expand their knowledge of and access to diverse education and career opportunities. This exposure allows participants to have more choice and align occupational goals with personal values, interests, skills, and personality.
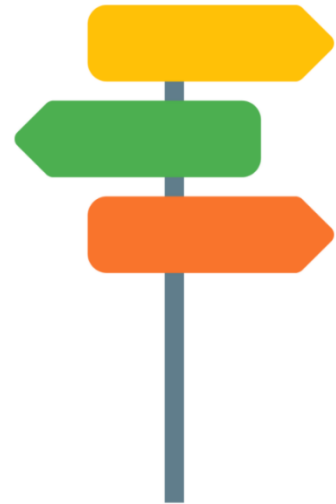
Although career exploration is a critical component of workforce development, it is often ignored. Most career choices are "uninformed and result from external variables and chance," rather than exploration.[x] Moreover programs supporting career exploration do not account for historic and current patterns of discrimination that make it harder for women, people of color, and other marginalized populations to confidently choose their occupations.[xi] This further exacerbates barriers to career opportunities for survivors who lack support in this critical step of economic empowerment. With programmatic expectations to help survivors achieve self-sufficiency within a short time-frame and limited resources to meet basic needs, service providers are often pressured to assist with immediate job placement. This often limits the options survivors have to whatever is available at the time instead of opportunities that align with their interests.
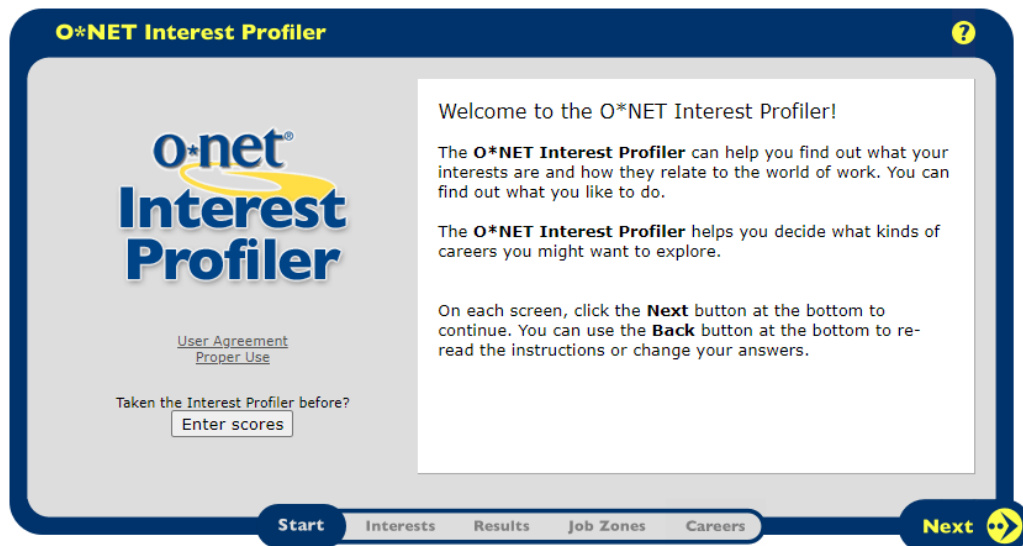
The career exploration and learning process often consists of assessments, job shadowing, career coaching from industry-specific leaders, online games, and/or simulations. Case managers, advocates and job developers use career exploration tools to help survivors identify their skills and interests and also learn about careers that they may not be readily exposed to. Advocates can support survivors in navigating these resources during initial career and education action planning conversations with survivors.

Some common resources for career exploration include:

1. [The Occupational Information Network (O*Net Online)](): Public and no cost resource center that provides a detailed database of occupations, career exploration assessments and tools to help job-seekers identify interest. Features [My Next Move](), an online career interest finder.
2. [CareerOneStop](): A one-stop source for career exploration, training and jobs. Includes resources for entry-level workers, veterans, career changers, laid-off workers and more.

By limiting or eliminating opportunities for career exploration, economic empowerment programs often rely on assumptions they have about the values, interests, skills and personality of a survivor. This can also reenact power and control dynamics present in abusive relationships by not providing much choice and agency for survivors in the education and employment. Service providers therefore risk guiding survivors towards opportunities that may not be the best fit.

# 3. Skill Building & Work Readiness

Work readiness refers to commonly expected skills and traits that employers look for in job-seekers.[xii] This includes **foundational cognitive skills** like basic reading, applied mathematics, problem solving, English proficiency and critical thinking and **non-cognitive, or soft skills** that support an individual's ability to perform and integrate into the workplace.[xiii]

According to the ACT, a national nonprofit dedicated to college and career readiness, a "work ready" individual has the foundational and soft skills needed to minimally qualify for a specific occupation.[xiv] The threshold of skills that an individual should acquire varies based on desired job position and industry. In other words, what is minimally required for one education or job opportunity, may not be the same for another.

