Discovering ME!

Implementation Guide

Center on
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Overview

Effective transition assessment and planning are critical to increasing students' employment outcomes, especially for those who face the most significant barriers to employment. Discovering ME! is a youth-focused, person-centered transition assessment and planning process. This process is designed to build early, customized work-based learning experiences for individuals with significant barriers to employment. The long-term goal of Discovering ME! is that all students find and maintain employment in careers that best match their strengths and contributions, interests, challenges to consider, and conditions for success.

About this guide

This implementation guide provides the "equipment" necessary to engage in the Discovering ME! process. This equipment includes an overview of recruitment, a description of all meetings for a Discovering ME! team, and all the documents necessary to facilitate and evaluate the process. The model has been piloted and refined throughout Virginia by experienced facilitators from VCU's Center on Transition Innovations (CTI).

Acknowledgement

The VCU Center on Transition Innovations would like to thank the Virginia Department of Education for their support and contributions to this guide.

For further information about the Center on Transition Innovations, please visit our website at **centerontransition.org**.

History of Discovering ME!

Discovering ME! was adapted from Marc Gold & Associates, process of Discovery (Callahan, 2016). The process of Discovery involves gathering information using a person-centered approach to guide the development of customized employment for adults with significant disabilities.

To assist educators in obtaining age-appropriate transition assessment information for school-age students with disabilities, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) endorsed the use of Discovery in 2012. During the 2014-15 school year, York and Loudoun school districts participated in training in Discovery and Customized Employment. At times, it can be difficult to translate the processes of traditional Discovery into school systems. In this case, the challenge of implementing an adult process with school-aged students proved to be too great.

In 2015, the VCU Center on Transition Innovations sought to identify needed adaptations to Discovery for use with school-age students. Initially, efforts were focused on high school students, but CTI soon discovered that starting in middle school allowed valuable transition and employment discussions and activities to occur while assisting with the transition to high school.

The streamlined, three-meeting process has been introduced in urban, suburban, and rural school districts across Virginia. Teachers have used interviews, observations, and portfolios to uncover the skills, interests, and contributions that each student can bring to a work-based learning environment and future job.

How is Discovering ME! different from traditional Discovery processes?

	Traditional Discovery	Discovering ME!
Individual with a disability	An adult job seeker	A middle or high school student
Outcome of process	Match job seeker with customized employment opportunity	Build customized work-based learning experiences to enhance career development and transition planning
Length of process and intensity	Often completed within a couple of months/ intensive	Extended over a year or multiple years/less intensive

Discovering ME! process

Discovering ME! is usually coordinated by school districts. The process is intended for middle and high school students with disabilities who do not typically benefit from traditional assessment and planning processes and have the most significant barriers to employment. The ongoing model consists of three meetings focusing on (1) collecting student information, (2) building opportunities in the home, school, and community, and (3) exploring careers. The process emphasizes collaboration among the student, family members, school staff, and agency representatives to capture foundational elements of the student's identity as a future employee and unique individual.

Program outcomes

- Increase expectation of students' capacity to work and pursue employment options.
- Discover individual student's strengths, interests, contributions, conditions for success, and challenges.
- Build collaborative partnerships with families, agencies, and schools.
- Support students in practicing self-advocacy skills and self-determination skills in the home, school, and community.
- Assist students in identifying postsecondary goals and career pathway skills.
- Provide a foundation for developing a coordinated set of transition activities.

Benefits of Discovering ME!

Sometimes in the disability field, emphasis is placed on an individual's disability. Rather than building a plan for future employment based on the student's disabilities or what they cannot do, it is crucial to focus on their abilities and the things they do well. Discovering ME! provides teams with a way of focusing on the student's strengths and interests in a way that is both positive and empowering. These benefits were identified through an evaluation of all Discovering ME! implementation sites across Virginia (VCU, 2020). The feedback from educators involved in implementing the process illustrates Discovering ME! encouraged all team members to think more creatively about the future of students with significant disabilities. The process served as a catalyst to help administrators, teachers, students, and their families to think about a positive and fulfilling future for students. And finally, the focus on the students and their interests builds short- and long-term benefits.

Additional benefits include:

- Providing a meeting structure and schedule designed to fit within a reasonable time frame.
- Requiring no purchases of products in order to implement the process.
- Giving families, teachers, and students a voice and a way to have conversations early about transition.
- Providing parents and students a more positive view of what their future will look like while increasing expectations within the home, school, and community.
- Inviting families, agencies, and schools into a true collaborative partnership.
- Offering user-friendly forms and a structure that helps to prepare a coordinated IEP.

References

Callahan, M. (2016). *A technology evolves: The story of MG&A: What happened when "Try Another Way" met the real world*. Mark Gold & Associates. Retrieved from **https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57fa78cd6a496306c83a2ca7/t/5cdedd800d89c400011ad1af/1558109568620/What+Happens+when+Try+Another+Way+5-2019.pdf**

Virginia Commonwealth University (2020). *Discovering ME! implementation summary results*. Center on Transition Innovations, VCU, Richmond, VA.

Timeline

The following timeline provides an overview of the suggested sequence of events to assist with implementing the Discovering ME! process. While there can be some flexibility in the progression of this process, it is extremely important to follow the suggested timeline for each of the three student meetings during the program implementation phase.

1

Program Development

Three to six months prior to implementation

- Determine need for Discovering ME!
- Secure administrative support
- Select school(s)

One to three months prior to implementation

- Provide professional development
- Select student(s)
- Select student support team
- Invite team members
- Assign responsibilities for meetings

2

Program Implementation – Year One

Meeting One (typically at the beginning of school year)

- Collect student information through team interviews

Meeting Two (approximately one week to one month after Meeting One)

- Assess 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills
- Build opportunities within the home, school, and community

Meeting Three (approximately two to three months after Meeting Two)

- Select top three career clusters of interest
- Determine individual assets and challenges to each choice of career clusters
- Build additional opportunities within the home, school, and community related to career cluster choices

TIP: The Discovering ME! process can be flexible to accommodate other implementation timelines, including summer schedules or 4 by 4 blocks.

3

4

Program Implementation – Subsequent Years

Meeting One (typically at the beginning of the school year)

- Update Interviewing Those Who Know Me - Year Two and Foundation Information
- Build new opportunities

Meeting Two (closer to the end of the school year)

- Update 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills and My Top Three Career Clusters
- Build new opportunities

Program Evaluation – Ongoing

- Conduct student evaluation
- Conduct process evaluation

Program Development

Planning and preparation at both the district and school levels is key to successfully implementing the Discovering ME! process with an individual student, several students in one school, or students from different schools across a school district. This includes determining the need for the process, securing administrative support, selecting schools for implementation, providing professional development, selecting participants, and assigning responsibilities. While each phase of program development is important, some flexibility within the process may be required to meet the individual needs of the students, families, school districts, and other stakeholders involved in the process.

1. Determine need

The first step to Discovering ME! implementation is to determine if a need exists to provide students with a person-centered process of transition assessment and planning. A review of both your district's data and individual student data will assist in making this determination.

Review:

- Post-school outcomes of students with disabilities, including data from Indicator 14
- Enrollment and completer status of students with IEPs in CTE courses
- Participation of students with disabilities in school and community activities
- IEPs reflecting a need for appropriate transition assessments and coordinated IEP activities

If the review of data indicates a need to provide some individual students with non-traditional assessment and planning, then presenting the Discovering ME! process to administrators is recommended.

2. Secure administrative support

Whether you are in a small, medium, or large school district, administrative support is critical when considering the implementation of a new process or program. When discussing the need and benefits of Discovering ME! with decision-makers, it is recommended that you share information gleaned from your district, individual student data, and a review of effective practices and predictors for post-school success. Data should dictate need. Evidence-based practices and predictors should dictate the process. To assist in securing administrative support, share the **What is Discovering ME!** overview. This quick and efficient document provides administrators with the key details to better understand this process.

3. Select school(s) for implementation

Selecting a school for implementation should be based on needs identified in Step 1. Since this process could be used with an individual student, there is no need to identify schools containing certain programs or course offerings. The most important aspect when choosing the school is to identify students who require a person-centered planning approach to transition assessment involving teachers and staff who are willing to be creative and work as part of a team.

4. Provide professional development

In addition to this guide, professional development resources are available from the Center on Transition Innovations (CTI).

Additional CTI professional development:

- Discovering ME! Overview webcast
- Meeting One webcast
- Meeting Two webcast
- Meeting Three webcast

5. Select student(s)

All students could potentially benefit from a person-centered approach to transition and career development, so how are candidates prioritized for selection? The following guidelines are suggestions for selecting students with the greatest potential to benefit from the Discovering ME! process.

Selection guidelines:

- Students who would likely need customized or supported employment in the future
- Students who have the greatest barriers to employment including students at risk for dropping out, with mental health challenges, cultural differences, I/DD, emotional disabilities, or military dependents
- Students who are in middle school or high school
- Students who have family members who are able and willing to go through a three-meeting process and willing to be collaborative partners

6. Select student support team

Each student is supported by a team of individuals representing the home, school, and community. The two requirements for meeting participation are that prospective team members know the student and want to support the student's career awareness and readiness. When all stakeholders are willing to be creative and supportive, they are able to contribute to a future of employment and community integration for the student.

The configuration of teams can be as unique as the student, but it is mandatory that Discovering ME! teams include the student, family members, school representatives, and community agency partners as often as possible. Often, teams will consist of five to eight individuals.

Because teams will function collaboratively during the process, all partners are encouraged to recommend other team members with strong relationships to the student who can provide information and work to advance the opportunities identified through Discovering ME!

