Employment Process Resource Guide

TransCen

If you would like to learn more about these tools or how field-based technical assistance can help build interagency team capacity please contact the author: Sean Roy - sroy@transcen.org



Introduction

A job seeker who has a paid work experience that matches their specific interests and abilities is four times more likely to secure and maintain paid employment after exiting school. This resource guide provides a process and tools to better ensure successful paid work experiences for persons with a disability.

Too often, when faced with the challenge of obtaining a work experience or job for a youth with a disability, we immediately approach an employer to propose a work experience or apply for a job. Instead, what we need interagency teams and their families to put in place is a process that gathers information from both of our customers, the job seeker AND the employer, that culminates in a written proposal. This proposal is our best opportunity to 'make the case' as to how we can address some of the employer's labor needs, why our job seeker(s) are able to do the work (with or without supports) and how our employment services will benefit the employer. To not follow a process that provides 'due diligence' through a written proposal, can lead to lower expectations by the job seeker and employer, miscommunication and bad job matches.

Job Search Process

The proposed steps in the Job Search process shown below will yield well matched, paid work experiences and employment for students with disabilities. This process is intended to increase the effectiveness of discovery, assessment, job development activities and on-going relationships with families and local employers.



These steps in the job search process and the recommended goals, activities, tools and desired outcomes are intended to:

- Frame a discussion on ways to partner in the job search process.
- Frame the discussion and recommendations on how job seekers, family members and advocates can better partner with transition team members and employment specialists in the job search process.
- Provide follow up resources and tools that can be used to foster more effective documentation and partnerships on behalf of specific job seekers.
- Build an organization's capacity to effectively engage youth, family and employers in the job search process.

Discovery Process

The discovery process for transition students shown in the diagram below is defined as a team of teachers, aides, counselors, employment specialists and family members working together to 'discover' their career options and assess their ability to meet some of the labor needs of specific employers. Quality performance is based on the ability to facilitate the knowledge that a job seeker and their family member needs to select one or several career or vocational goals based on the principles of person centered planning and informed choice. Quality performance is also defined as demonstrating the identification or development of the features which are made up of specific tasks, aptitude and abilities specifically related to their career or vocational goals that would be of interest to employers. Another aspect of quality performance is that this process is implemented in as timely a manner as is possible.



1. **Knowledge of Self**
   a) Goal: Learn what the job seeker knows about the kind of work they want to and can do
   b) Activity: Interview the job seeker and those that know the job seeker
   c) Activity: Review completed interest inventories and other assessment tools
   d) Tool: Positive Personal Profile (PPP)

   Desired Outcome: To document what the Employment Specialist, family members, Counselor and Teachers know about the job seeker and what the job seeker knows about their interest and ability to work. Establishes a dynamic document that can continue to capture the interests and abilities of the job seeker over time. Generate a preliminary PPP.

2. **Knowledge of the World of Work**
   a) Goal: Learn what the job seeker knows more about their vocational and career options
   b) Activity: Discuss career options with the job seeker and those that know the job seeker
   c) Activity: Review completed career inventories and other assessment tools
   d) Tool: Positive Personal Profile

   Desired Outcome: To document what the Employment Specialist, family members, Counselor and Teachers know about the job seekers knowledge of the world of work and what the job seeker knows about the world of work. Establishes a dynamic document that can continue to capture what the job seeker learns about the world of work over time. Generate a preliminary PPP.



