

## CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT—EMPLOYER RESEARCH

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This Grab and Go Practice is part of a series helping students, parents, teachers, and job developers create customized employment opportunities for students with disabilities.

### INTRODUCTION

Career counselors highly recommend that students research both the jobs that they are interested in and local employers within those fields. Employers appreciate when job candidates have a basic knowledge of their company and its placement within the industry.

Researching employers also involves identifying vocational themes and determining a strong fit between the student and a potential employer.

#### In this guide, we look at three key steps:

1. **Identifying vocational themes**
2. **Using themes to identify potential employers**
3. **Evaluating potential employers for “fit” with students**

### IDENTIFYING VOCATIONAL THEMES

Employer research starts with identifying vocational themes. Once you have the Positive Personal Profile created with a student, identifying at least three vocational themes from the discovery process can help expand the range of employers to develop relationships with.

Vocational themes are not job titles, but an accumulation of many related jobs, environments, skills, and interests. For example, when a student indicates an interest in “working with flowers,” a typical job suggestion may be to work in a greenhouse or assist an arranger at a florist shop. This suggestion, although logical, could be too narrow in scope when it comes to customizing a position for a student.

However, if “agriculture,” “horticulture,” or even “decoration” are identified as themes, then a list of local companies or people related to those themes

may be developed. This can be confirmed through career exploration activities (e.g., a work tryout on a weeding team at the botanical gardens, or a brief experience trimming trees with the local parks department) (Griffin & Hammis, 2011).

Griffin and Hammis (2011) warn that identifying fewer than three themes tends to limit employment opportunities for students. With at least three themes identified, job developers can widen the scope of potential employers and move beyond the stereotypical types of jobs that people with disabilities have traditionally held. Vocational themes enhance the range of employer matches and make it easier for students to find work related to their career goals (Keeton, Griffin, & Cassidy, 2015).

#### Translating Interests to Themes

INTEREST	→	THEME
Dogs	→	Animals
Trucks	→	Transportation
Airplane	→	Aviation
Tattoos	→	Art

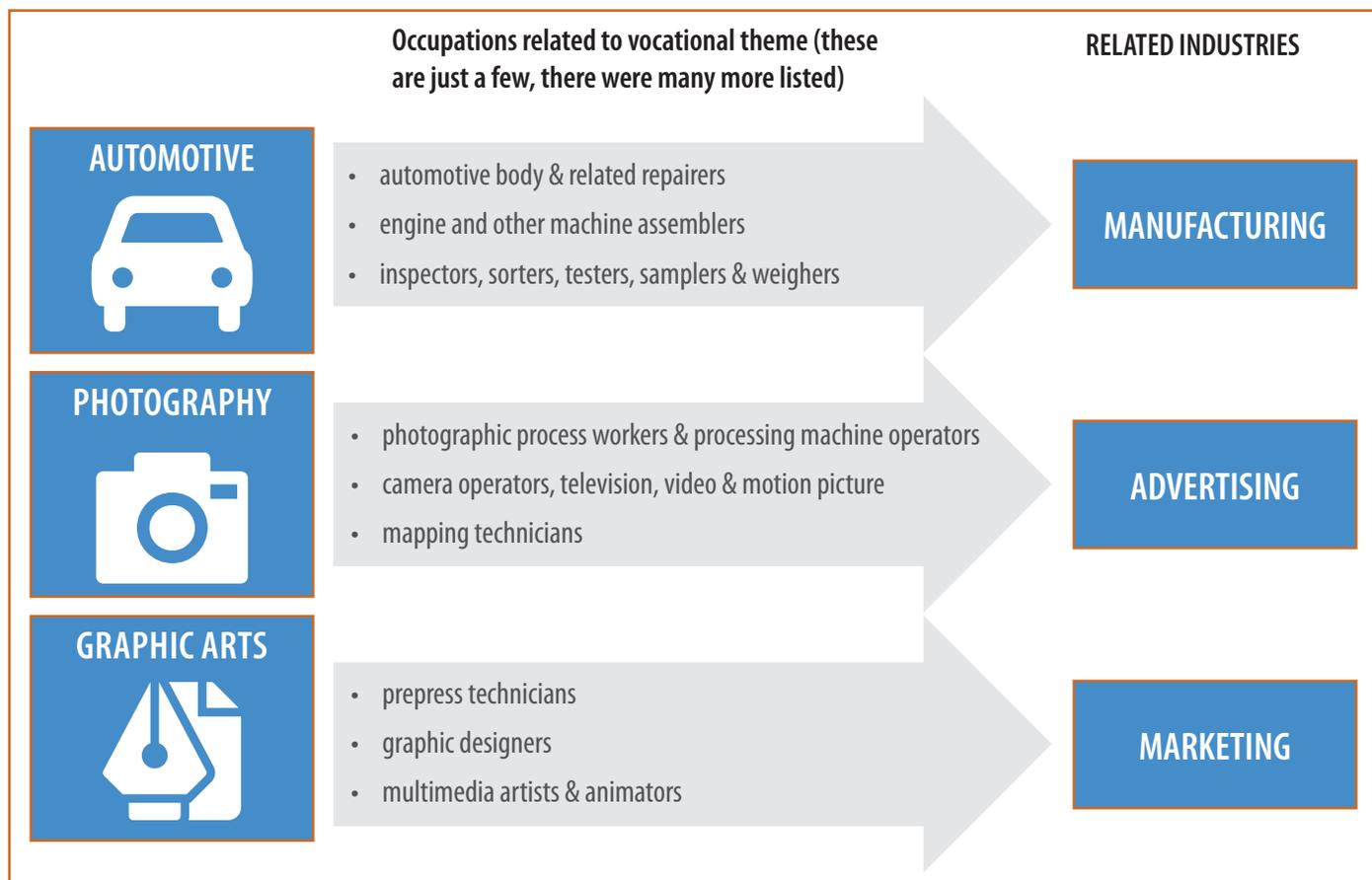
Use the Career OneStop website [www.careeronestop.org/](http://www.careeronestop.org/) to explore different occupations related to these vocational themes. This website also has great videos about different occupations, and can help narrow down your search by listing potential employers in a particular industry.

