>> Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us today for the LEAD Center's webinar Promoting Employment: Introduction to Customized Employment and Customized Self-Employment. My name is Elizabeth Jennings. I will be facilitating today's webinar. I work for National Disability Institute LEAD Center as the assistant project director. And I'm also very pleased to introduce today our two subject matter experts today, Janet Steveley with Griffin-Hammis Associates and Abby Cooper with Marc Gold and Associates. The national Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities commonly called the LEAD Center is a collaborative of disability workforce and economic empowerment organizations led byzations led by National Disability Institute with funding from the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy. I'm very pleased to now welcome our partners at the US Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy to provide you with a welcome.

 >> Thank you, Elizabeth. This is Chris button. And my colleagues here at the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the US Department of Labor, we are really, really excited about kicking off this webinar series on employment and specifically today, customized and self-employment. ODEP begin our work in the area of Customized Employment about 13 years ago. And we did it because we believed very strongly that the best of what we have learned in the world of disability and employment can be very useful and helpful in getting anyone who has challenging barriers to employment into a job that's a really good fit for them that will last and that meets the needs of the employers. So we are really excited about sharing some of the knowledge and the strategies that have been learned with folks across the nation through this webinar series and are particularly excited to have Janet and Abby on the phone today as two of our subject matter experts who are just so knowledgeable in this area, so thank you, ladies, for joining us. And thank you to Elizabeth and the entire lead team for organizing this webinar, which we are very, very excited about -- LEAD team. Elizabeth, I'm going to turn it back over to you.

 >> Thank you so much, Chris. And I'm going to turn it over to my colleague Nakia Matthews to provide you with some housekeeping.

 >> Good afternoon, everyone. The audio for today's webinar is being broadcast through your computer. Please make sure that your speakers are turned on or that your headphones are plugged in. You can control the audio broadcast by the audio broadcast panel, which is seen below. If you accidentally close this panel or if the sound becomes distorted or stops, you can reopen the audio broadcast panel from the top menu by going to communicate and join audio broadcast. If you do not have sound capabilities on your computer or you prefer to listen by phone, you can dial the number it and the meeting code you see here. And you do not need to enter an attendee ID. I will enter this information into the chat panel and a bit. Real-time captioning is provided during this webinar. The captions can be found in the media viewer panel which is here in the lower right-hand corner of the webinar platform. If you want to make the media viewer panel larger or conversely smaller, you can minimize and maximize other panels like chat, Q&A or participants. Please use the chat or Q&A box to send any questions you have during the webinar to me, Nakia Matthews, Elizabeth Jennings is also here with me, so any questions you have for her, you can direct them to me, Nakia Matthews. If you are listening by phone and not logged into the webinar, you may also ask questions by e-mailing Elizabeth Jennings atejennings@ndi-inc.org. The materials will be placed at the LEAD website at the link you see below. If you experience any technical difficulties during the webinar, please use the chat box to send me a message, or you can e-mail me at nmatthews@ndi-inc.org.

 >> The LEAD Center mission is to advance sustainable individual and systems level change that results in improved competitive integrated and employment and economic self-sufficiency outcomes for individuals across the spectrum of disability. As Chris mentioned, we see Customized Employment as one pathway to improve employment and economic advancement outcomes. And we're so excited today to be able to provide this information to all of you. Today, the agenda includes a review of the learning objectives, and answered the question, what is Customized Employment? And understanding of how Customized Employment is different than a traditional labor market approach. Possible outcomes of Customized Employment. Components of Customized Employment. And then we're going to provide some time for you to ask questions. As Nakia Matthews, you can ask questions through the chat box and we will facilitate those questions to our subject matter experts. F8 any time during the webinar or after the webinar, you have other questions that you'd like to ask, you can e-mail me, Elizabeth Jennings, at ejennings@ndi-inc.org. As a result of today's webinar, we intend attendees to have a better understanding of the Customized Employment and Customized Self-Employment, a better understanding of who can benefit from this best practice, a better understanding of the Customized Employment outcomes, and examples of individuals who gained employment through the Customized Employment approach. It is now my great honor to hand this over to Janet Steveley, who will provide you with a lot of wonderful information about Customized Employment. Thank you, Janet, for joining us today.

