

# workforce Development

a quarterly publication of the Maryland Customized Employment Partnership

2004 – Volume 01 Issue 02



## Art & Science

### *Helping People Find Good Jobs (Part 1)*

Job development is a process that takes time and preparation. It is not something that is “done” to someone, nor is it a one-time occurrence. The job search process is an “art” because it calls for creativity, energy, and enthusiasm; and a “science” because it requires careful planning, information gathering, and analysis.

The goal of job development is to bring the job seeker and the employer together to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome. For the job seeker, the goal of course is a satisfying job. What the employer hopes to get is a talented worker who helps the organization meet its goal(s).

There are a number of variables that can affect this outcome (see figure on next page.) For example, every job seeker has a unique set of characteristics, such as abilities, previous experiences, interests, personality, goals, barriers, and support systems. The career specialist must be able to identify these characteristics (with the job seeker’s input, of course) and determine how these will relate to the job search.

Likewise, every employer has a number of variables, such as people (with diverse characteristics and roles); processes (the way they get work done); and policies (the rules and regulations of the workplace). Both the job seeker and his/her advocate must learn how to identify and navigate through these variables in order for successful employment to occur.

Since the goal of the job search is to match a job seeker’s talents with an employer’s workplace needs – two important considerations are:

1. Does the job seeker have the required characteristics for specific job openings? (and)
2. Can he/she secure a job independently?

If the answer is “yes” then the job seeker should ultimately take the initiative and conduct his/her own job search. For people with significant barriers to employment, the answer is most often “no” to both

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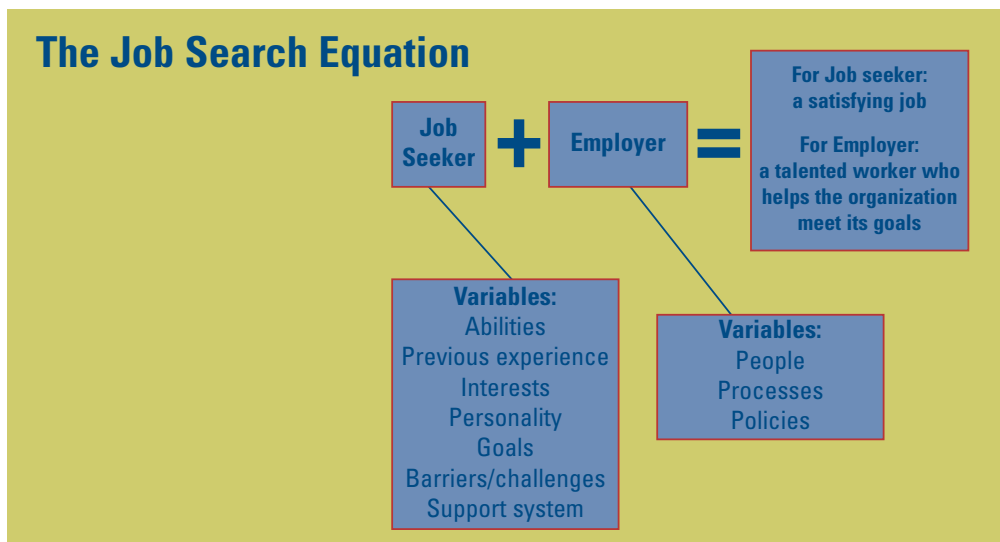
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questions. The job seeker will most likely need the assistance of an intermediary, such as a career specialist, to assist with this process.

### Job Development for Customized Employment

Customized employment is one strategy available to a job seeker with significant barriers to employment. The job seeker, with the assistance of a career specialist, can follow a series of steps to achieve job search goals.

#### Step 1

*Complete a Positive Personal Profile.* The career specialist can help the job seeker by spending time with him/her, talking to the people who know the job seeker best, and collecting information from other sources familiar with the individual. In addition to the obvious (finding out about paid, unpaid, and volunteer work experiences), consider the activities the person enjoys, the environments where he/she is has been successful, and the accommodations and supports that will be necessary for the job seeker to be successful in a work environment. Also important is to find out what the person dislikes – or particular situations to avoid.

For more information on creating a

Positive Personal Profile, or questions about facilitating its development, visit the MCEP website ([www.marylandcep.org](http://www.marylandcep.org)) and click on Tools.

#### Step 2

*Create an initial list of tasks,* or specific jobs or assignments that the person is capable of and would enjoy performing in a potential work environment. This list should be based on the information derived from the Positive Personal Profile. When the career specialist is ready to meet with employers to present a job candidate (see Step 5), this initial task list will be modified to merge the person’s skills with the specific needs of the potential employer.

Examples of an initial list of tasks for an individual interested in clerical activities might include: collating materials, alphabetical filing, numerical filing, greeting customers, photocopying, faxing, shredding, opening, sorting and/or delivering mail, data entry, organizing materials, answering multi-line telephones, taking messages, folding and stuffing envelopes, stocking and restocking supplies, and running miscellaneous errands. It is important to note that such a list is only an initial and preliminary list of

potential job tasks. Also important to stress is that each list is unique to each job seeker.