Other team members to consider:

Home

- Siblings
- Extended family members (aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, etc.)
- Family friends

School

- Auxiliary services (behavior specialists, OT, PT, speech)
- Transition specialists
- Instructional assistants

Community

- Adult/employment agencies (VR, waiver services)
- Church/civic/recreational organizations
- Parent resource groups

7. Invite team members

After selecting the student to participate in Discovering ME!, the case manager will contact the family and other team members through a phone call, letter, email, or verbal invitation.

The invitation should include:

- Brief rationale: plan for the student's future employment and community participation.
- Process description: a team invested in the student's future will meet three times for approximately two hours each meeting.
- Expected outcomes: possible careers will be identified and the student will have opportunities to explore employment opportunities in the home, school, and community.

Subsequent meeting dates can be determined at the initial meeting when all members are present.

TIP: Before concluding the notice of selection, it is imperative that schools secure parental consent before the teacher invites any outside representatives from adult agencies or community organizations that provide support to the student.

8. Assign responsibilities for meetings

During the Discovering ME! process, it is helpful to identify and share responsibilities. Discovering ME! meetings are straightforward, but they do require specific responsibilities in order to run smoothly. The following tasks assist with the success of each meeting and should be assigned to team members.

Inviter

- Invites and prepares team members: student, family, and community partners.
- Secures meeting location.
- Secures consent and release forms. Before sharing any student information with community partners or other non-school personnel, consent and release forms must be signed by the parent. You will want to follow the school district's policy and procedures concerning this topic.
- Completes the Student Profile/General Information form.

Notetaker

- Takes notes during the interview and subsequent meetings.
- Completes all other appropriate forms for each meeting.
- Shares edited documents with the team.

Facilitator

- Facilitates the meetings - this should be someone who understands the Discovering ME! process. This person needs to focus on running the meeting and not be involved in contributing input.
- Ensures all materials and forms are completed and ready for next meeting.

Implementation Coordinator

Only needed if implemented in several schools

- Oversees the development and implementation across multiple schools.
- Advocates for resources.
- Markets Discovering ME! to administrators, teachers, and students and families.

Program Implementation – Year One

Discovering ME! includes three meetings during the first year of the student's participation. The purpose of these meetings is to plan for the student's future employment and community participation. Through this process, the team collects information about the student to build activities in the home, school, and community that will expand work-based learning opportunities and explore potential careers.

Important considerations for all meetings

Listed below are general considerations intended to assist you in building a collaborative atmosphere throughout the Discovering ME! process. Specific considerations for individual meetings are included in each meeting section.

- The student, family, and school representatives must be present for all Discovery ME! meetings. If one of those individuals is not able to attend, the meeting needs to be rescheduled.
- The atmosphere of the meeting should be one where everyone feels comfortable. It is considered a place where no judgements are made.
- The meetings are intended to engage, value, and meet the needs of each student.

Strategies to meet the needs of students

- Students can be very schedule oriented and need advance preparation to participate in an activity that is atypical to their daily schedule. Add Discovering ME! to their visual or written daily schedule in order to help them anticipate this change. If the change is too great for them to acclimate to even with advance preparation, they may be allowed to leave early.
- Allow the student to be seated next to the person of their choice.
- Allow the student to engage in activities that help them calm or focus. These can include walking around the room, drawing on the whiteboard, or using their iPad.
- Ensure the student has a variety of ways to respond (verbal, written, thumbs up/thumbs down, and augmentative communication devices).
- Allow students to pace, stretch, or move during the meeting. Provide snacks, water, and give the student breaks when needed.

TIP: If you plan to implement Discovering ME! with more than one student, download the forms to either your computer or Google Drive. Having the reusable documents in one handy folder on your computer will ease the process.

Meeting **One**

The focus of Meeting One is to discover and collect information about the student's strengths and contributions, interests, conditions for success, and challenges within the home, school, and community environments. Through a facilitated discussion, the facilitator interviews the team and is responsible for the coordination of all activities.

Important considerations for Meeting One

In addition to the general considerations shared previously, teams should also consider the following:

- Create a meeting climate that best meets the needs of the individual student.
- Prior to the meeting, review the section "How Students Can Participate". This will assist in increasing student participation during the meeting.

Forms to be completed before **Meeting One**

- [ ] **Your division's consent to exchange information form**

Before sharing any student information with community partners or other non-school personnel, consent and release forms must be signed by the parent. You will want to follow the school's policy and procedures concerning this topic and use the forms and documents provided by your school. The Inviter is often the person responsible for ensuring these forms are signed.

- [ ] **Student Profile/General Information**

The Student Profile/General Information form provides very basic demographic information for the team. Information includes the student's age, grade level, and current agency participation. The student's teacher or case manager is often the person responsible for ensuring this form is completed and sharing it with team members. The information is maintained and used according to need. For example, it is often important to note when a student is in eighth grade and transitioning to high school. The student's age can be important when building work-based learning experiences.

Meeting One at a glance

Before **Meeting One**

- Collect signed consent to exchange information form
- Compile Student Profile/General Information form
- Determine key players
- Identify and reserve meeting space
- Set up date, time, and location for meeting and invite team
- Copy handouts
- Prepare student and family for meeting

During **Meeting One**

- Introduce team
- Review agenda
- Introduce Discovering ME!
- Conduct facilitated discussion
- Plan for next steps

After **Meeting One**

- Review all notes
- Complete Foundation Information form

Meeting One **Agenda**

Focus: Collecting information

Approximate time: 2 hours

Agenda items

1. Welcome and introduction of team members
2. Review agenda
3. Introduce Discovering ME!
   - **Introducing Parents to Discovering ME!**
   - **Discovery Acrostic**
4. Conduct facilitated discussion
   - **Interviewing Those Who Know Me – Year One**
5. Plan for next steps
   - **Meeting One Next Steps**

How Students Can Participate - Meeting One

- Introduce the participants and/or make them nametags before the meeting.
- Assist with tasks such as handing out papers or directing others to the restrooms.
- Provide input by responding to questions such as “Michael, tell us what your day looks like before you come to school.”
- Validate information by responding to questions such as “Michael, do you agree with what your Mom just said?”

1. Welcome and introduce team members

Each meeting should begin with a welcome from the facilitator. Ideally, the student should introduce the team members. Introductions can contribute to rapport, comfort, and collaboration among team members and serve as an affirmation of everyone’s interest and investment in the student’s current and future successes.

The team at a minimum must include the student, parent, facilitator, and notetaker.

2. Review agenda

The facilitator reviews the focus of the meeting, which is to have a facilitated discussion to learn more about the student. Next, review agenda items.

3. Introduce Discovering ME!

The facilitator should distribute copies of **Introducing Parents to Discovering ME!** and the **Discovery Acrostic** and review the following:

- Overview of Discovering ME!
- Why it’s important
- How parents can support the process
- Commitment to the process

4. Conduct facilitated discussion

The bulk of Meeting One is devoted to a facilitated discussion using an interview format. This type of meeting format invites participants to share stories, examples, and perceptions in a safe and supportive environment. These discussions are intended to uncover detailed information from various perspectives about the student's strengths and contributions, interests, conditions for success, and challenges. The information gathered helps the team get to know the student before developing exploration activities for employment. Before engaging in the interview, the facilitator should review the suggestions listed below to assist in fostering collaborative conversations.

Suggestions to foster collaborative conversations

Be respectful to all

Make sure you are using body and expressive language that shows you respect each team member's unique cultural, demographic, and knowledge differences.

Create a "safe zone" environment

Stress that team members adopt a no-judgment attitude with each other.

Help team members build relationships with other team members

This includes making sure all team members participate and no one person dominates the conversation.

Encourage "out of the box" thinking

Try to ensure creative thinking when building opportunities. Remember, we want to customize work-based learning environments to meet the needs of students rather than fit students into existing programs.

Listen more/talk less

Your job is to facilitate the conversations, not to add to them.

Keep meeting agenda on task

Make sure conversations don't sway too much off topic. When needed, bring the group back to focus.

Ask probing questions when needed

If the team is not providing adequate responses, ask probing questions that can provide richer knowledge and understanding of the child's Foundation Information, which includes strengths and contributions, interests, conditions for success, and challenges. Probing questions are sometimes also needed to ensure all team members understand what is being asked.

Have a notetaker!

As great as you may be at multitasking, it's not possible to be both an effective facilitator and notetaker. Make sure another team member is responsible for the task of capturing the discussions and conversations of the team.

Avoid using jargon or terms everyone on the team might not understand

If jargon is used, make sure to explain it to the group and then ask the team to avoid additional use.

Be supportive of all team members and remember that change is hard

Don't be disappointed if some team members take a little longer than others to adapt to this new process.

4. Conduct facilitated discussion (continued)

Interviewing Those Who Know Me form

Interviewing Those Who Know Me – Year One is the form used by the facilitator. While the facilitator is asking questions, the notetaker should take notes directly on this form either by hand or on the computer.

The form is divided into four main sections:

1. Discovering Me and My Family
2. Discovering My School Experiences
3. Discovering My Community Experiences & Friends
4. Additional Conditions for My Employment

Each main section contains sample prompts and clarifying questions in order to gather information to establish the foundation of the student's strengths, skills, interests, and support needs. The initial prompts are broad statements intended to begin discussions of the student's routines, supports, responsibilities, interests, and past successes and failures. These initial prompts often must be followed up with clarifying questions, which provide the team with additional, more specific information. For example, clarifying questions may be used if team participants did not understand the question or in response to an answer provided.

Sample interview prompt:

"Home is often one of the first places we learn about working and having responsibilities. Tell us some of the things your child does around the home to help himself or others. This could be as simple as making his bed or as complex as fixing meals for the entire family."

Clarifying questions:

If the child is not doing chores, please share why this is so. What attempts have been made to involve him in chores and responsibilities in the past? Were these attempts successful? Why or why not?