>> Okay. Hi. My name is Janet Steveley. Abby and I are the co-lead trainers for the LEAD Center Customized Employment initiative. I'm also a senior consultant for Griffin-Hammis Associates working on various Customized Employment project which focus on Customized Self-Employment, one of those is the entrepreneurship Boot Camp for veterans with disabilities run out of Institute for veterans and military families from Syracuse University. The other is the Kansas small business technical assistance and outreach center funded by the Kansas Council on developmental disabilities.

So what I wanted to start with today was the challenge that we've had in addressing employment. That is creating lasting satisfying, personal directed opportunities beyond the confines of a traditional job development approach. Customized Employment was designed for individuals with high or complex support needs, who traditional approaches didn't work for well, mainly because they rely on comparing job candidates against a set job description, and against other job candidates. People with more significant disabilities in particular didn't fare well, they often just didn't stand out as the most qualified.

And while customized employment was designed for people with complex needs, I think you'll find that the strategies are useful for a wide range of individuals who serve, who may have challenges around employment, whether that be criminal background, family responsibilities that interfere with employment, medical issues, lack of transportation, whatever that might be. So traditionally, what we've done is approach job development from a labor market approach, an approach that responds to the needs of employers with applicants who are qualified to meet those general needs. What we've learned about is [Indiscernible] at that traditional labor market approach hasn't worked very well because it puts them in situations where their skills are compared to the job description and -- or against other job candidates. And [Indiscernible -- background noise] in that competitive process, particularly -- [Indiscernible] increases the competition for jobs. So customized development is discovering the strengths, needs and interests of applicants and negotiating a job description that meets both the applicant's and employer's specific unmet needs. You might say, what about the labor market? That's what we've always been doing. And the labor market approach works well for some people. Those who have [Indiscernible] and it works for those who will come out at the top in that competitive process. But it who doesn't fare well with that approach, people who don't fare well with that approach, we need some different strategies. And think about it. It's mostly a hidden job market anyway -- [Indiscernible] people they know, people that coworkers know, it's often about who you know than what you know. So with a customized approach, we're not reacting to labor market needs, we're creating the labor markets by identifying specific unmet employer needs [Indiscernible -- background noise]

>> What Customized Employment seeks to do is to take people away from that traditional job search strategy that compares people to standard job descriptions and other job candidates and think about it, from a traditional -- development approach, we typically use standardized vocational evaluations and prepare people by getting resumes together or maybe helping them practice interview skills or other soft skills, and then jobseekers and employment specialists identify available jobs through posted listings, public workforce system, craigslist, cold calls, whatever, and assist people with filling out applications and going to interviews. And this more traditional strategy results in the employer or hiring manager selecting the job candidate whose skills best meet the job description.

Unfortunately, people with more significant barriers to employment may not stand out as the most qualified candidates, either because maybe they have fewer skills or more complexities around employment. So a customized approach seeks to circumvent that compare to process by focusing on how this particular person's skills meet and identified unmet need of employer. As long as the potential employee brings value to the business, always hiring. Employers are always looking for good quality employees. A Customized Employment uses an assessment process known as discovery that seeks to identify speak -- identify people's interests, strengths, and ideal conditions of employment.

It also relies on the use of informational interviews to collect information on employers needs. Once an unmet need is identified that matches the job seeker's interest and conditions of employment, and where there seems to be a fit, a proposal can be made. So it completely removes the job seeker from the comparative process. And the employer -- this model only has to decide if this one particular job candidate can meet one or more identified business needs. In 2002, a formal definition of customized employment was published in the Federal Register. And what it says is that customized implement means individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in ways that meet the needs of both. So it's a win-win sort of situation.

