

## **The Customized Plan for Employment: Developing a Blueprint for Job Development**

Now that you have gotten to know the job seeker through the process of Discovery, the next step is to organize that information into a plan for successful job procurement. There are an array of strategies out there for this step of the process. Marc Gold & Associates implements an Employment Planning meeting to which people who know the job seeker well and know the local community will gather to confirm the discovered information and draft a plan for job development.

### **What is the focus of a Customized Plan for Employment?**

Instead of starting with a discussion about what jobs are available in the community and who is hiring, the discussion centers on the person first. The goal is to develop a blue print for the job you want for the person or need to create for the person. This planning helps set the job developer as well as the job seeker up for success and the activity of calling on employers and marketing the person becomes much better directed and planned rather than randomly calling on employers that may or may not match what the person needs in a job and employment setting.

*Ideal Conditions:* The first area to gain clarity in is the ideal conditions of employment for the job seeker. These are the features of the job, supports on and around the job that the person will need to be successful. Each job seeker will have their own individualized list. Things that might be considered as conditions are:

- Wages- how much the person needs to make or wants to earn;
- # of hours they work, which hours they work, which days of the week the work or don't work;

- Predictability of the work routine and tasks. Some people are more independent when the flow of their routine is the same or they have the predictability of a list of their requirements for the day;
- Transportation could include proximity to home if walking or relying on a ride, the number of transfers on a bus a person would need to make, or time of day and geographic area if relying on a neighbor or friend to commute to work with;
- Type of social interactions might be a condition. Some people do best interacting with familiar coworkers but not unfamiliar people, or working alone with infrequent interactions with coworkers, some people would do best working alongside a coworker or having a coworker within their line of sight.

Some job seekers may have very few conditions and are pretty flexible in terms of what supports, settings and tasks work for them. The more conditions that someone has the smaller the list of employers that will match these conditions becomes. The idea is to set the person up for success by screening out situations that won't work for them and being proactive and informed enough to negotiate tasks, accommodations and supports that will enable them to succeed. The list of conditions guides the job developer in deciding which employers to contact and what needs to be negotiated on the person's behalf.

*Interests toward Aspects of the Job Market* – A person's interests provide a "direction beacon" toward various areas of the broader job market. Rather than identifying specific job titles, as is typical in traditional employment planning, this approach seeks to follow a job seeker's personal interests that are likely to tap into intrinsic motivation for working. These interests are identified during Discovery and relate to activities and performance the person does without being expected or required to do so. Broadly stated interests might include "working around boats", "office work" or "working in a retail setting". Be careful not to confuse work interests with preferentially-stated

conditions. For instance, if a person says in a plan, “I’d like to work around people.” They have stated a condition for any job they have, not a work interest that guides us toward a certain aspect of the job market.

*Contributions* refer to all the factors a potential employer might consider in hiring a job seeker as well as the specific tasks the job seeker is proposing to offer. Contributions include personality characteristics, skills, work and life experiences, specialized training, credentials and recommendations that a job seeker would bring to an employer. Having a ready list of contributions helps the job developer explain the benefits of hiring this individual to an employer and also helps them readily identify ways the job seeker can meet some of the unmet needs of the employer as they become clear.

### **How do I set up a Customized Plan?**

Attention to the logistics of setting up a plan is a key ingredient of success. The *setting* for the employment meeting should be conducive to the goal at hand. It needs to be a comfortable space, away from public access, to allow the discussion of confidential information if the person decides these topics should or need to be on the agenda for the day. Since you want the job seeker to be an active and empowered participant it is essential for the location of the meeting to be somewhere they are most comfortable. A room which holds 8-12 people who can be seated around a table works well. Access to a flip chart and walls that you can tape flip chart paper to are important. Typically speaking, avoid home settings and other informal spaces that do not allow for all everyone to be comfortably seated around a table.

While all meetings and employment planning processes are unique, an average *length* of these meetings can range from 1 ½ - 2 ½ hours. At the beginning of the meeting it is a good idea to survey participants to determine if any have time constraints which will take them out of the meeting early. If you expect the meeting to last more than 2 hours or if essential people need to leave early, breaking the meeting into two sessions is

recommended to ensure that your planning team doesn't lose steam or leave the meeting just when you get to the most crucial brain storming or planning. If broken into two meetings, the first can be utilized to clarify ideal conditions, preferences and contributions and the second focus on clarification of job tasks that the individual can perform and identification of specific employers which may have a need for the employees contributions and whose work environment may match the description of the Ideal Conditions of Employment necessary.

*The selection of meeting participants* is another important consideration. The end goal of the Planning meeting is to have a clear picture of the terms of negotiation for employment; a script for marketing which includes information about the person = s contributions and potential job tasks; a prospecting list of employers to contact; and actions steps outlining each member = s role and timelines for assisting with the job procurement. It is essential to include meeting participants who can support these outcomes. The individual should be encouraged to include meeting participants who:

- know them well
- are familiar with employment tasks or businesses that the individual is interested in pursuing
- have connections within the person = s community.