The ability to customize pre-employment opportunities in the home, school, and community comes from knowing the student. When the interview functions as intended, it yields detailed information about the student in four major categories which comprise the Foundation Information:

Strengths/Contributions: personal characteristics or traits, talents, skills, and ways in which the student helps others

Interests: what the student enjoys doing; what they want to learn more about

Conditions for Success: under what conditions is the student most successful and likely to thrive; what conditions will present unfavorable behaviors or outcomes

Challenges: academic, social, behavioral, or sensory nuances that will present obstacles to participate in opportunities or employment

Facilitators are entrusted with the responsibility of making sure that all participants are valued and heard within this process. Additionally, they are responsible for making sure adequate information is obtained through the facilitated discussion process.

In the first section of the Interviewing Those Who Know Me form, the facilitator begins the discussion by asking the student questions pertaining to the topic. When asking the student questions, it's important to tailor the questions to meet the student's comprehension level. The facilitator then asks the family to provide clarification or additional information pertaining to the specific area. In addition, if other team members have more information to share on the topic, it is important to allow them to provide input. Remember, the goal is to get information about the topic in the home, school, and community.

5. Plan for next steps

Discuss whether there is a need to obtain additional information (see **Meeting One Next Steps**).

Select activities needed to continue the collection of information:

- ☐ **Review previous assessments and IEP services**

  If appropriate, have one team member volunteer to review formal and informal transition assessments and report back to the team.

- ☐ **Interview others**

  Ask team members if there are others not present at the meeting who know the student well who could be interviewed at a different time.

- ☐ **Conduct observations**

  Observations should be conducted across environments to assess the student's current work environments and opportunities.

- ☐ **Expand invitations**

  Ask team members to suggest others who are not present at the meeting who can contribute to the work of the team.

- ☐ **Consider any additional steps**

  Ask if there are any other specific activities needed by the team for this student.

Facilitator concludes Meeting One by:

- Thanking the team for their participation
- Reminding the team of the date and time of Meeting Two
- Briefly reviewing Meeting Two agenda items

After Meeting One

After the meeting has concluded, the notetaker will share the Next Steps completed form with the team. The facilitator then reviews all notes, including team and additional interviews, observations, pertinent previously collected data, and the Next Steps form. This information is compiled into the Foundation Information, which is divided into four sections. The top half of the four-square format includes the student's strengths, contributions, and interests. This information becomes the building blocks upon which the team builds opportunities for the individual. The bottom half of the four-square includes the student's conditions for success and challenges, which helps the team to build support for the opportunities developed.

Meeting **Two**

In the first meeting, the team began collecting information about the student as a unique individual. At the beginning of the second meeting, the team continues that collection of information through a review of additional sources of data and through an informal team assessment of the student's workplace readiness skills. The team then uses that information to build new opportunities for the student within their home, school, and community. The facilitator's role is to coordinate the activities of the meeting and guide the team's discussion.

Important considerations for Meeting Two

- Collect information about the student across a variety of environments.
- The atmosphere of the meeting should be one where everyone is willing to focus on what the student can do, not what they cannot do. This is sometimes contrary to the focus of many other meetings for students with special needs.
- Remember we are not here to do the "same old, same old". All team members must be willing to expand their idea of what is possible.
- Recognize that change is hard. We sometimes need to push ourselves and our students outside of our perceived "comfort zones".
- Opportunities must be created in all three focus areas: home, school, and community.
- Talk is cheap. Make sure you **implement the opportunities** created in the meeting.

Forms to be completed before **Meeting Two**

☐ **Foundation Information**

This form is completed by the facilitator with the help of other team members between the first and second meetings. Review the responses and notes from the interviews to create a summary of this information in a user-friendly format.

☐ **Student Observation**

If deemed appropriate, observations are conducted between meetings. These observations are completed to capture information in various environments in which the student operates. Observations are conducted to provide information regarding what the student does, while avoiding observation bias or assumptions.

☐ **Additional Interviews**

If deemed appropriate, additional interviews are conducted by an assigned team member between meetings. These interviews are designed to capture the input of others who know the student well but are unable to be in attendance at the meeting.

Meeting Two at a glance

Before **Meeting Two**

- Identify and reserve meeting space
- Set up date, time, and location for meeting and invite team
- Copy handouts
- Prepare student and family for meeting
- Complete Foundation Information form
- Complete Observation form (if needed)
- Conduct Additional Interview form (if needed)

During **Meeting Two**

- Introduce team and review agenda
- Review new information
- Review and update Foundation Information
- Assess 21st century workplace readiness skills
- Build work-based opportunities
- Plan for next steps

After **Meeting Two**

- Review all notes
- Provide Building Opportunities form to all team members
- Update Foundation Information form with new information
- Add 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills results to Foundation Information

Meeting Two **Agenda**

Focus: Building opportunities

Approximate time: 1.5 to 2 hours

Agenda items

1. Welcome and team introductions
2. Review agenda
3. Review new information
4. Review and update Foundation Information
5. Assess 21st century workplace readiness skills
   21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills
6. Build work-based opportunities
   Building Opportunities
7. Plan for next steps
   Meeting Two Next Steps

How Students Can Participate - Meeting Two

- Review student Foundation Information through PowerPoint presentation, YouTube video, or picture presentation.
- Provide input on 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills evaluation.
- Prepare or share snacks.

1. Welcome and introduce team

The success of the Discovering ME! process is based on the ability of the student's team to work collaboratively. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to build on the team's collaborative spirit by recognizing and welcoming all team members to the second meeting. A friendly way of doing this is to allow everyone in the room to introduce themselves and explain their connection to the student.

2. Review agenda

The facilitator will briefly review what was accomplished in the previous meeting. The facilitator will then review the focus of Meeting Two, which is to have a facilitated discussion to build opportunities in the home, school, and community. Next, review agenda items.

3. Review new information

The team interview or team conversation was simply the beginning of the data collection process. As with any good transition assessment and planning format, data collection is an ongoing and continuous process. At the end of the first meeting, the team determined the sources of additional information needed and assigned team members responsibility.

These sources included:

- Informal or formal assessments that had been previously conducted that would help the team understand who this student is and how his life experiences can be used to encourage career development. It is important to recognize the limits of some of these forms of data. For example, if the student was given a standardized assessment which required a reading level above their level, it is highly unlikely the results of that data are accurate. It is always important to validate results through unbiased observations and/or multiple sourcing.
- Additional interviews of others who know the student well but were not at the first team meeting.
- Observations of the student in various environments.

After team members report on additional information, a summary of the critical and reliable data should be included in the appropriate category of the student's Foundation Information. Updating and adding new data should always be a part of Discovering ME! teams. The student's Foundation Information should be an ever-evolving document.

4. Review and update Foundation Information

As a team, review the student's Foundation Information for accuracy.

Types of corrections or updates needed:

New data from new experiences

As the student experiences new opportunities, we need to include data from those experiences.

Changes associated with maturity

It is typical for students to change their likes, dislikes, interests, and preferences. As adults, we experience these same changes. As a team supporting the student, it is important for us to recognize and honor these changes.

Existing data may need to be verified or clarified

For example, the team may have noted that the student likes working with animals. The team may need to build an opportunity which will help to clarify that piece of information. Does the student only like certain animals? Does she have any interest in working with animals as a career? Does she want to have her own pets to create ways to interact with others in her community? Did she report she likes animals only to make her Mom happy? Did she like animals yesterday, but today she has changed her mind?

5. Assess 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills

Workplace readiness skills are the skills generally believed to be most needed for successful employment. They are skills you would need regardless if you are working as a cashier at a fast food restaurant, as a manager at that same restaurant, or the chief operating officer of that restaurant chain. Skills related to work ethics, teamwork, problem solving, and self-representation are just a few of these essential workplace readiness skills. There are three major reasons we include this informal assessment as a part of this process:

1. It is important to be aware of these skills in order to build them in students. A lack of these skills can pose just as significant a barrier to entering or maintaining employment as a lack of job-specific skills. Therefore, they need to be a focus of early career conversations and instruction.
2. These same skills are important to community integration and healthy family relationships. Reinforcing skills across multiple environments by multiple people will develop skill acquisition and encourage generalization of skills.
3. Baseline data from this informal evaluation can help guide instruction and determine if progress is being made in building these skills.

Workplace Readiness Skills Evaluation

21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills is an informal assessment used to gauge early job assets and needs conducted through the team process.

Steps to complete assessment:

1. Provide the rationale for this assessment. Explain the importance of these skills and the reasons the process includes this informal evaluation (see pg. 25).
2. Explain the rationale of a team approach to evaluation. A team approach will be used because students can demonstrate a variety of competency levels in skills areas across environments (home, school, and community). In other words, a student may demonstrate great problem solving skills at home while demonstrating none within the school environment.
3. The facilitator will read each individual description ("what it may look like") within each skill area. Through a consensus of the team, the descriptor will be marked as a "**+**" if this is a "**job asset**" or "**-**" if this is a "**job need**" for the student.
4. Record the consensus answer and note any relevant conversations related to the specific skill area.
5. Summarize the data. After this meeting, record the summarized data on the back of the student's Foundation Information page. In order to summarize:
   - Simply look at the number of "**+**" and the number of "**-**" in each skill area.
   - If you have more "**+**" mark it as a "**job asset**"; if you have more "**-**" mark as a "**job need**".
   - If there is an even number of both "**+**" and "**-**", the reviewers should evaluate the comments and determine which category fits best.

TIP: Please note, you will repeat this informal assessment annually to identify areas of progress or regression.

6. Build work-based opportunities

Now we come to the crux of this meeting, which involves building opportunities for students in their home, school, and communities. These opportunities should be based on their strengths, the contributions they make, and their interests, while honoring their conditions for success and challenges.