Customized is based on individualized determination of strengths, needs and interests of the job seeker but also designed to meet the specific needs of the employer. And it may include employment developed through the Association of job tasks, self-employment or other strategies that result in job responsibilities being customized and individually negotiated to fit the needs of that individual. ODEP, the off -- office of disability employment possible -- policy has initiated major efforts to improve -- [Indiscernible] job support as part of both disability employment services and the generic workforce system. [Indiscernible -- background noise] developed in the disability field, it has become increasingly clear that these strategies are useful for a broad range of job seekers. Customized Employment is a set of tools and strategies to better -- reach better employment outcomes by matching jobseekers interest, skills and ideal conditions of employment with an identified unmet employer needed or in the case of self-employment, with an unmet community need.

So interests are a very critical starting point, because if people share an interest with a potential employer, it breeds personal engagement. If you are passionate about plants and so am I, we have something in common. And that serves as a basis for conversation and possible negotiation. I'm more likely to engage in conversation and share information with you because we have that common interest. So interests connect job seekers with like related people in places where they share a common theme. But we also need to think about the skills and contributions the job seeker brings to the work setting and how those can translate into tasks that can potentially benefit that employer. So for example if we know someone can drive a car, which is a skill, we would assume that they could also learned the task of moving or parking cars. If we focus on interest only, jobs rarely last if the employee is not contributing any meaningful way to the business. So what Customized Employment attempts to do is to identify unmet employer needs and help them see how a particular job seeker's contributions to the workplace could meet one or more of those identified needs. Some possible outcomes of Customized Employment include both wage employment options and self-employment options. Through wage employment, we are working to match the interest, skills and conditions of employment with an unmet employer need. And with self-employment, we're seeking to match an unmet community need with the job seeker's contribution. So we can creatively use resources to provide that win-win situation in lots of different ways. Let me show you some examples. First of all, negotiating jobs simply means that we started -- start by identifying what's going to work for the job seeker, and we surveyed the community through a series of informational interviews with employers to identify their needs. And then when there seems to be that fits, we can negotiate with the employer on how the job seeker could fulfill one or more business needs. We're not asking the employer to consider the job seeker to fill an existing job description. We are proposing a way to meet and identified business need. Let me give you an example.

Debbie was a young woman with autism who had just finished high school and was interested in office work. Her ideal conditions of employment included working in a clean, structured setting. It had to be on weekdays when bus service was available and on the bus route, because that was the only way she had to get to work. And we knew she had some skills around office tasks that she could -- some skills in collating and stapling and assembling packets and she had some work experience that she had done and she enjoyed very much, so she knew she didn't -- we knew she enjoyed that office environment. During the discovery process, Debbie's employment specialist and I conducted several informational interviews, one with the company that sold cell phone plans. During that informational interview, we tried to identify their unmet business needs. We met with the customer service supervisor. And she described the role of the customer service representative to us, who primarily sold cell phone package is over the phone.

As we were talking to her, at one point we asked, is there anything that doesn't get done around here? We're trying to get at needs. When we asked that question, she immediately said, filing. Filing is a bad word around here. People pay their kids to come in and file. And she kind of went on and on about it. Later when we took it to where we saw the filing room, it was a fairly large room with tall filing tablets -- cabinets with paperwork piled on top of the cabinets. When we asked more questions, what we found out is that customer service representatives were paid a commission for sales. So there weren't any sales happening when they were filing. So it was the whole reason the filing [Indiscernible] so we identified an unmet business need. And initially we didn't think it was a very good match with Debbie's skills because we automatically assumed it was alphabetical filing. What we learned is that really, all the paperwork was filed by phone number. And Debbie had really good number matching skills. So in this case, it was her preferred type of work that met her ideal conditions of employment and it met a need of the company. We proposed to the company that they hire her to file their paperwork, so it created a position with the benefits to the company being that it increased efficiency, they could find their paperwork when they needed it, it helped the company make money by keeping salespeople selling, and it improved employee morale because the sales representatives were obviously not happy with doing -- doing filing as part of the job. So it was a win-win for everybody. And Deb -- Debbie was hired and worked there a couple years.