Ideally the meeting participants will be comprised of having no more persons who are paid to attend than there are those not paid to attend – family, friends and others from the community. Previous employers or business owners from the person = s community who know the job seeker are excellent choices. Employers make great references for a job seeker or could possibly connect you to other employers as you are negotiating a

job on behalf of an individual. Consider inviting someone who is familiar with the community and knows many employers even if this individual doesn't know the individual job seeker. Most of us have gotten jobs at one time or another through people we know. It is a good strategy to load the meeting with people who are connected to employers and the applicant. In the Discovery process connections to the person have been identified. These connections should be considered as potential meeting participants. They might turn out to be a prospective employer or be willing to contact a connection of their own on behalf of the person.

After the job seeker has approved the Profile document, send each invited participant a copy giving them adequate time to review it prior to the meeting. In a cover letter request that they review the Profile and come prepared to discuss the person's contributions, skills, job tasks they can perform and offer information about the ideal conditions of employment for the person.

**How do I prepare the job seeker for the planning meeting?**

Since the role you are expecting the job seeker to play and ownership of this meeting afforded to them may be a new experience it is best to spend time prior to the meeting giving them information about the choices they will get to make and about the flow of the meeting. Have discussions with the job seekers prior to the meeting about how you will present sensitive information about ideal conditions or supports that needs to be discussed. Some sensitive areas of discussion may include: toileting, personal care, support needs around food or diet. Ask the job seeker if they are comfortable with this information being discussed publically and offer them the option to discuss more sensitive information in a smaller more intimate setting at a different time. Ask if they want any ground rules established. If this is a new experience for them give them examples of ground rules such as, "One person speaking at time, avoiding comments

such as they will never work, the speaking for the consumer, etc.”

Additional strategies to assist the person to effectively participate their plan include:

- Give the individual information about their role and decision making or veto power. Give them the option to ask someone to help make decisions if they need this support. The job seeker decides what information is to be recorded, the priority of them employers to be contacted and which job tasks they would like to pursue first.
- Ask them who they want to facilitate, record and who they want to sit next to (this person could significantly influence how much the job seeker will participate in their meeting).
- Encourage the job seeker to send out invitations and information to meeting participants in advance.
- Maximize participant = s time and participation at the meeting by giving them information about their role, expectations, and what information they will be asked to share before getting into the meeting.

### **What are my Facilitation Responsibilities?**

The facilitator runs the meeting on behalf of the individual. It is therefore essential for Planning Meeting facilitators to have a clear understanding of customized employment and the desired end components of the planning meeting. Ideally the facilitator of the Planning meeting is the same person who gathered the information about the person during the Discovery process. Facilitators commonly are required to redirect team members away from discussions of what is available for employment in the community back to what are the ideal features of the job for the individual. Another vital skill for facilitators is translating information shared during the meeting into employment related information. For example, during Discovery it may have been learned that an individual

learns best with concrete information about what = s next in their routine and typically uses a written schedule. This may be translated into an Ideal condition of work being someone in the individual = s work environment provides a written list of tasks that she needs to complete each day. The facilitator is responsible for supporting the job seeker to participate in and direct the meeting and planning process. The facilitator may need to redirect the recorder or others in the meeting to wait for the consumer to validate information before it is publically recorded, or may need to direct participants to provide wait time for the consumer to express their opinions and thoughts, or on occasion need to remind participants about the purpose of the meeting or ground rules set forth by the consumer. The facilitator needs to remain committed to supporting the consumer to control their planning meeting and process and refrain from owning the meeting themselves.

### **How does the facilitator begin a typical Planning Meeting?**

Although each planning meeting will be unique based upon the facilitator, the individual job seeker, and the team members involved, there are some general components which are included in all planning meetings.

- Facilitate introductions of all those attending.
- Explain that the purpose of the meeting is to develop a plan for job development.
- Explain how this meeting differs from other meetings that they have participated in.
- Establish the job seeker = s role and status as the person with Trump or veto power.
- Review ground rules and post in a visible location.

- Review the meeting components explaining the importance of sequence of brainstorming. It is crucial to define the ideal conditions first, then preferences and job task to encourage the customization of the job.
- Ask participants if anyone needs to leave early. If several key people must leave before the meeting is scheduled to end the facilitator may choose to schedule 2 meetings.

Again, you want to spend your time planning for job procurement not revisiting the Discovery Process. You have requested that people review the information about the person prior to the planning meeting so the team can make the most of the time strategizing marketing a job for the person.

It helps immensely with the employment planning meeting for participants to constantly have a picture of what has been covered and where the meeting is headed. An effective strategy is to publicly record and post information. An easy and inexpensive way to do this is using a flip chart on a stand and taping the finished pages of information on the walls. This will help the facilitator redirect the team to the goal at hand and redirect a team to the individual = s Ideal Characteristics if they begin getting off track and focusing on existing job openings versus customized employment. For job seekers who don = t read, consider augmenting the written words with icons to give them the benefit of the public information as well. Post the agenda on the wall to help keep the meeting on track and more importantly to keep the team members from jumping directly into listing employers who may have openings.