TIP: Too often there is a great deal of emphasis placed on what others do for the student with a disability. We need to change the narrative. Our focus needs to be on what the student can do for others. How can they add to the functioning of their homes, schools, and communities? This focus on what they can contribute changes the narrative to the student being viewed as competent. Competence leads to employment.

Why do we build opportunities?

These opportunities can provide:

- authentic environments for the student to learn and practice job and workplace readiness skills
- situational assessments which help the student to better define their short and long-term career goals
- ways for the student to contribute to others and be seen as competent
- validation of likes, dislikes, interests, and conditions for success
- opportunities to become more independent, self-reliant, and develop their self-determination skills
- the building of coordinated opportunities based on a strength-based model

How do we build opportunities?

1. Review ways students can benefit from these opportunities (see section above).
2. Build opportunities in all three environments: home, school, and community. This will allow collaborative sharing of responsibilities and help to reach the ultimate goal of future community integration and competitive employment.
3. Begin brainstorming possible opportunities while focusing on the student's strengths, ways they currently contribute to others, and their interests (top half of the Foundation Information). It is important to remind team members there are "no restrictions and no judgments" when brainstorming. Team members should be encouraged to share their thoughts of possible opportunities without the limitations (at this time) of their perceived level of "realism". Allowing for this free flow of ideas will generate a greater number of varied ideas.

   Examples of leading questions the facilitator may use include:

   - "Michelle has such a strong interest in children and babies, how can we use that interest to build opportunities where she can gain work experience and job skills?"
   - "Nicholas already spends time and helps his grandfather with tasks. Are there other older adults who could use his help?"
   - "Where, within our community, is there a need for Derek's strengths in organizing?"
   - "Are there environments, such as assisted living homes, with a concentration of older adults who could benefit from his skills?"
   - "Within his home, how could we use some of Barry's strengths to help him contribute to his family's functioning?"
   - "Within the school environment, what can Presley do to learn more about animals?"

6. Build work-based opportunities (continued)

4. Choose at least one opportunity to be completed in the home, school, and community. This can be completed by the team through the following process:

   A. Identify first opportunity. Identify the first specific opportunity to be explored ("Which brainstormed opportunity would we like to explore first?").

   Example: Based on Emily's interest in animals, the team thought Emily could develop a neighborhood dog walking service.

   B. Determine appropriateness. Determine if this opportunity meets the student's strengths, interests, and ways they contribute to others while still honoring their conditions for success and challenges. ("Are there any challenges that would prevent this student from participating in this opportunity? Or are there any supports that we need to build in this opportunity to ensure the student is successful?"). If the opportunity does honor the challenges and supports can be provided, the team continues with building the experience. If there are challenges that cannot be overcome or supports and accommodations that cannot be added to allow for an appropriate experience, the team needs to explore other opportunities.

   Example 1: Jack has a physical disability with his foot that does not allow him to walk long distances. The team must decide if there are any supports or accommodations that can be used to allow him to participate. Accommodations such as riding a bike rather than walking were deemed unsafe or inappropriate. Therefore, the team moved to another opportunity, such as being a volunteer reader to pets within the local animal shelter.

   Example 2: Within the home, Morty has a passion for making sure that all of the family's electronic devices never fall below half charged. Accordingly, the team identified an opportunity for Morty to work with the school's librarian to charge the school's tablets. While this opportunity builds on one of his strengths and ways he contributes to others, the team thought the library environment would be too overwhelming for him due to his social anxiety. The team determined a small private room within the library could accommodate this challenge.

   C. Make final selections. Make final selections of at least one opportunity in each environment: home, school, and community. Additionally, identify who will provide the supports, who will make sure the opportunity occurs, and the timeline for the opportunity to begin. Record this information on the Building Opportunities form.

   D. Share information. Share information with team members regarding teaching new skills, using a task analysis, and providing prompts to assist in making these opportunities customized work-based learning experiences.

   E. Identify data collection methods. Determine how data about the opportunity will be gathered.

7. Plan for next steps

The team will need to decide which of the following activities are appropriate to continue the information collection process for the individual student (see Meeting Two Next Steps).

Select activities needed to continue the collection of information:

☐ **Review previous assessments and IEP services**

If appropriate, have one team member volunteer to review formal and informal transition assessments and report back to the team.

☐ **Interview others**

Ask team members if there are others not present at the meeting who know the student well who could be interviewed at a different time.

☐ **Conduct observations**

Observations should be conducted across environments to assess the student's current work environments and opportunities.

☐ **Expand invitations**

Ask team members to suggest others who are not present at the meeting who can contribute to the work of the team.

☐ **Consider any additional steps**

Ask if there are any other specific activities needed by the team for this student.

Facilitator concludes Meeting Two by:

- Thanking the team for their participation
- Reminding the team of the date and time of Meeting Three
- Briefly reviewing Meeting Three agenda items

After Meeting Two

After the meeting has concluded, the notetaker and facilitator will ensure all team members have copies of the Building Opportunities form for reference and review. Additionally, these team members will make sure the student's Foundation Information form is updated with new information such as the 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills assessment.

Meeting **Three**

The focus of Meeting Three is to explore careers. The team will review the 17 career clusters and collect information on the student's interest and aptitude in specific career clusters. After the group narrows the selection to the student's top three career clusters, opportunities related to the selected career clusters are developed.

Important considerations for Meeting Three

- Celebrate the opportunities completed – any information gleaned is vital to the student's future success.
- Practice your listening skills – every team member will have important information related to the student's future.
- Discuss each of the 17 career clusters. You never know what career might spark conversation. Exploration is the name of this game. A career looks very different on paper than it does when the student is able to engage in the workplace and get a sense of the work and environment.
- Ideally, the student's new case manager will attend the third meeting to become more familiar with the student and their progress through Discovering ME!

Forms to be completed before **Meeting Three**

- [ ] **Foundation Information** (pages 1 and 2)
The Foundation Information will be updated to reflect any new information from Meeting Two, particularly those changes that resulted from their opportunities. Additionally, the 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills data will be condensed on the second page of the Foundation Information.

- [ ] **Student Observations**
If the team determined any observations were needed, the results will be included on the Foundation Information. Typically, after the second meeting, the team might conclude that an observation of one of the opportunities built is desired.

- [ ] **Additional Interviews**
If deemed appropriate, additional interviews are conducted by an assigned team member between meetings. These interviews are designed to capture the input of others who know the student well but are unable to be in attendance at the meeting.

Meeting Three at a glance

Before **Meeting Three**

- Identify and reserve meeting space
- Set up date, time, and location for meeting and invite team
- Prepare handouts
- Prepare student and family for meeting
- Check progress and request data from opportunities created in Meeting Two
- Summarize and add information to the Foundation Information
- Add 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills results to Foundation Information

During **Meeting Three**

- Introduce team and review agenda
- Review progress of opportunities
- Update Foundation Information
- Introduce the 17 career clusters
- Select the student's top three career clusters
- Determine individual assets and challenges to each choice of career clusters
- Build additional opportunities in the home, school, and community related to career cluster choices

After **Meeting Three**

- Share Discovering ME! results with identified providers and stakeholders
- Include a copy of Discovering ME! documents in the student's special education file

Meeting Three **Agenda**

Focus: Exploring careers

Approximate time: 1.5 - 2 hours

Agenda items

1. Welcome and introduce team
2. Review agenda
3. Review progress of opportunities
4. Update Foundation Information
5. Introduce 17 career clusters

   Exploring Career Clusters

6. Select top three career clusters

   My Top Three Career Clusters

7. Determine individual assets and challenges to chosen career clusters
8. Build additional opportunities related to career cluster choices

   Building Employment Skills through Career Readiness Activities

9. Celebrate!

How Students Can Participate - **Meeting Three**

- Share information about their work-based learning opportunities.
- Have the student share a summary of their informal workplace readiness skills assessment.
- Express preferences during the career cluster discussion.
- Share their job assets and needs regarding workplace readiness skills.
- Participate in small group identification of the top three careers.

1. Welcome and introduce team

Each time the team convenes, it is a good idea for the facilitator to welcome everyone and have each team member reintroduce themselves.

2. Review agenda

The facilitator will briefly review what has been accomplished in the previous two meetings, and let the team know what to expect from Meeting Three, which is to have a facilitated discussion to explore careers. Next, review agenda items.

Tip: In order to allow team members to visually review information during the meeting, the documents could be printed and shared or electronically shared via a projection system.

3. Review progress of opportunities

At the beginning of Meeting Three, the team reviews the progress of the opportunities developed during Meeting Two. The team discusses the student's experiences in these opportunities, which also builds accountability into the process. While the opportunities aren't like an IEP goal in a legal sense, there is still the desire for these activities to be prioritized as part of the student's activities in the home, school, and community. Additionally, the Foundation Information is a living and breathing document. In other words, we should be gathering data and information about the student from their opportunities and consistently updating the Foundation Information to reflect the student's current strengths, interests, contributions, conditions for success, and challenges.

4. Update Foundation Information based on opportunities

Anytime the student engages in a new opportunity, it will provide the team with additional data to add to the Foundation Information. Have the notetaker update the **Foundation Information** as the other team members report out on the opportunities through observations, data collection sheets, or other methods for reporting progress. It is vital to know how the student liked or didn't like the opportunity, what they liked about it, how much guidance and prompting was required to complete the tasks, and if they want to continue pursuing the opportunity. It is especially helpful if the student was observed during the opportunity. Any information gleaned from observations, recollections from the student or their support person, or data collected should be included in the updated Foundation Information.