3. Exploration

a) Goal: Based on additional discovery activity, the job seeker has chosen one or several vocational or career options that is listed on the PPP

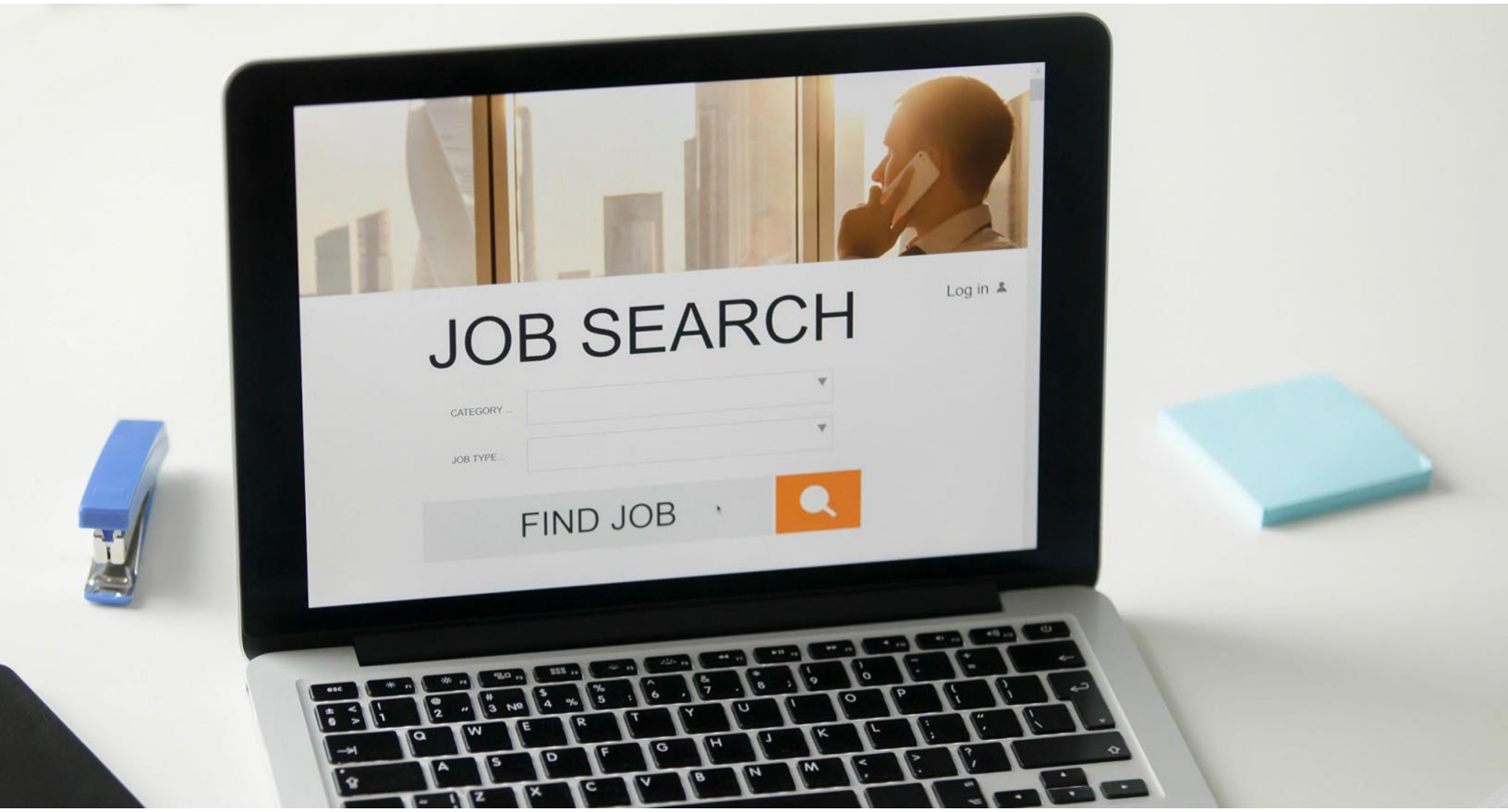
b) Activity: Worksite tours or job shadows between the job seeker and specific employers

c) Activity: Completed career inventories and assessments. Review O*Net or other career exploration websites. Conduct community mapping to identify local employment opportunities.

d) Activity: Family Interview to expand on the preliminary PPP based on family member perceptions

e) Tools: Discovery and Assessment Process Log
Family Interview Form
Positive Personal Profile

Desired Outcome: These tools provide a plan on how to explore what the job seeker needs to know about the world of work in relation to what the job seeker knows about themselves as well as obtaining input from family members through the family interview. Through this process, one or several vocational or career goals should be agreed upon and listed on the expanded PPP. Generate a completed discovery and assessment process log, a completed family interview form and an expanded PPP based on the exploration activity and family interview.