#### Step 3

*Complete a job search plan.* The job search plan is used as a means to review, clarify, and highlight the information gathered through the Positive Personal Profile and the initial task list. It is also a time to discuss, usually with a team of people who know the job seeker well, information that may not have been gathered previously, such as geographical preferences, preferred schedule, and transportation resources or needs. Also important to gather is a list of potential employers to contact for informational interviews (see STEP 4). The entire team (including the job seeker and his/her family) should be tapped for potential ideas and contacts. It is from this plan and planning meeting that job development efforts will begin. For more information on the job development plan, please see Tools of the Trade on page 7, or visit the MCEP Website at [www.marylandcep.org](http://www.marylandcep.org) and click on Tools.

#### Step 4

*Conduct informational interviews with employers.* The informational interview is an effective way to get to know employers, how they operate, and what challenges they face, without the pressure of trying to convince them to hire somebody. It is also a way to begin building employer relationships that are necessary in order to create customized employment opportunities. Some sample questions to ask during an informational interview include:

- Do employees perform duties that take time away from their main area of expertise?
- Are there busy times of the day or week when you could use extra help?
- Are there tasks you would like to see done more often or more efficiently?

If there are particular challenges or if there are interesting aspects to work

assignments within the company, then a subsequent tour of the worksite is a good way to clarify operational procedures and to pinpoint opportunities to customized a position.

#### Step 5

*Refine your task list.* The refined task list is created after the career specialist's visit with an employer – it targets and identifies the specific job tasks in a particular company that can be performed by the job seeker. Creating a task list is also a way of identifying negotiation points for a potential employer to consider. Examples of a refined task list are showcased in the table below.

The next series of steps in the customized employment job develop-

ment process includes negotiating with a potential employer for positions that are not necessarily advertised - those that may involve restructuring, creating, or carving tasks that ultimately benefit the employer's operation. This series of steps will be highlighted in the next issue of Workforce Development...stay tuned!



Initial Task List	Refined Task List
Greeting customers/customer service	Escorting patients from waiting area to appropriate room
Collating materials	Collating new hire information packets
Folding and stuffing envelopes	Folding, stuffing and distributing pay-checks
Running errands	Making bank deposits
Shredding	Shredding credit card receipts and old personnel records

# Online Resources

## **Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach (BPAO)**

[www.ssa.gov/work/ServiceProviders/bpaofactsheet.html](http://www.ssa.gov/work/ServiceProviders/bpaofactsheet.html)

The Social Security Administration (SSA) funds an outreach program to help people with disabilities and who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Trained Benefits Specialists work in all counties of Maryland. They are available to provide informed choice concerning work and explain all about the SSA work incentives. They do not work for SSA but under a grant from SSA and their service is free. Benefits Specialists are also available for Technical Assistance to agencies/institutions that serve the disability community, including those serving Transition-Aged youth.

When recipients of SSI and SSDI go to work, they risk losing their benefits – an obvious disincentive to working. To ensure that work leads to a net result of more income, albeit less SSI benefits, BPAO representatives are available to meet with individuals help them understand and take advantage of potential work incentives. In almost all cases BPAO reps can assist beneficiaries who go to work manage these benefits so that they net more money without losing core benefits.

For more information about the BPAO projects in Maryland, contact:  
Benefits INfoSource  
Independence Now, Inc.  
1400 Spring Street, Suite 400  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
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(888) 838-1776 (toll free)

## **Benefits Assistance Resource Center**

[www.vcu-barc.org](http://www.vcu-barc.org)

The Benefits Assistance Resource Center (BARC) of Virginia Commonwealth University is one of 3 regional training and technical assistance centers funded by the Social Security Administration (SSA) under the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 to provide training and technical support to Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach (BPAO) projects and Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) projects on the operations of the Social Security disability benefit programs (SSI and SSDI) and all associated work incentives.

## Spotlight on MCEP Partner



**Independence Now, Inc.**

Independence Now is one of Maryland's six Centers for Independent Living (CIL). Centers are funded in part by the Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Independent Living Branch, to provide several core services: advocacy, independent living skills training, information and referral, and peer counseling. Independence Now provides MCEP jobseekers with Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach services.

For more information on Independence Now, please contact  
1400 Spring Street, Suite 400, Silver Spring, MD 20910  
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# Spotlight on *ONE-STOP RESOURCES - Disability Program Navigator*

There are many systems working together at the One Stop Career Center to assist people with disabilities enter or return to employment. The United States Social Security Administration and the United States Department of Labor are jointly sponsoring Disability Program Navigators to better inform individuals with disabilities about work support programs now available at One-Stop Career Centers.

The Disability Program Navigator project began in Maryland in 2003 and is designed to assist people with

disabilities who are seeking employment and training services through Maryland's One Stop Career Center system. In addition to ensuring programmatic and physical accessibility at the One-Stop Career Centers, Navigators assist customers with disabilities to access and navigate the complex provisions of various programs that impact their ability to gain, return to, or retain employment. Twelve Navigators are currently working at One-Stop Career Centers across Maryland.