## Foundational Skills

- Applied Mathmatics
- Basic reading and Comprehenson
- Critical thinking or problem solving

## Soft Skills

- Professionalism or work ethic
- Networking
- Teamwork
- Oral and written communication
- Teamwork and collaboration skills

Some helpful resources to determine needed skills include:

1. O*Net Online  provides a list of minimal knowledge, skills and abilities needed for each occupation in directory.
2. The Competency Model Clearinghouse created by the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) provides an understanding of the essential skill sets and competencies for the workforce.
3. The U.S. Department of Education's Employability Skills Framework provides an employability skills checklists, tools and resources that help providers and employers align in workforce development goals.

Aligning all of these aspects with the interest of survivors and local priority-sectors, will assist service providers in developing strong work readiness programs for survivors of trafficking. Also, it will clarify what skills training and certifications a survivor needs to complete in order to be work ready and gain a competitive edge in the workforce.

Victim service providers do not need to develop these skill building opportunities alone, local community colleges are great resources for supporting skill building and work readiness. The [Adult Education and ESOL Finder](#) provides a database of local adult education programs that support foundational skills, soft skills, industry specific trainings, and English as a Second Language (ESOL). Lastly, the U.S. Department of Labor workforce development system supports communities with barriers in accessing education and employment needs through funding, job training, employment support and more. To understand this system, visit [Opportunities for Survivors of Human Trafficking Through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA): A Primer](#). The [WIOA-eligible Training Programs](#) database will help you find local adult and youth based programs dedicated to closing skill gaps. With the rise in digital technology, and the impact of COVID-19 on workforce development programs, many skill training and work readiness programs have shifted online. To navigate and assess online training opportunities, see this guide: [Helping Survivors Navigate Online Education and Training Opportunities](#).
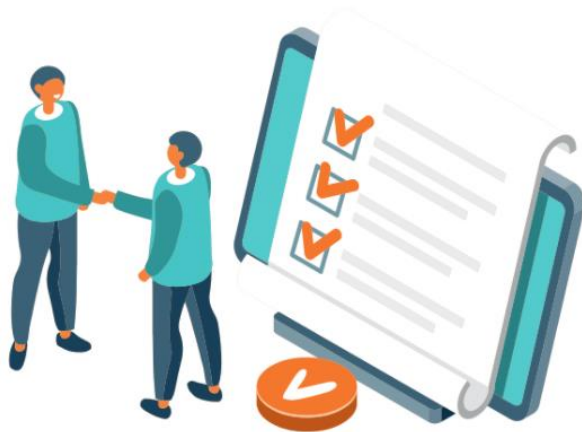
# 4. Experience Building

Experience building is an important part of the economic empowerment of survivors. However, survivors often struggle with complicated work history and lack of formal experience in the career field of their choice. Education and employment opportunities often use experience as criteria for eligibility and an indicator of potential success. Therefore, it is difficult for survivors to obtain employment or be accepted to certain training programs due to limited experience. Strong economic empowerment programs should provide survivors with multiple avenues to develop a basic and formal work history, and apply the foundational and soft skills acquired. Common options to build experience include volunteer work, internships, job shadowing, apprenticeship programs, and community leadership opportunities.

- **Volunteer work** is unpaid and voluntary work where an individual can be of service to community, organizations, or causes. Volunteer opportunities can expose survivors to diverse work environments and allow them to apply critical skills through helping fulfill a need in the community.

- **Internships** are short-term jobs that provide experience in a specific industry or real workplace setting. These short-term opportunities can be paid or unpaid, with the potential for long-term employment. During an internship, individuals participate in experiential learning where they are active members of a team and receive ample opportunity to apply their skills and work readiness training. While potentially great opportunities, there are many ways that unpaid internships can be exploitive, and the safety of survivors is always priority. A factsheet from the Department of Labor [Internship Programs under the Fair Labor Standards Act](#) provides information to help determine whether interns for "for-profit" employers are entitled to wages under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Two databases to search for internships are [Idealist](#) and [Chegg Internship Finder](#).

- **Job Shadowing** is the shot-term opportunity to follow and observe an employee on the job. Job-seekers can ask real-time questions, see live

interaction and responsibilities of a position, and get a better understanding of the desired industry. Through group tours of facilities or one-on-one support, survivors can gain a lot of insight and experience through job shadowing that can help them feel more comfortable with a specific career field, position, or employer.

- **Apprenticeship Programs** allow job-seekers to gain skills and experience, while getting paid. The [Department of Labor Apprenticeship Programs](#) provides resources and a database of local apprenticeship programs such as manufacturing, software development and information technology, engineering, health related fields, beauty/cosmetology industry and more.
- **Community Leadership Opportunities** are experiences through community led collaboratives, councils, and task forces. Survivors can utilize their skills through participating in such community initiatives. This can expand their individual experience, networking connections, and exposure to local employment opportunities.

## 5. Employment

Safe and sustainable employment is an important protective factor from victimization for survivors. Service providers can assist survivors in finding employment opportunities that align with their interest, skills and experience. It is important to examine these partnerships and opportunities to ensure that they are trauma-informed and safe for survivors. Supporting survivors with multiple barriers to employment can be difficult, however, service providers can assist through building strong relationships with local employers, workforce boards, and career centers. Partnerships with

11

these entities can help service providers gain real-time knowledge on what job opportunities are available or upcoming in their region, what training programs and priority sectors have funding for the professional development of survivors, and create easier access to safe living wage employment opportunities. In addition, service providers can help to educate employers about the needs of survivors of violence and trauma so that their workplace communities are more productive, have better retention, and are more resilient.