4. Preparation

a) Goal: Based on additional assessment activity, the job seeker and the Employment Specialist have identified key features (skills, aptitudes, personality traits, abilities, work experiences) that could be of interest and beneficial to specific employers

b) Activity: Job shadows, volunteering, summer youth placements, mock interviews with local employers, community based functional assessments, work simulation, unpaid work experiences, internships

c) Tools: Discovery and Assessment Process Log
Positive Personal Profile
Features to Benefits Form

Desired Outcome: Identification of specific tasks, aptitudes and abilities related to the chosen career or vocational goals captured on the expanded PPP. Itemized list of the key features that could be beneficial to local employers. Based on the expanded PPP, the features and benefits tool can help determine if the job seeker is ready for paid work experiences or placement. If there is an adequate number of features to interest an employer, the discovery process is complete and the job development process on behalf of this job seeker should commence. If there is not an adequate number of features to interest an employer, the features to benefits form and PPP can indicate what additional information is needed during the preparation/assessment phase. The features and benefits tool can also be used during the informational interviews with local employers to determine which of the job seeker's features would be beneficial to specific employers. Family members can play an important role in assessing their abilities and developing new skills at home and in the community. Develop an expanded discovery and assessment log, expanded PPP, and completed features and benefits form.

5. Employment

a) Goal: Achieve a paid work experience or job. Ideally, paid work experiences are consistent with the job seeker's career goals and can lead to paid employment.

b) Activity: Job Development Planning Process

c) Tool: Job Development Plan

Desired Outcome: This job development plan summarizes key information off the positive personal profile (PPP) and suggest specific employers and type of employers that should be contacted on behalf of the job seeker. This tool can also be used by the Employment Specialist to seek employer referrals from service coordinators, counselors, teachers, family members, other employers and the job seeker as to specific employers that should be contacted on behalf of the job seeker. Generate a completed job development plan.



Family Interview

Quality performance for engaging families and caregivers in the job development process includes giving families the opportunity to express hopes and fears related to competitive employment for their student. It is crucial that working partnerships are established and a common goal is identified. That goal is providing meaningful work experiences for all students so they can be better prepared for employment as part of their adult life. One strategy for engaging families in the job development process is conducting a structured family interview. This interview should be non-threatening and non-compliance based. Rather, it should present an opportunity for families, students and professionals to envision what a “good life” can look like for the student and discuss strengths, barriers, and specific action steps to get there through employment. Below are the steps and intended outcomes of an effective family interview:

1. Interview Preparation

a) Goal: Explain reason for interview and to schedule time with family and cross-agency participants

b) Activity: Speak directly to the family or caregiver of the student about the purpose of the interview. Stress that the interview is not a requirement and will not impact their student in a negative way. Instead, highlight that the goal is to prepare the student for a life of working competitively in the community, and the interview is an opportunity for the family to express dreams and fears about that possibility.

c) Tools: Positive Personal Profile
Family Interview Form Know Your Network Tool

Desired Outcome: A family interview is scheduled at a time that is most convenient for the family and key stakeholders in the job development process (could include VR counselor, work experience coordinator, or community employment provider). The interview may or may not include the student. A person who is familiar with the student and who has a good working relationship with the family should be picked to lead the interview. A copy of the interview questions and the Work Your Network tool can be sent to the family ahead of time so they can develop answers and consider contacts they have for work experiences.

