



## The Discovery Process: A Path to Employment for All

### What is Discovery?

Everyone has been evaluated at some point. Do you remember how the evaluation process made you feel? Were you nervous or uncomfortable? Did you leave wondering if the results of the evaluation reflect the “real” you?

Individuals with developmental disabilities face significant challenges when it comes to the accuracy and usefulness of typical evaluations and assessments. Some evaluations may be standardized checklists. Others are “situational assessments” where situations are usually made-up and not related to the individual’s strengths and interests. Often, evaluation professionals have a very limited time frame to get to know a person and create an opinion (such as: is this individual able to work?). These evaluations usually do not answer the question, “Who is this individual?”

The Discovery process is an evidence-based alternative to comparative, standardized assessments, and evaluations. Discovery is a person centered planning process that involves getting to know a person before supporting them in developing a plan for employment (Callahan, 2001). It is in-depth study of one.

Discovery begins with a team coming together to discover and gather information about an individual’s:

1. Interests, skills, preferred environments and activities: When are they at their best?
2. Current skills and levels of performance.
3. Effective strategies, ideal working conditions also including those environments and strategies that should be avoided.

The information gathered is incorporated into a

Vocational Profile. The profile is a tool that can be used for: Individual Education Plans (IEP) and Individual Plans for Employment (IPE) planning; organizing a customized employment experience; paid employment; and life activities and experiences. Customized employment is based on a match between the unique strengths, needs, and interests of the job candidate with a disability, and the identified business needs of an employer or the self-employment business chosen by the candidate.

### What Works?

#### A Team Effort

*Some of the components needed to make the Discovery process successful include:*

- ◇ A dedicated team, who believes in the individual and knows them best; and believes that everyone is able to work, regardless of the challenges they may face.
- ◇ The vast majority of the information being gathered comes from natural, inclusive settings and a variety of environments.
- ◇ Being careful not to jump quickly into employment planning. Just because someone shows an interest in an area, does not necessarily mean that they want to be working in that field. It’s critical to allow enough time to truly Discover!
- ◇ Having a capacity vs. deficit viewpoint. Many evaluations determine what an individual can’t do. Discovery looks at strengths and what a person can do.
- ◇ Brainstorming, brainstorming, and more brainstorming! For example, brainstorming

locations to explore an interest, or brainstorming possible employers in the area.

- ◇ Going with the flow of letting the individual lead the process.

### Example:

The team may plan to have someone go with Jane to a favorite book store because she loves books, but on the way Jane is pulling you to go into a nail salon. When something like this happens you have to go for it! It's important to find out what Jane likes about the nail salon and what grabs her attention. It will help the team because this is valuable information about Jane's interests, communication, social skills, support needs, etc.

### Benefits of Discovery

- ◇ New found interests and skills of focus individuals. Even family members are surprised when an individual's intense interest is not the area where they want to work.
- ◇ Overturning decisions of "unemployable" from Vocational Rehabilitation. VR accepts the Vocational/Personal Profile.
- ◇ Team member perspectives change. They see the unique skills, preferences, and support needs, and possibilities for an individual, first.
- ◇ Agency representatives (i.e. Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, provider agencies, and school personnel) on teams become more familiar with the individual and with each other. As a result the team members develop a bond while working together.
- ◇ IEPs and IPEs are modified based on new information including: learning strategies that work and training opportunities that lead to the individual's desired employment outcome.

### Example:

A mom, who initially thought her daughter could not be employed, discovered that her daughter could create her own business, with the proper supports in place.

## FCIC Related Projects

### Collaborative on DISCOVERY and Innovation in Employment (CODIE)

Through a grant from the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, FCIC has established CODIE. The purpose of CODIE is to build the capacity of school professionals, county transition teams, and programs to implement the Discovery process in supporting youth with developmental disabilities in achieving customized employment. [www.flfcic.org](http://www.flfcic.org)

## Resources

- ◇ Callahan, M., Shumpert, N., Condon, E., & Mast, M. (2005). *Discovery: Charting the course to employment*. Marc Gold & Associates.
- ◇ Callahan, M., Shumpert, N., & Mast, M. (2001) *Using Discovery and the Vocational Profile Strategy as the Foundation for Employment Planning and as an Alternative to Traditional Evaluation*. Employment for All.

## Websites

- ◇ Marc Gold & Associates. (2011). *Charting the Course to Employment*. <http://www.marcgold.com>
- ◇ Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor. (2011) *What Is Customized Employment?* <http://www.dol.gov/odep/>