## **Maryland's Lead Navigator**

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*Customized employment offers two distinct advantages to our One Stop operation. First, it represents model collaboration between partners. Second, and more importantly, is that this collaboration leads to real jobs for people with disabilities and other barriers to employment.*

*Eric Seleznow  
Director, Montgomery County Workforce Services*

## Recognizing MCEP Employers

### 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Workforce & Economic Development Awards Program

The Montgomery County Department of Economic Development held its 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Workforce and Economic Development Awards Ceremony on November 18, 2004 at the new North Bethesda Marriott Hotel and Conference Center. Each year business and individual awardees are recognized for leadership, workforce determination, and creative hiring practices, among others. At this year's ceremony, two employers were recognized for their customized employment efforts. *Dr. Robert Morgenstein* received the Disability Hiring Award – and was recognized for creatively crafting a job within his practice for someone with a significant disability (read more about Dr. Morgenstein on page 7.)

Also recognized at the event was *The Behnke Nurseries Company*. Behnke received the County's Agricultural Award and was recognized for its long-standing positive relationship with the disability community. For years Behnke has provided work experiences and opportunities to high school students with disabilities, in addition to working in partnership with local disability employment service providers.

The reason for this recent award was Behnke's efforts hiring an individual with multiple barriers to employment, including using a wheelchair, very limited communication, the need for a personal care attendant on the job, and never holding a paying job. Behnke worked with a career specialist at the MontgomeryWorks One Stop Career Center to create a position pruning plants, a constant need and a task that other employees perform if and when they are not working with customers.



Ramón DePaula talking about his experience working with Dr. Morgenstein.



Behnke Nurseries representatives receiving their award.

Behnke was honored for its recognition of the value of customizing work assignments that result in jobs for individuals with employment barriers as well as enhanced company operations.

# Tools of the Trade

## The Job Search Plan

Planning for a customized employment job search is quite different from the traditional job search process. Prior to making contact with prospective employers, there is a great deal of information the career specialist should be sure to have on hand. In addition to the initial task list and a summary of the jobseeker's interests, preferences, and dislikes or situations to avoid, it is helpful for the career specialist to have a thorough understanding all of the circumstances that might influence the job search.

It is most effective to utilize a customized employment planning team for identifying possible employment scenarios. In addition to the job seeker and his/her family and friends, the career specialist might consider representatives from the following categories, as appropriate: vocational rehabilitation, One Stop personnel and/or partners, community rehabilitation providers, BPAO representation, assistive technology services, teachers, etc.

The outcome of the team's input is a plan that guides the job search. The plan will include:

- a summary of the individual's interests and preferences
- a summary of situations to avoid
- preferred geographical locations of work
- preferred schedule (e.g. part time, mornings, evenings, etc.)
- transportation resources
- potential accommodations needed
- potential supports available
- a list of employers to begin contacting.

Armed with this information career specialists are ready to assist the job seeker begin looking for job prospects. The plan also serves as a way of identifying negotiation points that be important on selling a customized employment arrangement to an employer.

## customized employment in action

and the internal operational needs the office was currently experiencing.

Upon meeting Dr. Morgenstein at his office, the career specialist found that Dr. Morgenstein and his office manager were proactive in identifying tasks that might be appropriately re-assigned for a better work flow. Some of the identified needs in the office included: ushering patients from the waiting area to the appropriate room, pulling and re-filing patient's charts, running errands to the post office, making bank deposits, and additional light clerical tasks.

Ramón DePaula is an individual who was seeking employment and desiring a clerical position where he could also interact with people. Ramón is able to perform some typical office functions,

including those identified by Dr. Morgenstein and his staff, but not all of the tasks usually performed by an office clerk.

After negotiating with the career specialist, Dr. Morgenstein was willing to give Ramon the opportunity to perform different job tasks in order to assess whether he was a good fit for the practice, and whether the tasks would help to streamline his operation. After a volunteer work trial, Ramón was offered a job as a clerical assistant. He works in a position that was created to fill specific needs in the busy dental office and matched to his interests and skills. According to Dr. Morgenstein "Ramón's new position allows the front office staff to spend more quality time updating patient charts."

Dr. Robert Morgenstein has an established dental practice in the Rockville area. At the suggestion of an acquaintance who is a patient of Dr. Morgenstein, a career specialist from the MontgomeryWorks One Stop Career Center contacted Dr. Morgenstein to find out more about his practice, and how the flow of work occurred within his office. Dr. Morgenstein and his staff welcomed the opportunity to discuss their work



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MCEP is committed to and is making every possible effort to ensure that all materials developed, procured, maintained, or used by MCEP are accessible to people with disabilities. Please contact us if you would like to receive this newsletter in an alternative format.

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**MCEP Partners & Collaborators**

Montgomery County Department of Economic Development,  
Division of Workforce Investment Services

TransCen, Inc.

Career Transition Center, Inc.

Independence Now

WayStation, Inc.

Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services

Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration

Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Montgomery County Public Schools

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