4. Update Foundation Information based on opportunities (continued)

Sections of the Foundation Information to update:

- Any new contributions, interests, conditions for success, or challenges to consider should be reflected in the Foundation Information
- Work-Based Learning Experiences – add any new experiences once completed

5. Introduce the 17 career clusters

After reviewing and editing the Foundation Information, the team introduces and discusses the 17 career clusters and identifies student interests. The identified career interests are then narrowed to the student's top three choices based on what the student expresses, their Foundation Information, and what others observe of the student. The primary outcome is a document in which the team identifies My Top Three Career Clusters and aligns it with the Foundation Information.

TIP: The student might need extra explanation of some career clusters. Don't hesitate to go beyond the jobs listed in a career cluster to help flesh out your explanation for each career cluster.

Suggestions for introducing the careers clusters are as follows:

1. Use the **Exploring Career Clusters** to explain each of the 17 career clusters. Each cluster is listed on the document and includes common jobs found within each cluster. It is important to familiarize the students with the 17 career clusters because frequently young people just don't know the variety of jobs they could pursue. Did you know there are almost 1,000 specific descriptors for jobs on the U.S. Department of Labor sponsored website **O*NET**? If we don't know, we can't expect students to know! Additionally, we have found that students with disabilities are often stereotyped or pigeonholed into careers such as food service or janitorial work when they haven't explored all 17 career clusters. Introducing all 17 clusters also helps the teams to think more broadly about the student's career possibilities leading to more fruitful brainstorming on the team's part.
2. Use the **Virginia Job Outlook Projection to 2024** to provide the family with additional information on the job prospects for certain career clusters, including an estimate of median income in certain career fields.
3. Once the student is presented with information on the cluster, simply ask the young person, as well as the team, for their initial gut reaction. We ask, "Could you see yourself ever working in this field?" If the student says "yes", then the career cluster is marked as a consideration. If they say "no", then we move onto the next cluster to review. Ask the student to share what jobs might interest them within each identified career cluster.
4. Have the student choose 5-6 career clusters of interest. If too few are chosen, then the team doesn't have much to build on. If too many are chosen, the team and the student may be overwhelmed with trying to implement unique opportunities.

6. Select top three career clusters of interest

Once the student narrows their selections, the team works in small groups to identify the Top Three Career Clusters. There are three main reasons to break into small groups. First, this ensures participation by all team members without undue influence by one person. Second, many team members feel more comfortable contributing in smaller groups rather than the large group. And third, parents often enter this process not feeling sure of their student's ability to work. Hearing the ideas of multiple team members can be truly inspiring for the student and parent. The team follows the steps below to narrow selections to three career clusters:

1. Identify about 5 - 6 different careers of interest from the 17 career clusters.
2. Break into teams of two - three members.
3. Each mini-team then determines, using the Foundation Information, the best three matches for that individual student.
4. After the mini-teams reconvene, they each share their top three career interests along with ideas for jobs within each career cluster.
5. The larger team then determines the top three career clusters through discussion and consensus.
6. Once the top three are identified, list some possible jobs of interest in each career cluster. In many instances, jobs will be customized for the student.
7. Identify the education level required or most typical for this type of job.

To increase ownership, make sure the student participates in small group identification of the top three careers.

Through this process, the team determines the top three career clusters while also modeling for the student and team how to approach thinking about careers. This is important due to the number of interests a student in middle school or high school might wish to pursue.

Tips for the mini-teams to narrow the clusters:

1. First, consider the career cluster in which the student expresses the highest interest. What draws them to this cluster? What are their skills and interests related to this cluster?
2. Look at the Foundation Information. Is there a cluster that makes a good connection with the top part of the Foundation Information?
3. Does the student participate in any school or community clubs or activities that have a strong connection with one of the career clusters in which the student expressed an interest?

7. Determine individual assets and challenges to each choice of career clusters

Through the Meeting Three process, we also want to identify the assets the student possesses that will support the student as they pursue a specific career interest as well as the challenges with choosing that career. Did the team select a career cluster that recognizes the student's strengths/contributions and interests while also honoring their conditions for success and challenges? Most of us choose a career that is related to our interests and strengths. We want to ensure we are assisting the student with doing the same, so eventually they will have a level of job satisfaction.

We also acknowledge the student's challenges and conditions for success related to the choice of career. This will assist the team and those helping with job placement to provide needed accommodations. It also starts an open conversation concerning some of the barriers the young person will need to overcome in order to be successful in that job or career cluster.

Example:

Riley is a high school sophomore who loves working with kids and generally likes people and helping others.

Career cluster of interest: Human Services

- Assets related to this career cluster: trustworthiness, patience, helpfulness, and a pleasant personality
- Barriers related to this career cluster: problem solving ability

Both the assets and barriers were all noted on his Foundation Information and reflected in his 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills assessment and observations.

8. Build additional opportunities in the home, school, and community related to career cluster choices

Once the team completes My Top Three Career Clusters, they turn their attention back to opportunities in the home, school, and community.

1. Look carefully at the career clusters the student chose as their top three, since the team will develop opportunities related to these career clusters.
2. Previous opportunities were based on the student's strengths and interests, so it is likely that a few of the opportunities are already related to the student's career clusters.
3. Review those opportunities and brainstorm how to extend them so the student receives more or varied experiences within that opportunity related to the chosen cluster.
4. If the career cluster doesn't relate to any previous opportunities, the team will want to add a new opportunity to allow for initial exposure to jobs within that cluster.
5. The team might find it helpful to review **Building Employment Skills through Career Readiness Activities** in order to prompt some ideas. What can the student do in the home, school, and/or community to help them discover jobs of interest related to this cluster?

For example, let's say the student expressed an interest in fixing hair and applying makeup. An opportunity was developed in Meeting Two for them to visit a cosmetic counter and have a makeover while also asking some informal questions. In Meeting Three, the student identified Human Services as one of their career clusters. Taking that first opportunity and extending it could mean having them spend a day job-shadowing a professional at the cosmetic counter along with exploring careers within the Human Services cluster on O*NET.

9. Celebrate!

The Discovering ME! team has worked hard over the course of several months collecting information, building opportunities in the home, school, and community, and exploring careers. Make sure to recognize this hard work by all involved, especially the student and those team members who have been involved with developing opportunities and charting the student's progress. Hooray!

After **Meeting Three**

The third meeting typically takes place toward the end of the school year. Rather than looking at next steps, the team looks at how to extend the Discovering ME! process, Foundation Information, and opportunities into the next school year. The student's case manager will certainly want to share the Discovering ME! documents with the student's next case manager. The current case manager and parent will also want to broach how the opportunities will continue in the student's new grade or school. Ideally, the student's new case manager will attend the third meeting to become more familiar with the student and their progress through Discovering ME! Additionally, include critical information from this process in the student's IEP. More information on infusing Discovering ME! in the IEP is available in the Appendix.

Program Implementation – Subsequent Years

All that hard work in the first year of Discovering ME! starts to pay off in the subsequent years. Following the initial year of the Discovering ME! process, the team will meet twice a year, rather than three times. This two-meeting process allows the team to update information, build new opportunities, and continue to explore careers. The goal of Discovering ME! in subsequent years is to continually build on the opportunities developed each year toward increasing the team's understanding of the student's contributions, interests, conditions for success, and challenges. Team members might change, but the same roles will be required in order to implement the process.

Meeting **One** **(Subsequent Years)**

The focus of Meeting One during subsequent years is to conduct an updated interview, edit information as needed, and continue building opportunities. This meeting takes approximately 1 hour. The facilitator will coordinate the main activities, which include updating Foundation Information, reviewing and updating Building Opportunities, and planning for Meeting Two. As with meetings conducted in the first year, the team will want to include the student, family members, school personnel, community agency partners, and others identified by the family who know the student well.

TIP: Meetings during subsequent years will move much quicker. The facilitator might consider electronically dispersing materials to be reviewed prior to the meeting to refresh team members' memories.

Forms to be completed before **Meeting One** **(Subsequent Years)**

The facilitator will need to update or review the following forms prior to the meeting:

- [ ] Student Profile/General Information (update)

Meeting One at a glance (subsequent years)

Before **Meeting One**
(Subsequent Years)

- Identify the meeting facilitator and notetaker
- Invite the team
- Secure meeting space
- Prepare handouts
- Prepare student and family for meeting

During **Meeting One**
(Subsequent Years)

- Introduce team, process of Discovering ME! during this year, and review agenda
- Conduct team interview update
- Evaluate previous opportunities
- Update Foundation Information
- Build new opportunities
- Plan for next steps

Meeting One **Agenda**

(Subsequent Years)

Focus: Updating information

Approximate time: 1 hour

Agenda items

1. Introduce team and process of Discovering ME! during this year
2. Review agenda
3. Conduct team interview update

   Interviewing Those Who Know Me – Year Two

4. Evaluate previous opportunities
5. Update Foundation Information
6. Build new opportunities
7. Plan for next steps

   Meeting One Next Steps

How Students Can Participate – **Meeting One (Subsequent Years)**

- Have students prepare to discuss ways they believe they have grown during the previous year. “What are you doing today that you weren’t doing for yourself last year?”
- Students could list one thing they preferred and one thing they didn’t like in one of their opportunities and why. Students may present this information orally, using a communication system, or from a modified list of choices.
- Students might choose to present information to the team on previous year opportunities, their Foundation Information, or their favorite career clusters.

1. Introduce team and process of Discovering ME! during this year

Team members may change from year to year. To put the team at ease, have team members introduce themselves. Following team introductions, the facilitator explains the process and focus of the meetings for the year. Moving forward in subsequent years, the process is shortened and the focus is extended to further build the opportunities developed previously. The team will meet only twice for approximately an hour each time during Year Two and for each year thereafter.

2. Review agenda

The facilitator will briefly review what has been accomplished in the previous meetings. The facilitator will then review the focus of Meeting One (subsequent years) which is to update information. Next, review agenda items.

