

Implementing the Discovery Process

What is Discovery?

The process of Discovery is a person-centered approach to gathering information about a student prior to discussing potential jobs, employers, or job tasks. Discovery assists in revealing the student's interests, skills, and supports in environments and activities where the student is at his or her best. Discovery seeks to understand various facets of a student's life in order to discover who the person is rather than what he or she wants to do. This strategy utilizes already existing information instead of information developed through typical evaluations.

The Student's Blueprint for Future Employment

As we conduct Discovery, we search for pieces of information that we can include in a student's blueprint for future employment and include them in the student's profile. We presume that **all** students have something to offer in terms of contributions to a future employer and it is up to us, in Discovery, to determine what those contributions might be. This process uses interviews and observations to uncover the unique contributions, skills, and interests that a student can bring to a work experience and answers the questions:

- Who is this student?
- What contributions can the student make?
- Where and when the student is at his or her best?

Uncovering the Best Aspects of the Student

When you apply the Discovery process, you are uncovering the best aspects of the student by looking at and synthesizing the following aspects: routines, relationships, responsibilities, challenges, associations, friendships, conditions for success, tasks, solutions, connections, education, location, and life performance.

The strategy of Discovery employs both interviews and record reviews. When participating in Discovery there are four important steps:

1. **Asking** for names of individuals that the student and family feel know the student best.
2. **Meeting** and **interviewing** with these people identified by the student and families with the student's and family's permission. Potential individuals may include teachers, agency staff, counselors, other related services staff, friends, neighbors, and others.
3. **Obtaining** additional information about the student's interests, support needs, successful support strategies, and performance in various activities, as well as identifying family connections.
4. **Reviewing** confidential records **AFTER** seeking new and positive information about the student. Look for pertinent information to supplement information gleaned in the Discovery process.

Observations

Discovery also employs observations to validate how students interact and perform in a new context outside of school. These observations can validate what you already have learned about the students, and also help to gain a complete picture. Suggested settings for observations include, but are not limited to: home, community settings and activities such as sporting events, scouts, shopping, church-affiliated programs, volunteer or after school events and school- or community-based work experiences. When observing students use descriptive language in your summary of the observations. Make sure to write what you observed, not how you felt about the observation.

Discovery Process in Virginia

To assist educators in obtaining age appropriate transition assessment information for students with disabilities, the Virginia Department of Education endorsed the use of Discovery in 2012. Across Virginia, teachers are beginning the Discovery process in middle school and are using interviews, observations, and portfolios to uncover the skills, interests and contributions that each student can bring to a job. Current school divisions involved in Discovery include York, Montgomery, Loudoun, and Lynchburg City.

Success using Discovery

For years, Sean's teachers told his parents he would need intensive supports his entire life. Paid integrated employment was out of the question. Through the process of Discovery and Customized Employment, Sean's team got to know him through the lens of what he **could** do. His strengths, interests, contributions, and conditions for success were shared, observed, and documented. This led to the negotiation of a job with the big name employer, Barnes and Noble. Sean was the center of the process, every step of the way. He is proof that he and this process **can work!**

Additional Resources

- University of Montana Rural Institute: ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/Discovery.asp
- Marc Gold & Associates: marcgold.com
- Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC: griffinhammis.com/customizedemployment.html

Contents adapted from: Condon, E. (2012). The process of discovery. [Video podcast]. Retrieved from worksupport.com/training/webcastDetails.cfm/230