These resources can help explore and assess trauma-informed, safe and suitable employment options are:

1. Promoting Employment Opportunities for Survivors of Human Trafficking (PEOST) Project
2. National Association of Workforce Boards
3. CareerOneStop Job Search
4. Business Coalition Against Human Trafficking
5. Workplace Responds Resource Center

It is important to maintain on-going case management with survivors and provide resources that ensure retention. Navigating a new job can be overwhelming therefore continuing to support survivors after and through employment is important. On-going case management can include helping survivors understand their workplace rights, how to navigate conflict, or negotiate benefits, and continuously providing survivors with opportunities to strengthen their skillset to remain competitive in the workforce, or managing conflict in the workplace. Survivors may return over time for help with strengthening their resume for a new opportunity or support in finding a more suitable work environment. It is important to keep an open-door policy to ensure that survivors maintain and continue to grow in their economic empowerment. Survivor-led mentorship and coaching networks are a great way to support survivors on an on-going basis. Victim service agencies can connect survivors with a mentor or coach that can help fill in the gaps that may occur outside of traditional economic empowerment programming.

## Moving forward together

A well-rounded economic empowerment program should have all five tiers in order to support the needs of survivors and prepare them for the workforce. These five tiers are often organized within a career pathway that walks a cohort of survivors through each of these components. However, not all organizations have the capacity or resources to address all tiers effectively. This guide is a starting point to help victim service providers better understand each tier of an economic empowerment program in order develop clear goals, determine which areas to focus on internally, and which areas can be fulfilled through partnership with local resources. For further support in understanding economic empowerment programs and program models that incorporate the five tiers visit: Guiding Principles to Inform Economic Empowerment Programming for Survivors of Human Trafficking.

References:

[i] Office for Victims of Crime. (2015). Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide: Education & Job Training/Placement. Office of Justice Programs. https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/44-comprehensive-victim-services/education-job-trainingplacement/

[ii] Gozdziak, E., Lowell, L. (2016). After Rescue: Evaluation of Strategies to Stabilize and Integrate Adult Survivors of Human Trafficking to the United States. *National Institute of Justice*. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249672.pdf

[iii] Gozdziak, E., Lowell, L. (2016). After Rescue: Evaluation of Strategies to Stabilize and Integrate Adult Survivors of Human Trafficking to the United States. *National Institute of Justice*. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249672.pdf

[iv] Clawson, H.J., Dutch, N. () Addressing the needs of victims of human trafficking: Challenges, Barriers, and Promising Practices. *US Department of Health and Human Services* https://rhyclearinghouse.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/docs/19724-Addressing_the_Needs_of_Victims.pdf

[v] Ridley, E. et al. 2005. Domestic Violence Survivors at Work: How Perpetrators Impact Employment. Augusta, ME: Main Department of Labor & Family Crisis Services. www1.maine.gov/labor/labor_stats/publications/dvreports/survivorstudy.pdf.

[vi] Hess, C., and Del Rosario, A. 2018. Dreams Deferred: A Survey on the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Survivors' Education, Careers, and Economic Security. Institute for Women's Policy Research. iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/C475_IWPR-Report-Dreams-Deferred.pdf

[vii] Aron, L.Y., Zweig J.M., Newmark, L.C. (2006). Comprehensive Services for Survivors of Human Trafficking: Findings from Clients in Three Communities. *Urban Institute Justice Policy Center*. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/43051/411507-Comprehensive-Services-for-Survivors-of-Human-Trafficking.PDF

[viii] Aron, L.Y., Zweig J.M., Newmark, L.C. (2006). Comprehensive Services for Survivors of Human Trafficking: Findings from Clients in Three Communities. *Urban Institute Justice Policy Center*.https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/43051/411507-Comprehensive-Services-for-Survivors-of-Human-Trafficking.PDF

[ix] O*NET Career Exploration Tools *U.S. Department of Labor*. https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/onet/tools

[x] Duane Brown and Associates (2002). Career Choice and Development (p. 465) http://www.borbelytiborbors.extra.hu/ZSKF/CareerDevelopment.pdf

[xi] Duane Brown and Associates (2002). Career Choice and Development (p. 467S) http://www.borbelytiborbors.extra.hu/ZSKF/CareerDevelopment.pdf

[xii] Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (n.d.) Pre-Employment Transition Services: Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/overview/workplace-readiness-training

[xiii] ACT (2013) Work Readiness Standards and Benchmarks: Key to Differentiating America's Workforce and Regaining Global Competitiveness https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/Work-Readiness-Standards-and-Benchmarks.pdf

[xiv] ACT (2013) Work Readiness Standards and Benchmarks: Key to Differentiating America's Workforce and Regaining Global Competitiveness https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/Work-Readiness-Standards-and-Benchmarks.pdf