3. Conduct team interview update

Meeting One, during subsequent years, starts with an update of the interview by the team. A shortened version of the interview can be used during subsequent years. As evidenced by the sample below, the interview is designed to update information that has been previously collected. It asks for any changes to the student’s routines and activities in the home, school, and community. Although the **Interviewing Those Who Know Me – Year Two** form is shorter and focuses on updates, the updated interview is still intended to yield rich conversations on the student’s progress, life events, and changes that have occurred since the previous academic year.

Sample interview prompt

“Have there been any changes to your child’s day or routines since the last time we met?”

or

“Are there any changes you would like to see in your child’s routine?”

4. Evaluate previous opportunities

The team will hear reports concerning progress or insights gleaned from the opportunities developed at the last meeting. This information is used to update the Foundation Information and to decide to either hold steady on an opportunity, adapt it, or expand upon it. The team will want to evaluate the student's progress, or lack thereof, while also documenting the barriers and challenges that might have influenced the outcome. Ideally, the opportunities have continued with few interruptions and observations have been conducted or data collected on each of the opportunities in the home, school, and community. Having the data and observations allows the team to review information that is more reliable than just memories and recollections, which in turn permits greater ease in evaluation. Hearing the student's feedback on how they either liked or didn't like an opportunity and why is also vital to the task of evaluating the previous opportunities.

5. Update Foundation Information

Once you have conducted the interview, the team will want to update the Foundation Information with any new information gathered during the interview. They will also want to quickly look over the information to ensure its accuracy. Students' interests change frequently, and the team will want to make sure they are basing opportunities on the newest and most relevant information.

6. Build new opportunities

By the time the student enters the second year of the Discovering ME! process, they have already experienced multiple opportunities in the home, school, and community. From this point forward, the team is focused on (1) building on the information gathered and (2) assisting the student with experiencing greater depth in areas of interest or trying new opportunities. Each new opportunity developed should be more specific and connected to their profiles as future workers. Opportunities should continue to be based on the student's strengths, interests, current contributions, and identified career opportunities, and they should be experiences that the student is invested in pursuing. Additionally, opportunities should target the student's postsecondary goals related to education, employment, and independent living.

TIP: When the team is brainstorming ideas for opportunities, they need to build an opportunity that moves the student along the transition continuum from exploration to employment.

7. Plan for next steps

This meeting will conclude with planning (see **Meeting One Next Steps**). The team will need to decide which of the following steps are appropriate to continue the collection of information process for the individual student:

- ☐ Review previous assessments and IEP services
- ☐ Interview others
- ☐ Conduct observations
- ☐ Expand invitations
- ☐ Any other additional steps

Meeting **Two** (Subsequent Years)

Meeting Two during subsequent years continues to focus on updating and extending opportunities. During this meeting, the 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills assessment, and My Top Three Career Clusters will be updated. As a result, the Foundation Information will be updated and opportunities will be extended.

Forms to be completed before **Meeting Two** (Subsequent Years)

- [ ] **Student Observation**

  If deemed appropriate, observations are conducted between meetings. These could be classroom observations, observations of opportunities, or other activities the student engages in throughout their home, school, or community.

- [ ] **Additional Interviews**

  If there are new people in the student's life who are unable to attend the team meeting, they could be interviewed outside of the meeting structure.

Meeting Two at a glance (Subsequent Years)

Before **Meeting Two (Subsequent Years)**

- Invite the team
- Secure meeting space
- Prepare handouts
- Prepare student and family for meeting

During **Meeting Two (Subsequent Years)**

- Welcome the team and review the agenda
- Update Foundation Information
- Update the 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills
- Update My Top Three Career Clusters
- Develop new opportunities

After **Meeting Two (Subsequent Years)**

- Plan for continuing student meetings
- Expand the scope of Discovering ME! to other students or schools

Meeting Two **Agenda**

(Subsequent Years)

Focus: Updating and extending opportunities

Approximate time: 1 hour

Agenda items

1. Welcome team
2. Update Foundation Information
3. Update the 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills

   21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills

4. Update My Top Three Career Clusters
5. Develop new opportunities
6. Plan for next steps

   Meeting Two Next Steps

1. Welcome team members back to the process and review agenda

By now, the team members may know each other and the process well, but a nice welcome back is typically helpful for the student and family who may not regularly see some of the team members. A friendly way of doing this is allowing everyone in the room to introduce themselves and reminding the team of their connection to the student. After the introductions are completed, the facilitator will review the team's agenda and focus of the meeting.

2. Update Foundation Information

The first thing the team will want to hear is how the opportunities, developed at the end of the last meeting, proceeded. Did the student like the activities and experiences involved? What was gleaned from the data collected during these opportunities? Any new information gathered from the student's experiences should be documented on the Foundation Information.

3. Update the 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills

Students mature and change frequently during middle and high school, and the Discovering ME! process honors this growth. During subsequent years, the **21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills** assessment will be updated. Since the initial information has already been recorded, this will be a much quicker process than the first informal assessment.

Steps to complete the assessment:

1. Review each individual description ("what it may look like") within each skill area and the student's prior performance.
2. Through a consensus of the team, determine if this skill has changed. Mark each individual description as a "**+**" if this is a job asset or "**-**" if this is a job needed for the student.
3. Record the consensus answer and note any relevant conversations related to the specific skill area.
4. Update the Foundation Information with any changes to the 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills.

4. Update My Top Three Career Clusters

The facilitator will review the top three career clusters and seek guidance from the student and other members concerning any changes to the student's interest in the identified career clusters. If the student indicates they are no longer interested in a particular career, eliminate that cluster from My Top Three Career Clusters. Since the student has already been introduced to the career clusters, a quick review may be all that is needed to choose a new focus cluster. If they are still quite conflicted on choosing a new cluster(s), the team may elect to repeat the process of elimination outlined below. Once new career clusters are selected, My Top Three Career Clusters is updated to reflect the new information.

The team follows these steps to narrow selections to three career clusters:

1. Identify about five or six different careers of interest from the **17 career clusters**.
2. Break into teams of two - three.
3. Each mini-team then determines, using the Foundation Information, the best three matches for that individual student.
4. After the mini-teams reconvene, each shares their top three matches along with some ideas for jobs within each career cluster.
5. The larger team then determines the top three career clusters through discussion and consensus.
6. Once the top three are identified, list some possible jobs of interest in each career cluster. For some students, we may be listing traditional jobs. For other students, we look at customized jobs based on that individual student.
7. Identify the education level that is required or is most typical for each type of job.

5. Develop new opportunities

With possible new career clusters to explore and previous opportunities to expand upon, the team will want to dive into new opportunities. Once again, the team will turn its attention back to the home, school, and community for new opportunities. Looking carefully at the three updated career clusters chosen by the student, the team develops opportunities related to these clusters. Additionally, they will review other identified opportunities. If these opportunities have not been completed, does the team want to continue to pursue these activities or choose new ones? For other completed opportunities, did the student indicate an interest to continue with this opportunity and, if so, how can it be extended? Review those opportunities and brainstorm how to extend them so the student receives more or varied experiences.

6. Next steps

By now you are an expert on the Discovering ME! process! You guided teams through the first and second year of collecting student information, building on their strengths, and exploring career interests. This meeting will conclude with planning (see **Meeting Two Next Steps**).

Let's look at some next steps related to the student.

- Share the Discovering ME! documents with the student's next case manager.
- Discuss how opportunities will continue in the student's new grade or school.
- Include the information in the IEP.
- Share with community partners (with parental permission).
- Continue meeting two times a year to update information and build new opportunities reflective of the changes the student experiences.
- Use this information, as they progress through school, as the foundation for customized or supported employment.

Let's also look at the next steps as they relate to the process for your school or division.

- Expand Discovering ME! to other students and schools.
- Use data to identify how students are benefiting from Discovering ME! and where improvements could be made. The evaluation information in this guide provides several methods for identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses in the process.
- Consult this guide and the related training materials when training new people.
- Celebrate and share successes - good news often goes unshared. Acknowledge your stakeholders' efforts and accomplishments at school board meetings, on social media, or other news releases.

Evaluating and Sustaining Discovering ME!

Evaluation

Evaluation design focuses on what your evaluation wants to accomplish and how, as well as the ways the findings will be used. Examples of what your evaluation wants to accomplish are: gaining an understanding of your program and what works; improving on how tasks get done; determining the outcomes for those participating in the program; and determining the effects of the program on the community.

Consider what is most important to stakeholders: Process? Outcomes? For the purposes of Discovering ME!, the evaluation ideas will focus on these two evaluation areas.

Implementation and process questions: How well has Discovering ME! been implemented? Did we implement the process with fidelity? Were all expected or planned tasks completed? How satisfied are the students and parents?

Outcome questions: Did we meet our objectives? How much of an impact has it had on our students? Were there any unintended consequences (and what were they), such as an impact on the community or local businesses?

Timeline for evaluation activities

Ideally, the evaluation would start at the beginning of program implementation. If you're already part of the way into your program, don't scrap the idea of evaluation altogether. Even if you start late, you can still gather information that could prove useful in making improvements.

Develop your evaluation questions

What do we need to ask? Consider asking questions regarding the implementation and process of Discovering ME! as well as the outcomes of the process.

Implementation and process

Did the team follow the recommended planning process for Discovering ME! implementation? How well did we put our plan into practice?

Possible questions: Who participates? Is there diversity among participants? Why do participants enter or leave the program? Is there a variety of services and alternative activities generated? Do those most in need of help receive services?

Possible methods to answer those questions: monitoring system that tracks actions and accomplishments related to implementing the program, a survey of satisfaction with goals, and a survey of satisfaction with outcomes.

Outcomes – meeting objectives and impact

How well has the program met its stated objectives? How much and what kind of a difference has the program or initiative made?