2. Conduct Family Interview

a) Goal: Conducting the structured family interview should accomplish the following goals: 1) Provide a safe environment for families to express hopes and fears regarding the role of competitive employment in the lives of their youth, 2) Help to strengthen the working relationship between families and relevant professionals, 3) Set the expectation that paid competitive employment for the student is the common goal everyone is working towards, 4) Establish specific ways families can play a role in the process, and 5) Identify career goals or specific community employers for a possible job or work experience

b) Activity: Conduct a structured family interview (maximum 1 hour). Create a welcome atmosphere and invite professionals who will play a role in facilitating work experiences for the individual student. Use information from interview to add to the Expanded Positive Personal Profile.

c) Tools: Positive Personal Profile
Family Interview Form

Desired Outcome: Information from the parent interview is used to complete an Expanded Positive Personal Profile and to identify possible career goals or specific employers to explore for work

experiences. Families are aware of the overarching goal of preparing students for employment success and are energized to play a role in the process. The Positive Personal Profile contains enough "features" of the youth that the next step in the process (job development) can begin. Generate a completed Family Interview form and expanded positive personal profile.

3. Process Interview Internally and Establish Action Steps

a) Goal: Possible career goals and specific employers are identified, and conversations about interagency supports for work experiences begin

b) Activity: Interagency team meets following the parent interview to plot out student strengths, support needs, and action steps for employer engagement.

c) Tools: Positive Personal Profile
Job Development Plan

Desired Outcome: Information from the structured family interview is used by the interagency team supporting the student to take actionable steps towards securing a paid job or relevant work experience. Team discusses the information provided by the families, including the fears they might have about their youth working in the community, and collaborates to provide funding and staffing supports. Lead staff are identified that will contact potential employers, including those mentioned by the families, for informational interviews. If needed, additional assessment or skill building is also put into place. Generate an expanded positive personal profile and job development plan.

Employer Engagement and Proposal Creation

Employer engagement is defined as a team of school and employment staff working with a job seeker and their family to identify, approach, assess labor needs, propose and negotiate paid work experiences. Quality performance in the job development process is defined as demonstrating a knowledge of an employer's labor needs, requirements of targeted jobs, recruitment and hiring process, as well as proposing the integration of suitably matched job candidates and delivery of employment services that benefit the employer's overall operation



1. **Employer Contact**
   a) Goal: Secure an informational interview
   b) Activity: by phone or in person, contact employers to secure an informational interview. Cold call employers that Employment Specialist doesn't know or contact employers the Employment Specialist does know or network with other Employment Specialists, case managers, counselors, teachers, family members, other employers or job seeker contacts and find out who they know. Employment Specialists, job seekers and family members could also attend networking events such as Chamber of Commerce meetings, job fairs, etc.
   c) Tools: Know Your Network
      Job Development Plan

Desired Outcome: Itemized list of employers the Employment Specialist knows in their network. This tool could also provide a list of employers that other Employment Specialists, job seekers, service coordinators, counselors, teachers or family members know. This list of employers should be specific to the career or vocational goals of the job seeker. Generate a completed Know Your Network form and list of employers on an expanded job development plan.

2. Informational Interview

a) Goal: To learn as much as possible about the employer's operation and their labor needs as well as secure an appointment to conduct an employer presentation

b) Activity: Conduct an informational interview in a timely manner and obtain information on an employer's overall operation, make up of their workforce, specific job opportunities for specific job seekers, requirements of the jobs, recruiting practices, hiring process, and any workforce related issues and labor needs.

c) Tools: Informational Interview Form
Informational Interview Questions

Desired Outcome: the informational interview form provides a structure for conducting the informational interview, a way to document what you are learning about the employer's operation. The informational interview questions are used to prepare for the employer interview. The employer interview provides vital information that can be used in the Employer Proposal and during an Employer Presentation as well in establishing rapport with the employer based on what you are learning about their labor needs. Generate a completed informational interview form.

