

Discovery Best Practices

A Guide for Indiana Employment Specialists and VR Counselors Working with Job Seekers with Disabilities

This guide is designed to facilitate mutual understanding across provider agencies and VR regarding Discovery practices and throughout the VR Employment Services process.

For each Discovery practice, the guide provides **activity examples** and **quality indicators**. In your roles as employment specialists and VR counselors, you should use the quality indicators to ensure you are completing activities and documentation using best practices.

We assume the Discovery process:

- Should take 20-60 hours for most job seekers, over a two- to eight-week period (perhaps longer if the job seeker participates in work experience/s).
- Operates through a strength-based lens to fully explore possibilities.
- Uses a team approach (both paid and unpaid individuals are involved).

Note for Employment Specialists: For any authorized services (e.g. Situational Assessment), you must ensure the activity meets the service delivery requirements and expected outcomes requirements set forth in the *VR Manual of Employment Services*.

This document was produced by:



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Throughout this guide:

- ES refers to employment specialist.
- PM refers to program manager.
- VRC refers to VR counselor.
- Job seeker and VR participant both refer to the individual receiving services.
- DSP refers to direct support professional.

Discovery Practice: The Intake Meeting

Examples

- ES meets with job seeker at the job seeker's home.
- After agreeing to the location on the phone, ES meets with job seeker at the public library.

Quality Indicators

- The ES or PM makes contact with referred VR participant within 48 hours of receiving the referral. Once contacted, intake occurs within 10 calendar days of receipt of VR referral for services.
- The job seeker and family/support professionals may request the intake meeting occur at the ES office, but the ES should not offer this as the ideal option or make this standard practice.
- The ES/PM completes basic forms/releases/permissions required by provider agency in order to begin services.
- The ES/PM verifies information received from VR referral. ES/PM may need to have a discussion with VRC regarding the job seeker's benefits and the need for benefits analysis if applicable. The ES/PM answers questions and addresses concerns related to benefits and does so using accurate knowledge and information.
- The ES/PM explains roles and expectations and employment services to the job seeker, especially Discovery (since this is the onset of service provision). The ES/PM answers questions and concerns about the employment services process and Discovery.
- The ES/PM ensures collection/documentation of critical information such as Social Security benefits, state identification documents, and medication/s. If driver's license/state ID, Social Security card or birth certificate (or a passport) are not up-to-date or available, ES will subsequently assist job seeker to secure the former two, as they will be needed for the hiring process.

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- The ES/PM will take notes during the intake.
- Intake meeting attendees identify and schedule next steps and activities.
- The ES/PM proactively schedules a Job Development and Planning meeting with the VRC/job seeker/others to occur within two months (may be adjusted as needed).

Discovery Practice: Meet/Greet

Examples

- ES meets with job seeker at their home.
- ES meets with job seeker at local coffee shop. DSP attends meeting as well.
- ES meets job seeker and VRC at the library.

Quality Indicators

- Home visit occurs at job seeker's home, unless policy or job seeker dictates otherwise.
- Home visits are necessary to collect rich information and to get a more accurate glimpse into the job seeker's identity.
- If completed outside the home, visit occurs at a community setting such as library, coffee shop, or church.
- Home visit may include others who know the person well.
- Intake has been completed prior to this meeting.
- The ES allows job seeker to lead the conversation using "smooth listening" and strategies that promote open-ended conversations. The ES does not lead the conversation or structure the conversation as a rigid "check-the-form" interview.
- The ES uses creative strategies for communication should the job seeker not disclose or share information openly or comfortably, including use of natural supports present at the home visit.
- Through the meet and greet, the ES finds or identifies skills and interests to use as an initial starting point for planning future activities, and avoids premature identification of job selection.
- Discovery activities are individualized and organically generated based upon the unique job seeker. Best practice is to refrain from routine use of pre-established "community sites" for purposes of "assessment."

