

## CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT—DISCOVERY

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Issue No. 6

### INTRODUCTION

For students who have difficulty obtaining paid work through traditional methods, a customized employment approach can provide a more thoughtful, individualized plan that meets the needs of both the job seeker and the employer. The Discovery phase is the foundation to customized employment. Staff should first spend time developing a good understanding of the student's skills, strengths, and career goals. This will help match the student's abilities to the unmet needs of the business and position the person for successful, integrated paid employment. In this quick guide, we will look at Step 1 in the customized employment process: Discovery.

### WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO LEARN DURING DISCOVERY?

- Where this person is most at ease and most productive.
- When the individual is most engaged and by what people or activities.
- What supports are needed most in particular situations and how they are best delivered.
- Situations and environments to be avoided.
- Personal skills, talents, and interests.

Discovery will also uncover the vocational themes that will be used to develop a list of potential employers to research and engage.

The most effective way to get a clear picture of a student's abilities is to gather information from people who know the student the best: **family members, teachers** and of course the **student**. Another effective way to understand a student's abilities is by observing the student in different environments including **school, college**, and the **community**.

This Grab and Go Practice is part of a series helping students, parents, teachers, and job developers develop customized employment opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

### 1. INTERVIEW THE STUDENT

This interview may take place over several meetings as staff get to know the student. Information that the student can provide may include insights about their:



- career goals
- hobbies and interests
- preferred community activities
- favorite classes
- job likes or dislikes
- previous work experiences
- experience using public transportation

When meeting with a student who has verbal limitations, ensure that communication accommodations are in place to help the student share their answers. Commonly used strategies include:

- augmentative and alternative communication devices (e.g. a tablet/iPad)
- visuals or online images
- paper or notebook the student can use to write down their answers
- text-to-speech software

Identify several activities outside the home that are familiar to the student. Accompany them to these places and observe the skills, relationships, level of interest and supports needed in performing these activities. Keep in mind that people may act differently in different situations and environments, or depending who they are with.

Develop a list of who should be interviewed, and assign different members of the team to conduct these conversations.



## 2. INTERVIEW PEOPLE WHO KNOW THE STUDENT

A family's knowledge of the student's vision, strengths and interests is invaluable in helping staff identify some of the essential factors necessary for job success. The conversation could start as simply as "Tell me about Sam..." and go on to talk about the person's qualities and passions, as well as what they do at home and in the community. Teachers have usually known the student for a long time and can provide helpful information on student's general history, academic skills, support strategies, assessment results, situations or tasks to avoid and any previous work history.



## 3. OBSERVE THE STUDENT IN THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

Being part of college life offers many opportunities for students to meet different people and try new activities. Observe how the student adjusts to new situations and their ability to get around the campus, how they interact with other students, contribute to class discussions and follow directions. This can be useful in determining the student's directional abilities, memory, time management skills, learning style, social behavior and how they would adjust to a new job or work environment. Observe the student working in different settings, such as at a college internship and interview their work supervisor. Look for answers to these questions:



- How does the student learn new tasks?
- What is their speed and accuracy in completing assigned tasks?
- Does the student take initiative in seeking new work?
- What is the impact of lighting, noise and space on the student's mood and productivity?
- How does the student interact with coworkers?

## 4. DEVELOP THE POSITIVE PERSONAL PROFILE

The Positive Personal Profile form (Tilson, 2012) is a way to organize the information collected from the interviews, observations and discussions with the student and people who know them well. This information is essential in identifying a student's interests, strengths and abilities, as well as other factors that need to be considered in making a good job match. Information from these interviews and observations will also help identify any needed accommodations and supports. Collecting this information is ongoing, and should be updated periodically as the student has new experiences, learns new job skills and develops clear preferences about work.



## 5. IDENTIFY VOCATIONAL THEMES

Identifying the vocational themes from all the information collected through the discovery process can help expand the range of job opportunities open to a student. It forces the job developer to broaden their thinking to include information from different aspects of a person's life. Themes are unifying ideas about a particular type of work and represent an accumulation of many jobs, environments, skills and interests. They are not job descriptions. For example, "construction" could limit the potential employer list to just jobs in the construction industry, but thinking about jobs involving "working with her hands" will open up your thinking to include many other job possibilities.



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**Identify at least three vocational themes from the Positive Personal Profile.**

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## CONCLUSION

Discovery takes time and effort but is the key in providing a strong foundation for a person centered, customized approach to employment.

## REFERENCES

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The Think College Transition Project is funded by an Investing in Innovation Development Grant # U411C130149 from the Office of Innovation and Improvement with matching funds provided by the Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation. Think College is a project of the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

RECOMMENDED CITATION: Hooley, R., & Carlson, C. (2018). Customized Employment—Discovery, Think College Grab and Go Practices, Number 6. Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston.

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