3. Employer Proposal and Presentation

a) Goal: To secure a yes/no decision on what is being proposed or schedule another appointment for a job interview or to meet with another decision maker within the organization. What is being proposed (the close) can be a paid placement, paid work experience, summer youth placement, unpaid work experience or even a job shadow experience or worksite tour.

b) Activity: Present an employer proposal letter and make 'the ask' (the close)

c) Tool: Employer Proposal Letter

This proposal should include a summary of the employer's labor needs based on the informational interview, requirements of the targeted jobs or work experiences based on the interests and abilities of one or more job seekers, qualifications (features) of the job candidate if the ask is on behalf of a specific job seeker based on a possible match, the employment services being offered to the employer

and the benefits of those employment services to the employer (e.g., save money on recruitment, hiring and training costs, improved job retention, etc.) and 'the ask' (the close) – what you want them to make a decision about.

Desired Outcome: Demonstrates to the employer, the Employment Specialist's understanding of their labor needs and the requirements of targeted jobs, defines how specific job seekers can match the job or work experience requirements and can contribute to the employer's operation based on their abilities, skills, personality traits, etc. (features), proposes specific employment services and the benefits of those services to the employer's operation and their bottom line, and spells out what the Employment Specialist is asking of the employer. A completed employer proposal letter to be shared with the employer during the presentation. The proposal letter should only be presented in person and never mailed or emailed in advance of the presentation.

4. The Close

a) Goal: Obtain a yes/no decision from the employer based on what is being proposed (the close)

b) Activity: Many times, at the employer presentation meeting, a yes/no decision is not obtained. If that's the case, another appointment should be scheduled to get to the close (yes/no decision). The follow up appointment can be to schedule a job interview between the employer and the job candidate or to meet with another decision maker (supervisor, manager or own- er) who was not at the employer presentation. It is important to encourage and obtain closure as to whether the employer wants to work with the Employment Specialist. Even if they say no, the Employment Specialist has a chance to address their concerns or issues.

c) Tools: Employer Proposal Letter

Desired Outcome: If a decision isn't made at the employer presentation meeting, the proposal letter becomes an important 'leave be- hind.' The Employment Specialist also has the chance to revise the proposal letter based on what is learned during the employer presentation meeting. The Employment Specialist also has the opportunity to adjust the close such as proposing a time limited On The Job Training (OJT) or work experience instead of the placement. Develop a revised employer proposal letter.

Improving Family Participation and Partnerships: Training Resources

Improving employment outcomes and work experience opportunities for students with disabilities requires capacity building on many levels. Two of the most important audiences for capacity building are families and the professionals who support students towards employment goals. Each has an important role to play in the student's employment success but each may need training to help them play those roles effectively.

In 2018 TransCen, Inc. received a contract from the Michigan DD Council to develop training materials targeted at families and professionals. The MI DD Council recognized that if the state was going to take full advantage of their new Employment First Executive Order and improve employment outcomes for persons with significant disabilities, families would need to embrace competitive employment as an option for their loved one. The Council had been informed that many families were apprehensive about exploring competitive employment, and the professionals supporting those families were in need of training to help them build partnerships. The MI DD Council decided to create 2 training curricula that could be used by advocates, educators and employment program staff to 1) Help families see opportunities in competitive employment and raise expectations that their son or daughter could work, and 2) Increase the capacity of professionals, including educators, VR Counselors and employment program staff to build effective working partnerships with families and better promote competitive employment as an option for all people.

Parent and professional training is a proven strategy to help people make informed decisions about employment, to better understand their roles in the process and to connect with a shared understanding of each other and the positive impact employment can have in the lives of people with disabilities. The descriptions of the Michigan training curricula are provided in hopes that similar efforts can happen in your state.