Possible questions: How many people participated? How many hours are participants involved? How has behavior changed as a result of participation in the program? Are participants satisfied with the experience? Are there any negative results from participation in the program?

Possible methods to answer those questions: monitoring system (see page 45), survey of satisfaction with goals and outcomes, tracking goal attainment, behavioral surveys, and interviews with key participants.

Develop your evaluation method

Data is gathered through monitoring and feedback. This method of evaluation has three main elements:

1. **Process measures:** what you did to implement the program
2. **Outcome measures:** what the results were
3. **Observations:** whatever you do to keep track of the program while it's running

Surveys about the program

How is it going? It might seem like an overly simple approach, but sometimes the best thing you can do is ask the people involved in the program. This is best done through surveys. There are three kinds of surveys you're most likely to need to use at some point:

Survey of goals: typically done before Discovering ME! begins – how do your stakeholders think you will do?

Survey of the process: done during Discovering ME! – how are you doing so far?

Survey of the outcomes: done after Discovering ME! is finished – how did you do?

Goal attainment report

Were your goals reached? You will want to keep track of your goals. At the end of each year, someone should compile this information in a report that shows which goals were met and where you need improvement. The report should include the goals of the program, whether or not each goal was reached, and the percentage of how many goals were reached.

Interviews with key participants

Key participants—students, community partners, parents, teachers, etc.—have insights that can provide rich information for program evaluation. Interviewing them to get their viewpoints on critical points of the Discovering ME! timeline can help you learn more about the quality of this process, identify factors that affected the success or failure of certain events, capture a history of your program, and gather insights which you can use in planning and renewal efforts. These interviews can be informal.

Higher-level indicators of impact

These tested-and-true markers help you assess the ultimate outcome of your program. These are the major indicators that your program is successful. What do the experts say should be happening as a result of participating in your program?

With the table below, you can obtain a good overview of what sort of things you will have to do in order to get the information you need. Feedback and reports should be provided at meetings, or at least at the end of each academic year.

Types of evaluation and sample questions

	Formative	**Process**	**Impact or Outcome**
Questions the type of evaluation can answer	Is Discovering ME!'s implementation optimized for success? Is the Discovering ME! program well developed?	How is Discovering ME! operating, and in what context does it operate? Has Discovering ME! been implemented as planned? How can its operation be improved?	Did Discovering ME! reach its objectives? What impact did it have on target outcomes? What long-term changes can be attributed to Discovering ME!?
When to use the type of evaluation	During the planning stages or beginning of Discovering ME!'s implementation so revisions can be made before the program starts	In the early stages of Discovering ME!'s implementation to provide initial feedback	At the end of Discovering ME!'s development, when it's stable and unlikely to change in fundamental ways

Note: The evaluation section was adapted from Center for Community Health and Development. (n.d.). Evaluating the Initiative Toolkit. University of Kansas. Retrieved February 17, 2021, from the Community Tool Box: **https://ctb.ku.edu/en/evaluating-initiative**.

Sustainability

One of the cornerstones of sustainability is evaluation. The previous section has provided examples of key questions to consider for obtaining information on the implementation of Discovering ME!. Having this information can help to determine the next steps for sustaining your efforts and plans to continue or expand Discovering ME!. What is important to remember is that sustainability of any initiative is a developmental process, so it begins early on. This means developing allies, communicating with all key stakeholders on student outcomes, creating clear roles and responsibilities of team members, and starting the process or program with a small number of students to ensure success, and building from there.

Key components of sustaining Discovering ME!

Building a sustainability plan is not a separate plan added on to the initiative, but is woven into the entire implementation process. Documenting the activities conducted through the Discovering ME! process, or sharing information with other stakeholders, is important, but make sure that for sustainability purposes it is part of your everyday work in implementing this initiative. It should be developmental and occur over time to help you build or expand the Discovering ME! process. Some of the key components to assist in developing and implementing sustainability activities are described below.

Develop allies across all partners in the Discovering ME! process

Sustaining a new initiative requires building allies who understand the importance of what you are doing and the impact of offering this opportunity. Seeking supportive administrators and other school staff, along with community partners can help you to build awareness. Your allies can assist in disseminating information about Discovering ME! to a wider group of individuals or provide input and guidance on the implementation process. In research conducted on sustainability for transition programs, the support of one key administrator over time proved effective (Benz, et al., 2004).

Develop ongoing communication with all key stakehlders

Ongoing communication is essential for sustaining Discovering ME!. Providing examples or stories about the experiences of students in their home, school, and community can help stakeholders understand what Discovering ME! is about and how it contributes to building career awareness and workplace readiness skills for students. Use whatever methods are effective for getting the word out about what you are doing. Whether it is talking to other colleagues or collaborating partners, presenting at meetings, or writing short forms of communication, each method of communication will help to highlight the work the district is doing to improve transition outcomes and increase the likelihood of expanding Discovering ME!.

Provide clear information on staff roles and responsibilities

As described in the guide, there are specific roles and responsibilities of the team when working with students, especially for school staff members. Building a core team of teachers over the period of the initial implementation years can assist in maintaining Discovering ME!. It is important to ensure that, over time, the Discovering ME! process does not rely on just one or two educators. Again, this is where communication with administration and educators helps to expand the knowledge and understanding of Discovering ME!. By doing so, you are increasing the number of educators who can lead this initiative.

Document and share student outcomes

It is important to share the variety of experiences that students gained in the home, school, and community. This information could be collected through documents completed during the meetings and yearly evaluation results. The importance of sharing outcomes cannot be overstated! This is particularly important if you are looking to increase the number of students participating within a school or expanding to multiple schools. Family members, students with disabilities, community partners, administrators, and teachers all need to be aware of the impact of Discovering ME! to build early career planning opportunities. In addition, obtaining long-term outcomes of student participants through the post-school follow-up for Indicator 14 provides valuable insight into their transition from high school. Discovering ME! is listed on the Indicator 14 survey as one of many services or activities offered in the transition process.

Network with other districts implementing Discovering ME!

The **Center on Transition Innovations** (CTI) can help you connect with other districts implementing the Discovering ME! process. Talking with others about their experiences initiating Discovering ME!, some districts for multiple years, can provide invaluable assistance. Discussing how to expand opportunities, overcome issues in implementing and sustaining Discovering ME!, and ideas on experiences that students have completed in their home, school and community may generate useful ideas on what can be accomplished.

References

Benz, B.R., Linstrom, L., Unruh, D., & Waintrup, M. (2004). Sustaining secondary transition programs in local schools. *Remedial and Special Education, 25*(1), 39-50.

Conclusion

The success and sustainability of Discovering ME! will require a collaborative partnership among various stakeholders in the development, implementation, and evaluation of this person-centered transition assessment process. The purpose of this guide is designed to provide the structure, resources, and practical tips to engage all participants in the replication of this student-focused career awareness and readiness process. We encourage revisiting this guide throughout the first years of implementation to ensure Discovering ME! fidelity, establish sustainability, and plan for school or district-wide expansion. For additional information on the development and implementation of Discovering ME!, visit the **VCU Center on Transition Innovations**.

Appendix

- Case study
- Infusing Discovering ME! in the IEP
- Discovering ME! and Indicator 13
- Discovering ME! and Academic and Career Plans

Case study

When Eduardo started the Discovering ME! process, he was in 8th grade at Happy Valley Middle School. His teacher was eager to start the Discovering ME! process with Eduardo and his family after hearing about its function as an age-appropriate transition assessment. She tried to complete traditional transition assessments with Eduardo, but she never felt they yielded any true results for him. His family was also eager after hearing it could help address his transition to post-school work opportunities. They had been told in the past that Eduardo would not be able to work due to his cognitive ability and issues with fine motor coordination and speech.

During the first meeting, the team had a lively discussion based on the interview questions. Eduardo and his parents participated along with his great-aunt (who also lives with the family), speech pathologist, art teacher, special education teacher, and case manager from the Community Services Board.

After the first meeting, the teacher developed the **Foundation Information** from the results of the interview. It indicated Eduardo has strengths in attention to detail, keeping a schedule, and organization. He also has a wide range of interests, including weather, building things, funny movies, looking up information on his iPad, and creating computer-generated art. His conditions for success include working in quiet areas, having a consistent schedule, and reporting to one primary authority figure. His challenges include having below-grade-level academic skills, sometimes having speech that is difficult to understand, and being very fearful of thunderstorms. The team also completed the **21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills** assessment. It indicated Eduardo possesses strengths in work ethic, integrity, self-representation, health and safety, and time and resource management. He needs additional support, instruction, or training in problem solving, communication, and conflict resolution. The team then looked for opportunities in the home, school, and community related to his strengths, interests, and contributions from the Foundation Information while considering his conditions for success and challenges. These opportunities included presenting the weather each morning to his homeroom class, building a birdhouse with help from his dad and brother, and interviewing a meteorologist.

During the third meeting, Eduardo and his team reviewed the Foundation Information for clarity and accuracy, and they heard a report on his progress in the opportunities in the home, school, and community. After the review, the team determined Eduardo's top three career clusters: Arts, Audio/Video Technology and Communication, Architecture and Construction, and Manufacturing. The team also looked at opportunities in the home, school, and community that would address his Foundation Information while also allowing for exploration in the three career clusters. In the community, they determined he would volunteer with his family for Habitat for Humanity and visit a TV station for a tour to become more familiar with jobs related to Architecture and Construction as well as Arts, Audio/Video Technology, and Communication. At home, Eduardo would work with his grandfather to build a birdhouse. While at school, he would assemble weekend food backpacks as an early work-based learning experience related to manufacturing.

Once the three meetings were completed, Eduardo's team continued utilizing the information from Discovering ME! to build his IEP and to advocate for certain coursework for his 9th grade schedule. Some of the opportunities were listed as transition activities in the IEP and a good portion of his Present Level of Performance was taken from his Foundation Information. As they planned his transition to 9th grade, his middle school case manager met with his high school case manager to help determine how to continue the opportunities already developed at the middle school.