A second potential wage outcome is something we call resource ownership. And this is an outcome that might be -- an approach that might be used sparingly and only when driven by discovery. It's also matched on -- based on the match between individual and business need. It involves the individual contributing a necessary item or equipment to the business. And that equipment and then helps generate profit for the business that can then generate wages for the employee. Because businesses hire people when they are making a profit. They don't hire people when they are not making a profit. So in this scenario, the job seeker is not -- is bringing an asset to the company, usually a piece of equipment, and their job becomes operating that equipment. And a written agreement can and should be made and put into place that details the ownership of the equipment, how maintenance will be dealt with, what becomes of the equipment if the employee no longer works there, et cetera, et cetera. So also since the employee owns the equipment, they can decide if it can be used by others for instance on their days off or on second shift or things like that.

And this is an economic development approach. It gets at that win-win. We're not just purchasing a job, for the person, but it's a job investment or economic development strategy. And think about it, many of us bring assets to our work. Things like college degrees or automobiles or in some fields, tools are something that's expected. So resource ownership is not that unusual. When you think about it. But it emerges through conversation and negotiation, it is never a starting point. And it's generally used to seek better than increase positions. -- better than entry positions. A people need to purchase an asset, they might be a variety of sources to go to, things like Social Security, or Social Security Administration PASS program, which stands for plan to achieve self-support, PASS, a way people get money to buy assets. It might come from personal or family resources. It might come from community rehab provider funds or loan programs. So depending on the individual job seeker, they might have access to different resources.

Let me show you an example of resource ownership. Albert was interested in food and liked working outdoors and especially enjoyed selling and interacting with people -- Albert. A successful work environment for him would be near home and have some flexible hours. And so his team approached Johney's Italian Ice, a company that sells shaved ice from carts because they felt like it really met his interests and ideal conditions of employment. During the informational interview, they learned that Johney's was a small and undercapitalized company that couldn't afford to bring on another employee. They didn't have the equipment being another CART, to be able to expand their business. So by Albert purchasing a CART and bring that resource to the company, it created a position for how but that didn't exist before. And Albert had accessed the PASS plan to achieve self-support and he also had the support of his Integrated Resource Team and family to make that a successful venture. So Johney's Italian Ice, the employer, also benefited by being able to expand their territory, have increased sales and profits and increased competitiveness. And increased profits are what was used to pay Albert's wages. Here's another example of mutual benefits through resource ownership. This example was a university department that had been outsourcing much of their copying work. And they needed both personnel and equipment to bring that back into their department. So by this job seeker purchasing a state-of-the-art copier and related production equipment, he was able to create a 17 plus career with soul -- full benefits and status as a university employee. So both negotiated jobs and resource ownership are examples of wage employment outcomes.

Self-employment is another potential outcome of Customized Employment. And self-employment is potentially for anyone, but not necessarily for everyone. So why self-employment works or doesn't work for someone has little to do with disability or probably other challenges that people experience, but self-employment can provide some accommodations that might be more difficult to accommodate in a wage employment setting like for example, I was working with a veteran with a pretty serious back injury. He needed to lay down for about 10 minutes every hour. He was more interested in self-employment because he felt like that probably wouldn't be accommodated well in a wage setting. So by adding self-employment as a possible outcome, it increases the range of employment options and opportunities for job seekers.

I can't stress enough that discovery here, making sure that self-employment really matches somebody's ideal conditions of employment and that the support is available if it is needed.

Another interesting thing about self-employment for people who receive SSI and/or Medicaid or other needs-based programs is that it is the one way for them to accumulate wealth. Their income and resource limits for those programs -- through the work incentive called property essential for self-support, they can exclude this as property and money held within an active business account from the $2000 resource limit for SSI or Medicaid. So it is a way also for people to accumulate wealth who might not be able to in other ways. Talking about self-employment, I'm really talking about micro enterprise.