### **Are there recommended “ground rules” for a Planning Meeting?**

Yes, most facilitators find it helpful to lay out “ground rules” either verbally or in writing on a poster prior to a Plan so as to insure that everyone will be respectful of both the focus of the meeting as well as the individual for who the meeting is about. The following is a representative set of “ground rules” that have been used in Customized Plans for employment:

- Employment is the goal
- The focus will be on employment possibilities that fit the individual
- Other, non-related, issues will be discussed at another time, and
- The meeting belongs to the individual and he/she must approve any component of the plan

*Establishing a Parking Lot for Related Issues:* Often during a meeting, tangential issues will be brought up by participants that threaten to derail the meeting’s flow and focus. Facilitators are encouraged to develop a “Parking Lot”, a blank poster page, that can become a list of those issues that will not be discussed during the meeting but that will be addressed in the days following the Plan. In this way, legitimate concerns can be recognized without causing the meeting to lose focus.

### **What is the Structure of a Customized Plan?**

Each of the following components of the employment planning meeting will be listed on a flip chart paper. The group, along with the job seeker, will offer information for each category and the recorder will capture the ideas on the paper. Upon completion of each section, the paper will be taped to wall ensuring that it remains visible for all participants. The Customized Planning meeting is comprised of the five components that follow:

1. What works?/ What doesn’t work?
2. Characteristics of an Ideal Job

#### **Conditions**

Interests

Contributions

3. Potential Job Tasks
4. Specific Employers with connections
5. Action Steps

*Meeting Components:*

A) *What works/What doesn't work:* As an ice breaker people have recommended starting a brainstorming session about what works for the person and what does not work. Use one sheet of flip chart paper and draw a vertical line down the middle. Be sure to balance the answers on each side rather than focusing solely on what doesn't work. These reflections serve to break the ice and get everyone participating. The perspective can relate to any aspect of the individual's life, not just employment.

B) *Characteristics of an ideal job:* In this section of the meeting the facilitator and participants will assist the individual to identify ideal conditions for success, interests toward various aspects of the job market and potential contributions. You begin by having participants share their thoughts about conditions that must be in place within a work environment for this individual to be successful. This may include environmental characteristics, training or support strategies, or conditions such as accessibility characteristics. Although all participants are asked to share ideas, the job seeker must give permission prior to information in this section being recorded on the flip chart paper. (To best prepare the job seeker to participate in this section suggest that they might generate a list of conditions they think are necessary, based upon their Profile prior to the meeting. Regarding Interests, the participants should generate ideas about what broad categories of work a job seeker prefers. Examples include: working around boats, working in an office, doing police work or working with computers. The facilitator can always reference information that they have discovered in the discovery process but in general should let the meeting participants take the lead in contributing information. The final characteristic of an ideal job relates to the potential contributions of the individual to employers. It is common for a facilitator to need to redirect team members to describe things in terms of employment related characteristics. For example if a team member offers that the individual likes people, a facilitator may

prompt What have you observed that leads you to that conclusion? What about that contribution would make the individual attractive to an employer? The contribution might be that the individual would get along with coworkers, constantly has a smile on their face, and greets everyone by name each morning. Since this area is one of the more challenging for persons with significant disabilities, use the following categories to help identify contributions:

- Strongest personality characteristics
- Best skills of life
- Credentials
- Experiences
- Recommendations

*C) Potential Job Tasks:* This component of the plan signals a turning point from an individual focus that that of an employer's benefit. You begin by referencing the strongest skills identified in the previous section (or in Section 5 of Part II of the Profile of Discovery) and translating, as necessary those skills into potential job tasks by using employer friendly language. Be sure to consider all the skills that the individual can perform, or that you believe that they might be able to perform, based upon the information learned about them in discovery. One major difference between this employment process and previous job development processes is that your goal is to identify and combine tasks within a work environment and create a job description for a person rather than looking for an existing group of tasks (an existing job description with a job title) that is currently performed by someone else within a work environment. This list of tasks is generated in relation to Interest Areas identified in the previous section. The facilitator should look for common themes among tasks that might be used in

various interest areas. After the list has been generated the job seeker is asked to prioritize which tasks they would most like to perform and those they do not.

*D) Specific Employers:* The final step of the plan itself, lists specific employers who might meet the ideal conditions of employment and may have tasks which the consumer can perform. This list also comprises the initial prospecting list and most specifics of the potential job sites won = t be established until the job developer visits the site. It is of critical importance to use the person's Interests to guide the listing of employers. List specific employers by their name and then identify the Interest area. Next, list the task numbers of the Potential Job Tasks from Section C of the plan felt to be a fit with each employer. After a list of between fifteen to twenty five employers is generated ask the individual, with family assistance, to prioritize the order in which employers will be contacted by the job developer to contact on their behalf. Then ask the meeting participants if anyone has a connection within each of the businesses. If so ask if they would be willing to contact the connection on the job seeker = s behalf to ask if the job developer could call to establish a time to come tour the business or present the marketing portfolio.

*E) Action Plans:*