## FOR EXAMPLE:

Devon is a young man in a dual enrollment transition program who has been working at several job trials. His father is a photographer, and Devon has enjoyed watching and participating in this work. He is also interested in learning more about computer-generated artwork, and perhaps trying out a job related to this field. He also has a strong interest in cars and how they are decorated.

Devon can be independent at tasks he is assigned once he is given the right amount of support to help build his skills. He would benefit from working in an environment where his coworkers are friendly and supportive of his desire to learn, and in a position that would have possibilities for advancement.

Devon's three vocational themes are **Automotive, Photography, and Graphic Arts.**



## USING THEMES TO IDENTIFY POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

Now you have six industries to research instead of just three themes! For each occupation listed in the Career OneStop website, there are other related occupations that can be researched. For example, in the listing for the occupation of Automotive Body & Related Repairers from the above list, the related occupations include:

- Engine and Other Machine Assemblers
- Painters, Transportation Equipment
- Molding and Casting Workers
- Sawing Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Wood
- Heat Treating Equipment Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Metal and Plastic

Doing an online search of any one of the industries listed in the graphic above (automotive, manufacturing, photography, advertising, graphic arts, and marketing) can help identify a list of 10–20 employers for each theme.

Creating a strong list of potential employers in various themes will not only help with your current students, but will also support your program's long-term success for employment outcomes. The effort you are putting in now to build your master list of potential employers will mean less time-consuming employer research in the future.

## EVALUATING POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS FOR “FIT” WITH STUDENTS

### What is “fit”?

Fit means the right match between a student’s interests, skills, and preferences and the employer’s environment/culture and job tasks.

Fit does not have to be perfect, but it should be close enough for job proposal development.

Once you have your list of employers, they should be prioritized by how accessible the job is to get to and by best “fit.” Fit is initially based on the interest expressed by the student. As you are researching each employer, you will be revisiting the “fit factor” many times. Narrow down the list of 10–20 employers to five within each theme that seem to be a better fit.

### Students can help you research!

Once you’ve given a basic overview and clear instructions on how to use the Career OneStop website, ask the student to help you search for occupations and employers. Have them prioritize the lists based on location and high interest.

Although the student will be able to help do much of this research, you will likely need to use your own networks to identify potential employers. Additionally, it may be helpful to create a relationship map with the student to discover additional sources of contact information – people in their networks who know people within different industries. Please refer to the Grab & Go called “*Developing an Employment Network.*”

Industry websites can also be found through the Occupational Outlook website:

[www.bls.gov/ooh/home.htm](http://www.bls.gov/ooh/home.htm)

For example, the search for mapping technicians (within the vocational theme of photography) lists the following websites: National Society of Professional Surveyors, and American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing.

