

## Employment First Georgia

[www.employmentfirstgeorgia.org](http://www.employmentfirstgeorgia.org)

### 1. Overview of Customized Employment

Customized Employment is a strategy that provides persons with disabilities, and indeed other applicants with significant barriers to employment, with an alternative to traditional, competitive jobs.



According to a new definition used by the US Department of Labor, Customized Employment refers to:

*Individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in ways that meet the needs of both. It is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the person with a disability, and is also designed to meet the specific needs of the employer. (Federal Register, June 26, 2002, Vol. 67, No. 123 pp 43154 -43149)*

Customized Employment relies on a negotiated rather than competitive approach to employers; therefore, job developers must be available to assist applicants to develop personalized proposals for employers.

This approach to employment offers the promise of

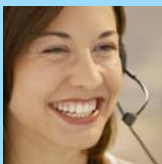


welcoming all persons with disabilities who wish to work into the generic employment system and into a job that fits their needs. It also defines the critical role of vocational rehabilitation services to support both the

individual with a disability and the generic system to make employment a viable option for persons once thought to be unemployable.

### 2. Discovery

The discovery strategy uses discovery as a substitute to comparison-based testing procedures in that it utilizes already-existing information rather than information developed through formal assessment methods. Discovery is used as a guide for



customizing an employment relationship for an applicant with an employer. This process takes into account the applicant's entire life experiences rather than single instances of performance. The discovery process begins with a provider representative who meets with the applicant and family at the home of the applicant. These visits, along with other discovery activities, give the individual and family, as appropriate, information about their powerful roles in the process and allow the provider to compile basic information that is necessary to begin the process.

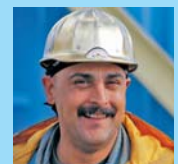
The provider then schedules time to spend with the applicant during the activities that comprise the majority of typical days, as well as accompanying the applicant during planned community activities. This interaction allows the



provider to get to know the applicant and to assist in identifying personalized preferences and conditions for employment as well as individual contributions to be offered to employers.

### 3. The Narrative or Visual Profile Document: Capturing the information of discovery

This process uses a comprehensive format that describes the individual in a narrative manner, and a plan is then developed. For students, this document becomes a work in progress during the transition years of the student's school career passed on from teacher to teacher until graduation. The document is then passed on to adult employment service personnel to be used as a basis for job development and support, as appropriate. For adults, the descriptive document provides information vital to planning and can substitute for traditional, comparative vocational assessment procedures. In addition to



sample profile formats for a written narrative, alternative format for capturing discovered information will be offered.

#### **4. The Customized Planning Meeting: Developing the employment plan**

A Customized Planning Meeting is held with the applicant, family, friends, advocates, the provider, VR counselors and others chosen by the applicant. This planning meeting adheres to the values associated with the best of person-directed, person-centered values. The applicant (with support from family or others, as necessary) holds “trumps” during the meeting and decides the information that will be included in the plan. The meeting describes a customized job development plan in the form of a blueprint that includes:

- \* Generally speaking, “what works and what doesn’t work” for the applicant;
- \* The applicant’s preferences, contributions, and conditions for employment;
- \* The types of job tasks the applicant feels should comprise the job;
- \* Specific employment sites where work could be developed for the applicant; and
- \* Employment leads and relationships with possible employers.

#### **5. Development of a Representational Portfolio**

The customized process also utilizes a “presentation portfolio” as a tool for job developers to use to introduce both the general idea of persons with significant disabilities making contributions to employers and as a personalized, visual resume that represents the best of the applicant with a disability.

The portfolio is a customized visual presentation on behalf of a person that will assist either the job developer or the person herself or himself, as s/he speaks with employers. The portfolio was test marketed with employers throughout the country and found to be of significant benefit in explaining the unique contributions of applicants. This new product can be used by people with severe and multiple disabilities, including physical and communication disabilities, and their representatives, as appropriate, in order to assist such individuals in securing employment.

#### **6. Customized Job Development**

While the Customized Planning Meeting clarifies the applicant’s preferences and conditions of employment and specific employment leads, it does not provide the applicant a job. Job finding efforts are initiated based on the “blueprint” developed during the Customized Planning Meeting. It is essential to discover any of the applicant’s relationships or his or her support circle’s relationships with targeted employers. This helps to make initial contacts with prospective employers. In most cases, conventional job descriptions will not be appropriate for an applicant with significant disabilities. Therefore, the provider must look beyond job openings, to identifying the unmet needs of an employer. Armed with the knowledge about the applicant, the provider can then look for job tasks and work cultures that fulfill the applicant’s criteria for a successful job match. Tours of specific employment sites are used to identify the unmet needs of an employer by looking at job tasks, employee routines, and worksite cultures.

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For more information on customized employment, please visit our website at [www.EmploymentFirstGeorgia.org](http://www.EmploymentFirstGeorgia.org).

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