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- The ES plans and crafts future activities as a result of “thinking in questions” and curiosity about information gathered thus far. In other words, the ES creates an intentional path to discover diverse information about the job seeker. The ES takes notes after the conversation has been completed (e.g. in the car), rather than during the conversation. If notes are taken during the conversation, the ES takes care to ask the job seeker if they are comfortable with note taking (some information is too valuable to delay noting) and intentionally minimizes the amount of notes taken.
- Roles and expectations may be explained/reviewed again (also done at the intake meeting) and agreed upon. ES addresses concerns or questions from the job seeker and/or significant others present. (Note: Those present should be there with permission of the job seeker.)
- ES/PM, job seeker, and others present discuss and agree upon frequency of visits and activities.
- During meetings, the job seeker is included in all discussions about the process..
- ES uses visit(s) to establish and build rapport and trust.
- ES observes, learns, and captures job seeker likes, preferences, dislikes, daily/weekly/monthly routines, and support systems.
- ES begins to identify job seeker needs (conditions for success).
- Meet and greet serves as “jumping off point” for planning Discovery activities and services.

Discovery Practice: Neighborhood Mapping

Examples

- ES and job seeker walk or drive around the neighborhood within an approximate one-mile radius.
- ES videotapes area businesses, churches, and schools and later reviews video with the job seeker.

Quality Indicators

- The ES and job seeker take a tour of job seeker’s immediate neighborhood and nearby community.
- With occasional exceptions, mapping is completed with the job seeker present and participating. An exception might be indicated if job seeker’s mobility or health issues

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prevent physical participation. In this case, the ES can videotape the neighborhood mapping and later review with the job seeker.

- The ES notes businesses that might be an employment option, a work experience opportunity, or a place to try a situational assessment.
- The ES asks job seeker what businesses he/she or family frequent in the area such as groceries, banks, clothing stores, auto repair, home services, etc. The ES questions job seeker about what they like/do not like about these businesses.
- While taking the tour, the ES asks job seeker “who” they know in the area (people who live in nearby homes or work in area businesses) and explores further, using open-ended questions. This helps generate social networking.
- The ES notes transportation options by thinking about the following questions: What is available in the area? Ask the job seeker if they’ve thought about how they would get to work? Is there a bus line? How often do buses run? How early do they pick up in the morning, and how late do they run each day? Do ride-sourcing companies (e.g., Uber or Lyft) cater to the area? Is there a bike lane? Is there a train? What safety concerns might be present in their neighborhood? Is there a sidewalk? Do they have to cross a busy street to catch a bus? Is it safe to walk the neighborhood alone? Are there Crime Watch signs posted?
- The ES identifies neighbors who could be beneficial to the job seeker’s quest for employment. The ES gets permission from the job seeker to speak with those identified neighbors.
- Neighbors who have interactions with the job seeker might be considered for information. Look for neighbors who either offer assistance or who are offered assistance by the job seeker. Generally, the longer the job seeker has lived in the neighborhood, the more likely there will be neighbors who have useful information about the job seeker.
- The ES ask job seeker where they participate in activities close to home. This helps the ES identify additional places, resources, and services that can provide opportunities for Discovery activity planning.
- The ES asks job seeker who they know in various establishments in the neighborhood, like the trainer at the YMCA or the hairstylist at the local salon. That may give you an opportunity to connect with more people who know your job seeker.
- The ES notes neighborhood-mapping information by recording names/roles on their smartphone, taking pictures, or creating a paper list.

Discovery Practice: Interviews with People Who Know the Job Seeker Well

Examples

- ES interviews the job seeker's grandmother, neighbor, former teacher, and barber.
- ES talks to job seeker's behavior specialist, case manager, and direct support staff.

Quality Indicators

- Those who are interviewed have a genuine (positive) interest in the job seeker.
- ES interviews people who know the job seeker well. These interviews should include those who are identified by the job seeker.
- ES identifies "lifelines," both paid (social service providers) and unpaid people who are important in the job seeker's life, and includes these people in interviews.
- ES engages in "smooth listening," and asks questions at the appropriate time.
- ES uses interviews to gain positive information including job seeker strengths and successes. ES does not capture (on the Discovery Profile) negative or unhelpful information. The ES may capture information learned about supports that work well for the job seeker. If noted through interview, these supports would then further be verified by the ES.
- ES frames challenges as either a support need or as an ideal condition of work. ES does not note a job seeker's challenge as a reason for exclusion from potential career opportunities (legal exclusions aside, as necessary).
- ES finds or identifies skills and interests to use as another jumping off point or path of curiosity for planning future activities.