**Other ideas for initial employer research include:**

#### Do online research

- Specific company websites
- Social media
- Industry websites – learn the industry jargon

#### Use the college career services office

- Look for a separate section of the website dedicated to employers – you may find this helpful in finding employer leads
- Go to a career panel program to listen to speakers
- Ask for a list of employers who have hired students from the college
- Attend career fairs and collect business cards (and bring your own to pass out)

#### Join Chamber of Commerce and/or other employer networking organizations

## CONCLUSION

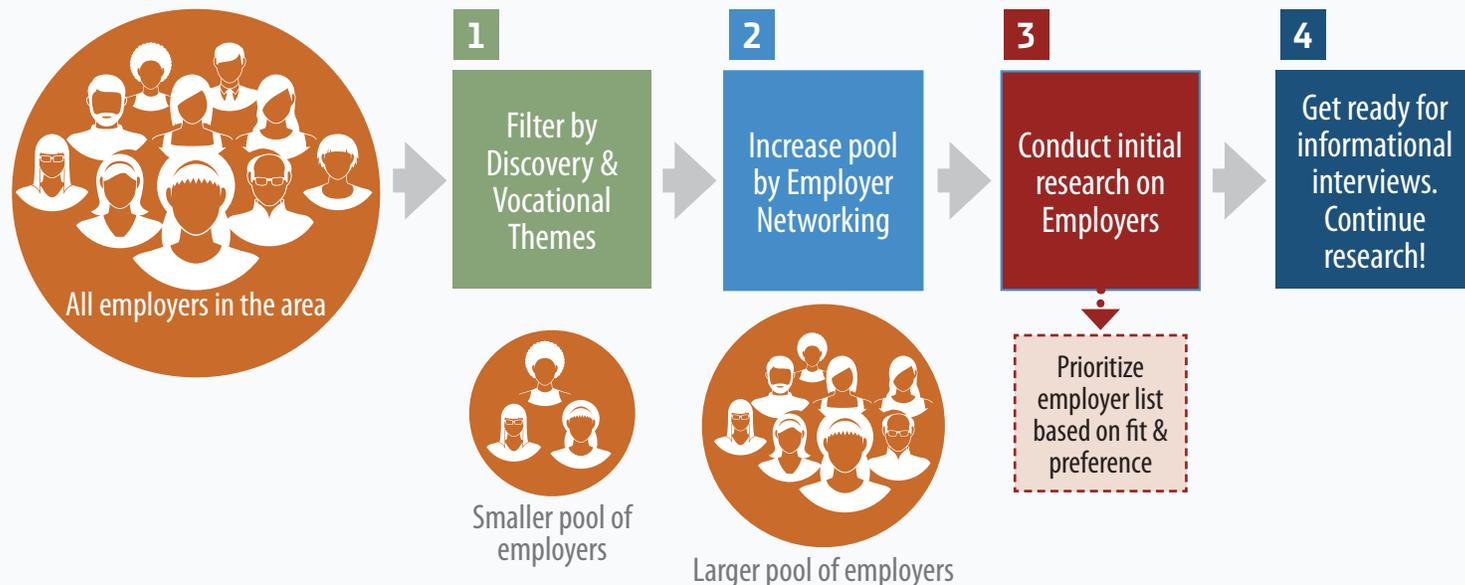
Employer research is a critical step in quality job development. Employers appreciate the extra attention to detail that you take when asking thoughtful questions that reflect careful research. Such attention creates good will and trust with employers that will serve you well regardless of the immediate outcomes for a specific student.

## CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT PROCESS



# EMPLOYER NETWORKING & RESEARCH

(ADAPTED FROM CALLAHAN, 2014 AND GRIFFIN & HAMMIS, 2005)



## VOCATIONAL THEMES

- Broad interest areas of student
- Developed from the Discovery process
- Widens the scope of potential employer matches for best fit of student career goals
- See page 1 for more information on vocational themes

1

## EMPLOYER NETWORKING

- Relationship mapping: Student & family, Job developer, School district
- Business networks (Meetups, Associations, Chamber of Commerce, etc.)
- See Grab & Go: Developing an Employment Network for more information on networking

2

## EMPLOYER RESEARCH

- Accessibility of workplace (including location)
- Culture of workplace (including values/mission)
- Name of one contact, related to you or the applicant, who can give you information regarding the company

3

## CONTINUED RESEARCH

- Recent accomplishments or news on the company
- Community alignment, initiatives/partners
- How the company refers to itself/industry segment
- Discrete tasks likely to be performed

4

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