Both Eduardo and his family were very pleased with the information gained during the Discovering ME! process. The assessment data was used in the IEP and coursework for 9th grade. Eduardo is enthusiastic about continuing with Discovering ME! during his high school career.

Infusing Discovering ME! in the IEP

One of the significant benefits of a student's involvement in Discovering ME! is the vast amount of information that is collected during the three meeting process. While Discovering ME! is not part of the formal IEP process, there are many reasons that educators will want to review the **Foundation Information**, **21st Century Workplace Skills** assessment, **Building Opportunities**, and **My Top Three Career Clusters** as they work to develop the IEP. As an age-appropriate transition assessment, Discovering ME! offers the IEP team information that could be utilized in developing the present level of performance, annual and post-school transition goals, and accommodations and modifications. Let's review two methods for including Discovering ME! in the IEP process.

Option one

Possibly the quickest and easiest method for including Discovering ME! as part of the IEP is to upload a portion of the forms developed during the meetings into the IEP platform used by your school (ex. IEP Online). While it is unnecessary to upload all the forms, there are some that lend themselves to inclusion in the IEP. For example, it is not recommended that the interview form is included as part of the IEP due to the amount of information on the finished interview. Since information from the interview and other Discovering ME! components are condensed into the Foundation Information, it is more reasonable to upload it along with other pertinent forms into the student's existing electronic IEP file. This allows information from Discovering ME! to become part of the student's electronic file, which may then be viewed as documentation of student voice, collaborative planning, and age-appropriate assessments.

Option two

The team developing the IEP may also choose to infuse information collected through the Discovering ME! process into existing sections of the student's IEP. Rather than including the entire form in the existing IEP, the team uses the information from the varied components to develop sections of the IEP. For example, the Foundation Information would be best incorporated in the student's Present Level of Performance. The student's conditions for success and challenges to be considered, also from the Foundation Information, will be beneficial when developing accommodations. Opportunities in the home, school, and community could be used to develop the goals, objectives, and transition activities. My Top Three Career Clusters will be suitable in discussions to develop the student's postsecondary goals for employment, education, or training. As you can see, the Discovering ME! data has the potential to be included in many, if not all, components of the student IEP.

The present level of performance

What information from the Discovering ME! process might be best included in the Present Level of Performance? The Present Level of Performance should provide the IEP reader with an overview of the student that covers who they are, what they like, what they are good at, and the type of support they need to succeed. Many aspects of Discovering ME! uncover this information through the interview and other assessments. Information and data from the following Discovering ME! components should be considered and summarized during the development of the IEP.

- The Foundation Information, which includes information concerning the student's strengths, contributions, conditions for success, and challenges to consider
- 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills assessment, which is summarized on the Foundation Information
- Summary of observations from locations in the home, school, and community
- Summary of opportunities implemented in the home, school, and community
- Summary of My Top Three Career Clusters

Other components of the IEP

Beyond the Present Level of Performance, Discovering ME! data and information is very useful in developing other sections of the IEP as well. The 21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills assessment provides data for skills the student still needs to achieve employment and could be used for the development of IEP goals and transition activities. The student's opportunities in the home, school, and community yield vital information to develop transition goals and activities or yearly goals and objectives that align with the postsecondary goals. Involvement from agency representatives in the Discovering ME! process also facilitates their continued involvement in the IEP process and allows for greater opportunities for collaboration on IEP goals and services related to transition. It should be noted, if the person(s) and/or agencies responsible for executing and funding the stated goals, objectives, and activities are not able to participate in the IEP, then the opportunity should not be included in the IEP even if they were in attendance for the Discovering ME! meetings. Information from My Top Three Career Clusters indicating a student's interest in future employment is useful for developing the postsecondary employment and education/training goals.

Individualized and Coordinated IEPs

The use of a person-centered transition process as an age-appropriate transition assessment tends to lead to IEPs that are more individualized and coordinated. The nature of Discovering ME! as a student-focused process yields results that are significantly individualized as the process is unique to each participant. There are no checklists or templates that create cookie-cutter results! Each student participates in opportunities that were uniquely designed to meet their strengths, interests, and conditions for success. As such, when infusing the results of Discovering ME! into a student's IEP, it naturally results in an IEP that is as individualized as the process.

TIP: IEPs that include the information from Discovering ME! can assist in smooth transitions as students move between case managers or schools.

As part of federal monitoring, school districts are required to ensure that a student's transition services are part of "a coordinated set of activities designed to be within a results-oriented process" (34 C.F.R. §300.43(a)). This means the postsecondary goals have been developed based on the student's age-appropriate transition assessments, and the annual goals and transition activities meaningfully relate to the postsecondary goals and can reasonably lead to the student achieving their postsecondary goals. It really makes good sense doesn't it? Like any good goal, there should be activities and opportunities that assist with progressing toward the goal. This is the intent of requiring that IEPs be coordinated.

Discovering ME! and Indicator 13

Indicator 13 is one section of the State Performance Plan, which is the federal monitoring component for each state required by IDEA 2004. Virginia is required each year to collect data on the federal indicators and report these indicators to the U.S. Department of Education. Indicator 13 looks specifically at transition for youth ages 17 and above to assess the quality of services leading to their postsecondary goals. How can Discovering ME! assist teachers and families with meeting the requirements for Indicator 13? The information gathered during the Discovering ME! process can be invaluable in crafting IEPs that meet the requirements for Indicator 13. Let's look at each requirement and reflect on how the Discovering ME! process addresses it.

Appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals updated annually

By the end of Meeting Three, the Discovering ME! process has identified the student's top three career clusters that relate to their interests and strengths. This is a great place to start working with the student and family to develop postsecondary goals for the IEP. Each year as part of the annual update, the Discovering ME! team will review the career clusters and further refine the student's postsecondary interests based on a review of the opportunities.

Transition services and related IEP goals

The transition services in the IEP must reasonably lead and relate to the postsecondary goals. The Discovering ME! process assists in this regard in the development of opportunities in the home, school, and community that relate initially to the student's **Foundation Information** and eventually to their top three career clusters. The opportunities could easily be developed into transition services with related annual IEP goals.

Based upon age-appropriate transition assessments

The Virginia Department of Education designates the Discovering ME! process as an age-appropriate transition assessment.

Evidence the student is invited to the IEP meeting

The Discovering ME! process requires the involvement of the student. This naturally sets up an expectation for student involvement in the IEP process, and provides the student with experience interacting and responding to others in meetings related to their education.

Evidence, if appropriate, of agency representation invitation to the IEP meeting

The Discovering ME! process encourages collaboration with agency representatives and is, sometimes, the first interaction between the student and an agency representative. This eases the path for agency involvement not only in the IEP, but also in developing a working relationship between the student and the agency.

As you can see, the Discovering ME! process provides ample connection to the Indicator 13 requirements. A win-win for all!

Discovering ME! and Academic and Career Plans

What are Academic and Career Plans?

For years, too many students have been leaving our high schools without clear goals for their future. How do we know this? First, our country has seen an increase in the number of students getting college degrees above what is needed for their jobs or careers. This may mean students are staying in college for four years when they only need a two-year degree. Other students are spending too much time in college due to changing their majors because they didn't have clear goals when entering college. Earning degrees not needed and spending more time in college than is necessary often results in both a delay in entering the job market and students acquiring extra college debt. Other students lose money because they lack the education or training for jobs; thus, they may be unemployed or working in low-paying jobs. College and career readiness and planning helps students find the future that is right for them, hopefully without wasting time and money.

As part of states' efforts to get students college and career ready, schools are required to develop Academic and Career Plans or Individual Learning Plans for all students. In Virginia, these plans must be developed in seventh grade and reviewed during high school. Academic and Career Plans were introduced to help maximize achievement in middle and high school in order to help ensure postsecondary success.

What is included in Academic and Career Plans?

Each student's individual plan should include two major components: (1) their program of study for middle and high school and (2) a postsecondary career pathway based on their academic and career interests.

A student's program of study includes the type of diploma they are working toward achieving and the middle and high school courses they should take. Also included are the student's participation in extracurricular activities, career and technical student organizations, work-based learning opportunities, and community service. Each student's program of study should be directly related to their career goal. In other words, if the student wants to become a doctor, they should be earning a diploma which will allow access to a four-year college, take as many classes as possible in middle and high school related to the field of health sciences, and become involved in activities and community volunteering related to medical jobs. Academic and Career Plans detail the pathway or series of courses students will take to achieve their identified postsecondary employment goals.

The disconnect between Academic and Career Plans and students with the greatest barriers to employment

Although state regulations often mandate Academic and Career Plans or Individual Learning Plans for all students, the reality is that some students lack these plans or have plans that are meaningless due to the methods used when they were developed. There can be a multitude of reasons that this is true. First, these plans are often developed based on online assessments designed for general populations. Due to the nature of their disability, many students with the greatest barriers to employment do not respond well or achieve accurate results from these online assessments. Some students lack the reading level or vocabulary needed to understand the assessments or do not have the attention span required to participate.

In many districts, school counselors are charged with the development of students' academic and career plans. Many of these school counselors lack familiarity and experience working with students with the most complex needs, especially students who do not earn traditional regular diplomas or fit into mainstream or general curriculum classes.

Considering that these plans are intended to provide a guide or blueprint to future employment, the lack of a well-developed plan for students with the greatest barriers to employment is particularly grievous. With proper **Foundation Information** and planning, appropriate and meaningful Academic and Career Plans can be developed for all students. Schools can overcome this disconnect by utilizing Discovering ME! to inform the Academic and Career Plan process for students with the most significant barriers to employment.

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