Discovery Practice: Doing Familiar Things

Examples of potential familiar activities

- Job seeker prepares a meal in job seeker's kitchen and shops at job seeker's usual grocery store to purchase items needed for the meal or for the household.
- ES observes job seeker play bingo at the VFW with her dad.
- ES watches job seeker pick tomatoes in the job seeker's home garden.
- ES goes with the job seeker to the YMCA to watch the job seeker participate in her usual exercise class.
- ES shadows job seeker as they attend their culinary class at Ivy Tech.

Quality Indicators

- Activities will vary case by case but include being alongside the job seeker, gathering info, and observing familiar activities that lead to strength-based observations and skills.
- ES discerns competencies through intentional, purposeful, and familiar (to the job seeker) activities of interest that shed light on skills, abilities, tasks, support needs, and instructional strategies.
- Reported activity(ies) occur at home and/or in familiar community-based settings, where job seeker performs familiar activities.
- ES should note transferrable skills identified during the activity. The ES would then speculate how to further shed light on these transferable skills in another setting.
- ES is present during activities to assist job seeker and enhance competencies. ES takes note of teaching and support strategies used and beneficial to the job seeker during the activity.
- Job seeker participates in activity, as opposed to being passively present. The ES takes a picture or video of the job seeker "in action."

Discovery Practice: Doing Unfamiliar Things

Examples of potential unfamiliar activities

- ES observes job seeker setting up for a lunch event with a caterer.
- ES watches job seeker assisting local stationery store with wedding invitation collating.
- ES sees job seeker assisting pilots by pulling weather reports at local airfield.
- While at the airport, ES discovers job seeker is interested in the gadgets and dials of the airplane. ES sets up subsequent opportunity for a job shadow with the technician who fixes planes.

Quality Indicators

- Activities will vary case by case but include being alongside the job seeker, gathering information, and observing unfamiliar activities.
- ES discerns competencies through intentional, purposeful activities of interest that shed light on skills, abilities, tasks, support needs, and instructional strategies.
- ES identifies or develops activities that are new to the job seeker, based on job seeker's emergent interests or skills or preliminarily identified vocational themes, to provide further discernment. While relationships and connections may be made in the community, the intent of the activity is not job development.
- ES develops observations in unfamiliar environments during this time. This will yield information about job seeker coping skills in novel environments, while completing novel activities.
- ES develops a multi-layered experience that engages multiple skills and tasks (e.g., ushering for a play where job seeker is greeting people, handing out brochures, seating people, and/or using flashlight vs. just handing out brochures). The experience developed builds upon the job seeker's emergent interests or skills.
- The ES ensures that the job seeker is/appears competent in the experience. This means that the ES may provide supports and has tailored the task appropriately. Most job seekers will benefit from a multi-layered experience that engages multiple skills and tasks, while some job seekers may need to focus on a primary/singular task or skill.
- ES responds quickly (within 2-3 working days), with a planned activity (see above) that is related to an identified interest or skill.

Discovery Practice: Capturing Conditions for Successful Employment

Examples

- ES notes that a public bus stops two blocks from the job seeker's house and transfers to another bus that goes downtown. ES also learns that job seeker's older brother is willing to provide transportation to and from work.
- Job seeker's parent tells ES that due to the job seeker's medication regimen and/or side effects of the medication, it would be better if the job seeker has an afternoon or evening work schedule.
- ES notes that job seeker can't climb ladders (non-negotiable). Job seeker also tells ES that he prefers afternoon work because he likes to sleep in (negotiable).
- ES notes that job seeker uses a Dynavox for communication but they may also benefit from assistive technology to manage their schedule throughout the day. (Will likely need to coordinate with VRC; an assessment may need to be completed by appropriate agency who can also provide training.)
- ES notices that job seeker prefers not to be around crowds.

Quality Indicators

- Conditions of employment and ideal work environments may be captured or noted during a situational assessment, job shadow, informational interview, or other Discovery activity.
- The job seeker's unique preferences and conditions for employment are noted in the Discovery Profile.
- A rationale for each of the job seeker's conditions for successful employment is noted on the Discovery Profile.
- The negotiables and non-negotiables are identified appropriately in the Discovery Profile. Environmental concerns that are negotiable or non-negotiable that could be considered include dust, lighting, temperature, sudden loud noises, etc.
- Conditions are described in positive terms and as solutions to the barriers. The ES actively avoids use of negative descriptors and conditions. For example, the ES would not write, "Joe Smith must work after 10 a.m., because he refuses to get out of bed." The ES might alternately write, "Joe Smith prefers working after 10 a.m. to accommodate his late-night gaming hobby."