1. Parent Training on Seeing Possibilities in Employment

a) Goal: Provide families of youth and young adults with disabilities with the opportunity to get accurate information about competitive employment and the role it can play in adult life

b) Activity: Parent training session

c) Tools:

A Future that Includes Employment Presentation
Family Training Worksheet
Sample Youth Vision
Positive Personal Profile
Features to Benefits Form

The PowerPoint should contain information that supports paid employment as an option for all people. The information should be a balance between explaining the positive impact of employment and actual strategies that families can use to help prepare youth for employment success. Presenters are encouraged to avoid complicated program eligibility information or too much emphasis on publicly funded supports as the only option. That information can be shared with families once they agree to explore employment in the community.

One effective strategy for holding an interactive parent training session is to use a worksheet to support the various themes of the workshop. Questions on the worksheet might include: 1) What do you hope adult life will look like for your son or daughter?, 2) What is your son or daughter's greatest skills or attributes?, 3) What is your greatest concern when thinking about employment for your son or

daughter?, and 4) What do you need to feel hopeful and energized about your son or daughter's employment future? The worksheet should also include an opportunity to have participants describe 3 action steps they will take based on the information from the workshop.

Families of youth with significant disabilities may have limited opportunities to have positive conversations about their youth. However, we know that focusing on a person's unique strengths and interests is the best way to explore careers that are the best matches.
The Positive Personal Profile and Features to Benefits tools can be used during the parent training session to help families see that all people have skills and traits that can lead to employment. It is important to note that employers are looking for potential employees with skills that benefit their business. Translating a person's positive skills, traits and interests to "features" beneficial to an employer can be a useful group exercise.

Desired Outcome: Parent training sessions can yield multiple benefits. Most importantly, they offer a safe environment where families can learn about employment opportunities, ask questions and express concerns. Ideally, they come feeling apprehensive about competitive employment and leave energized about the possibilities that lay ahead for their son or daughter. Parent sessions also provide opportunities for cross-agency collaboration. An effective session requires schools, VR, employment providers, and advocacy groups to work together to promote and present. Finally, these sessions offer the chance to make sure the right message about employment is being sent - that employment in the community is possible for all and should be the expectation, not the exception.

2. Professional Training on Building Partnerships with Families

a) Goal: Provide capacity building to school, VR, and employment program staff on understanding families and building effective partnerships with them

b) Activity: Professional training session or in-service
Tools:

Lighting the Way PowerPoint Presentation
Sample Youth Vision
Positive Personal Profile
Features to Benefits Form

The professional training should be no more than an hour and de- signed to be delivered by advocates (including self-advocates) or fellow employment or education staff. The PowerPoint should focus on 2 main themes, 1) building empathy and understanding to better relate to the family experience, and 2) strategies to build partner- ships with families so they can play a role in the employment process for their loved one.

Families often have difficulty seeing beyond their youth's disability and envisioning them as adults with dreams and strengths. Kentucky Works, a project of the University of Kentucky, has posted a sample "youth vision" document that schools and families can use to help youth tell their own story. The vision tool also doubles as a resume. Showing an example of a completed youth vision is a powerful way to help families see their son or daughter in a different way. Visit the University of Kentucky, Human Development Institute, Employment Checklist website for a blank version of the tool that schools and families can use for free.

The Positive Personal Profile and Features to Benefits tool is an easy to use assessment tool that focuses on a job seeker's positive skills and traits and translates them to "features" beneficial to an employ- er. When used in conjunction with a structured family interview (de- scribed earlier) to can be a powerful tool in matching a youth with individualized job opportunities. Families tend to respond favorably to the Positive Personal Profile since it promotes a positive conversation about their youth and their dreams for the future.

Desired Outcome: Many schools, VR agencies and employment programs seek to improve their engagement of families in the employment process. However, they still struggle doing so. This could be due to a lack of good capacity building (staff training) resources on the subject. The outcome of providing this training will be staff who feel more comfortable and focused when engaging families. In addition, families may feel more empowered when interacting with staff who strive to first understand, then partner with them to reach a common goal.

Publications materials can be found on the Michigan DD Council's website.

Materials are also posted on Incompass Michigan's website.

JOB