

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT AND GUIDED GROUP DISCOVERY

Guided Group Discovery (GGD) opens doors to employment for people who experience barriers to employment. LEAD Center recently released comprehensive [Guided Group Discovery materials](#), designed to enable youth and adults with disabilities and others to find a job that is a good fit with an employer who values and needs the talents they have to offer. Read on to learn about the process and how to access the materials.

Customized Employment (CE) became a part of federal law with the passage of the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) in July 2014. Customized Employment is an approach to hiring, retention, and return to work that matches a job seeker's strengths, the conditions under which they will be successful, and their interests to the needs of an employer. It can bring people from diverse populations, including those with disabilities, into the workplace to contribute their talents to meet critical business needs. CE utilizes an individualized approach to employment planning and job development — one person at a time and one employer at a time. Because CE jobs are a good fit for the person and the employer, there is greater employee satisfaction and productivity, resulting in enhanced retention and profitability for employers. In short, CE is a “win-win” strategy that meets the needs of employers, as well as job seekers. The definition of customized employment in WIOA [§361.5(c)(11)] includes:

- Competitive integrated employment for an individual with a significant disability,
- Based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual with a significant disability,
- Designed to match the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer, and
- Carried out through flexible strategies.

CE can also include self-employment, including entrepreneurship and business ownership. More information on Customized Employment can be found on the websites of the [Office of Disability Employment Policy \(ODEP\)](#) and [LEAD Center](#).

GUIDED GROUP DISCOVERY AS AN ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT AND JOB DEVELOPMENT TOOL

Discovery is the foundation of Customized Employment. It is a proven evidence-based practice that improves employment outcomes for youth and adults with disabilities. Too often, traditional vocational assessments are based on comparative and/or normed approaches that often determine that people

with significant disabilities may not be a good match for most jobs. Guided Group Discovery is an alternative assessment tool proven to identify the strengths of job seekers with and without disabilities, particularly those with multiple barriers to employment. The purpose of GGD is to lay the foundation for Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) that meets the job seeker’s preferred characteristics and conditions of employment – and the needs of a business.

GGD consists of a series of sessions that can be co-facilitated by staff from schools, American Job Centers (AJCs), vocational rehabilitation (VR), community rehabilitation programs, Centers for Independent Living (CIL), behavioral health, developmental disabilities, veterans programs, and other partner agencies. The sessions guide people through developing a “Blueprint for Employment.” The Blueprint for Employment helps job seekers identify their interests, skills and contributions, conditions for success, and support network. The Blueprint information is used to target specific job opportunities that “fit” the job seeker and also benefit the employer. Guided Group Discovery results in a positive written description of each job seeker that can guide their job search. This information is used to facilitate the employment planning session, targeting tasks and specific work settings that match the characteristics the job seeker desires. This typically is done in five to six sessions of 90 minutes to two hours each, over a period of five to six weeks. However, GGD has been adapted for different settings and groups, to either be offered in fewer weeks and/or with shorter sessions over a different timeframe (e.g., to be used in schools to align with class periods).

HOW GUIDED GROUP DISCOVERY RESULTS IN EMPLOYMENT

- In Guided Group Discovery, job seekers clarify their Conditions of Employment (e.g., slightly later start time to accommodate morning routine, no fluorescent lights that flicker, only one supervisor giving assignments, minimal background noise, etc.), Interests, Contributions, and Favored Tasks.
- Upon completion of the Guided Group Discovery process, the job seeker and/or their representative can use this information to meet with specific employers in an effort to negotiate a customized job description or design a self-employment opportunity.
- Potential employers are identified during Guided Group Discovery, using other group members, facilitators, and/or an individual’s network.

RESOURCES

[Guided Group Discovery Curriculum Materials \(including a Facilitator Manual and PowerPoint, and a Participant Workbook with its Blueprint for Employment\)](#)¹ – an approach designed to lay the foundation for competitive integrated employment as a Universal Design that can benefit all job seekers.

[Guided Group Discovery: Paving the Way to Employment Webinar](#)² – in which LEAD Center shares materials used to implement Guided Group Discovery through cross-system partnerships.

[The Essential Elements of Customized Employment for Universal Application Manual](#)³ – a guide for the universal application of elements of Customized Employment across service delivery and training providers approaches.

1 <http://leadcenter.org/webinars/group-discovery-alternative-assessment-tool-workforce-centers-and-community-based-providers>

2 <http://leadcenter.org/webinars/webinar-guided-group-discovery-paving-way-employment>

3 <http://www.leadcenter.org/resources/tool-manual/essential-elements-customized-employment-universal-application>