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- The ES disregards agency convenience as a condition for success. For example, if the job seeker strongly prefers a third shift schedule, the ES would acknowledge and respect this condition, regardless of job support inconvenience.

Discovery Practice: Capturing Personal Attributes

Examples

- ES observes that job seeker is friendly, evidenced by greetings at church.
- Job seeker has strong preference for routine, verified and observed throughout home and routine community activities.
- Job seeker recognizes potential danger; he checks street crossings at least twice before crossing the street.

Quality Indicators

- ES reflects about personal attributes as indications of ideal working conditions. For example, someone with a strong preference for cleanliness would likely not prefer working in a junk yard. (The Discovery Profile section, “Ideal Conditions,” aligns with personal attributes.)
- The person’s personality or behavioral qualities are described using positive language.
- The ES does not use clinical diagnostic labels as a personal attribute.
- Within a total caseload, personal attributes should not be repeated or bare a strong resemblance across all job seekers; job seekers are unique, and personal attributes should be unique.
- Attributes are identified through the Discovery process and are given within a context. Context can be noted by using the phrase, “as evidenced by.”
- ES refrains from assuming personal attributes without evidence.

Discovery Practice: Informational Interviews with Employers

Example

For a job seeker whose emerging vocational theme is “culinary,” the ES and job seeker complete an informational interview with a college culinary professor, a shop owner specializing in canine health foods, and the local hospital’s neonatal director to learn more about specialized neonatal food prep.

Quality Indicators

- The purpose of informational interviews is to ask for career advice and information. Informational interviews are based on potential emerging themes and are not job development.
- ES completes informational interviews with the job seeker present. However, there may be times when the job seeker is not present. This likely occurs when the ES is initially arranging, exploring possible contacts, and planning the informational interview.
- These may be conducted during situational assessments and/or work experiences as appropriate.
- ES spends time preparing the job seeker for the informational interview and explains the purpose of the meeting. Preparing the job seeker helps ensure they are well-informed and can present themselves in a positive light.
- The intent of a Discovery informational interview is to refine and finalize vocational themes, to learn more about an industry, to learn more about skills for success in that industry or to build personal/professional relationships for the job seeker.
- ES facilitates interview with a focus of common shared interests (vocational themes), not on the potential of employment.
- ES arranges one to three interviews for each identified or emerging vocational theme.
- ES uses a strategy of social networking (people the ES knows or the job seeker/family knows) to identify potential leads for informational interviews.
- ES uses a variety of sources; including warm leads, appointments, business network, and cold calls with small businesses.

Discovery Practice: Developing Vocational Themes

Vocational Theme Examples

- Religion
- Faith
- Organization
- Conservation
- Beautification
- Mathematics
- Informatics

Quality Indicators

- Vocational themes must be unique for each job seeker.
- There must be a minimum of three vocational themes.
- Developing vocational themes involves gathering information throughout all Discovery activities.
- ES identifies vocational themes as a result of knowledge gained about job seeker's interests, skills, conditions of employment, and personal attributes. The vocational themes are aligned with the total Discovery experience and findings. ES ensures job seeker endorses these vocational themes and makes changes based upon job seeker input/choice.
- Themes are broad umbrella topics that represent an accumulation of many jobs, environments, skills/task sets, and interests.
- ES refrains from listing job titles in this section; vocational themes are not job titles.
- Vocational theme can be identified with one word or a phrase (mechanics/service to others).
- ES refrains from developing vocational themes representing "easier" job placement; job seeker giftedness drives the vocational theme.
- There is mutual understanding and agreement of themes by all team members.
- Emerging vocational themes translate to establish vocational goal created using the Job Development and Placement Plan, Individualized Plan for Employment (goal). This is done in collaboration with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor during a team meeting.

Discovery Practice: Listing Employers Based on Identified Vocational Themes

Examples

For a job seeker whose vocational theme is “beautification,” aligned businesses might include a local:

- tattoo shop
- glass blower
- furniture refinisher
- nail salon

Quality Indicators

- ES develops a list of businesses for aligned with each vocational theme, and these businesses are located in the job seeker’s community. Businesses listed must be unique for each job seeker’s vocational themes and ideal working conditions.
- Identified list of employers aligns with identified vocational themes.
- ES refrains from listing businesses simply because that business typically has “help wanted” advertising.
- Under each theme, as many lines as possible are completed with thoughtful, individualized, and appropriate information using warm leads, use of social capital, ES knowledge of the community, and team suggestions.
- ES asks for suggestions from other people present at the Job Development and Placement Planning meeting.
- ES uses this list of businesses as a blueprint for job development, contacting each listed business. ES uses referrals from other people whenever possible when contacting businesses.

Discovery Practice: Using Work Experiences

Examples

For a job seeker interested in art, ES explores potential work experiences (of 1-12 weeks) at:

- a tattoo shop,
- a glass blower,
- a furniture refinisher, and
- a museum.

Quality Indicators

- Work experiences must be unique for each job seeker and can be used during Discovery.
- ES arranges a one- to 12-week work experience. Job seeker, business, and ES agree upon the work experience. This Discovery work experience activity may be paid or unpaid, and the ES, job seeker, and business also agree upon this prior to beginning the work experience.
- ES notes insights gained as a job seeker completes the work experience. This includes insights about job seeker's interests, career goals, skills, ideal working conditions, references, support needs and training strategies.
- ES goal is not job placement through a work experience (even though an employer may end up offering a position); ES should not promise this to a job seeker.
- ES provides on-site assistance as needed throughout the work experience; ES uses this time to gain insight into important factors needed for job seeker success.
- Work experiences may only occur in competitive, integrated, community work sites.
- Work sites used for work experiences should not be pre-established and repeatedly used for every job seeker; work experiences are uniquely developed for each job seeker.

Discovery Practice: Job Shadowing

Examples

- 1-8 hours spent observing local candy-maker as they roll and cut taffy and fudge.
- 1-8 hours observing print shop employees when the ES/job seeker visit Staples.

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Quality Indicators

- Job shadows are job observations and might include a number of businesses throughout a community.
- Job shadowing activities must be unique for each job seeker.
- ES is present with job seeker in a one-to-one fashion for the duration of the job shadow.
- ES asks open-ended questions in order to gain feedback, thoughts, and feelings from the job seeker regarding tasks/environment being observed. ES focuses on job seeker reported likes/dislikes and what they learned from the job seeker.
- ES may arrange the job shadow with a business, or the job shadow can be completed anonymously (no one but the ES and job seeker will know they are observing and why) in most public spaces.
- Job shadows can help the ES/job seeker hone in on potential vocational themes and/or provide new directions to explore.

Discovery Practice: Job Development and Placement Planning Meeting

Example

Information collected so far in Discovery indicates that working in agriculture is a good goal for the Individual Plan for Employment. During a meeting at the job seeker's home, the team (VRC, ES, job seeker and others) brainstorms strategies for job development around the identified agriculture goal.

Quality Indicators

- The ES/PM proactively schedules a Job Development and Planning Meeting with the VRC/job seeker/others to occur in roughly two months (may be adjusted as needed) upon completion of the initial Intake Meeting (described above).
- ES explains goal of this meeting to the job seeker.
- ES and job seeker review the Discovery Profile prior to the Job Placement and Planning Meeting.
- ES assists job seeker to identify and invite others to the Job Placement and Planning Meeting. These would be people who know the job seeker well, whom the job seeker

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has invited to attend and who share a strength-based, possibilities lens for the job seeker's career and vocational goals.

- Once identified, the ES (with job seeker permission) shares the Discovery Profile with others for their review prior to the Job Placement and Planning Meeting.
- ES and job seeker agree upon strategies to achieve successful placement and expectations of one another (frequency and manner of communication/consultation/contact) prior to the Job Development and Placement Planning Meeting.
- If the Job Placement and Planning Meeting will be virtual or via telephone, the ES ensures accessibility and accommodation needs of the job seeker/other attendees are in place prior to the meeting.

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