The Small Business Association defines a small business as less than 500 employees. That still sounds pretty big to me. So microenterprise is those little, mostly owner operated source of businesses with one to five workers. And there are over 22 million Americans who own single owner operated businesses. And increasingly, that's been an option for people with severe disabilities or other barriers to employment.

We find that people who are interested in self-employment aren't necessarily saying, I want to be a business owner, but rather, they are people who are artisans, they have a desire to make a particular product or to provide a particular service, and it's usually something that they are passionate about, whether that's making fishing rods or putting on Princess parties or beekeeping or whatever it might be. We also find that people who -- interests and skills and ideal conditions of employment match a business idea or opportunity, they can show a need for that particular product or service, and they've done research and found that the business idea is feasible, and people who have the needed support to establish and maintain the business. Business owners don't need to do everything, but everything must get done.

So it's not uncommon for business owners to contract out for certain things that they don't do well like accounting or tax prep or payroll or website development or marketing. All business owners do that. When helping somebody with self-employment, we just need to make sure that if they need support and help with certain areas, that it's either something they can pay for out of their business income, and it is accounted for in the business financials, or that they have natural support to do that. Here's an example.

Adam had a lot of challenges to employment including a physical disability, cognitive disability and a very severe seizure disorder. Adam didn't start with the idea of self-employment, but he knew he wanted to work with plants. As his Integrated Resource Team helped him through the discovery process, they did Summit event -- informational interviews and also a short work trial at a local nursery. What they learned was that many nursery jobs occurred early in the morning. Particularly nursery jobs that provided the physical access that he needed. So through the medication he took to control seizures, he was really groggy in the morning. So one of his conditions for success was starting later in the workday, later in the morning or early afternoon. So those early-morning jobs just didn't seem to work well for him. As we learned more, we discovered that Adam lived in a group home that had a huge yard and had staff assigned to them throughout the day due to his medical issues. So it seemed that self employment might fit his ideal conditions of employment and that he also had adequate support for it to be successful. So Adam and his team decided to look into starting a business. Through some more info -- informational interviews with local businesses that sold plants, they learned that those businesses were in need of ground cover. They were saying they couldn't get enough in, they were going out like hot cakes. Atoms business became growing ground cover in a greenhouse and selling them to the local retailers. The business start up costs came from Vocational Rehabilitation. And through PASS. The group home staff were able to provide support through business operations.

Another potential self-employment outcome is what we call business within a business. And if you think about the Geek Squad model, which is a business operating as its own entity within another organization, so when you go into Best Buy, the big electronics store, you'll see the Geek Squad in the corner of the store. That's operating as an independent business, providing a service, which is repairing electronic equipment within the bigger store, Best Buy. Best Buy is the host company and the Geek Squad is the business within the business. And some advantages of that model is that there are still support and customer base, people who buy electronics at Best Buy will likely need them repaired at some point. So that they're likely to go to the Geek Squad. And if Geek Squad can't repair it for some reason, the customer is right there at Best Buy to buy a new electronic device.

Think about how many Subway sandwiches are within gas stations, or Starbucks, with the local grocery stores, we see that kind of thing happening a lot. And it can be a unique and interesting option for potential entrepreneurs, particularly people who may lack skills in critical areas. For example, if somebody lacks skills in handling money or in business bookkeeping, and they don't project to earn enough to hire somebody to do that and have no other support for it, perhaps that's something they can negotiate with the host business.

For instance, I'm working with a team right now who is supporting a young man in a very rural community and they're trying to set up a grocery delivery service that Daniel will run within the host business of the grocery store. What we're negotiating with the grocery store is that the grocery store will bill the customer's monthly for their delivered orders. And that way, the store pays Daniel the delivery fee and he doesn't have to deal with the money, plus it's more convenient for the customer.

Here's some other examples of businesses within businesses, like an espresso business within a bakery, a card detailing business within an auto garage, a large capacity washer and drinks that are provided within a laundromat, or a gift stand selling stuffed animals in a zoo. So you can see how these businesses complement each other and often build support for each other. Some common elements of the customized approach our first of all, begins with discovery, which is a process for gathering information that describes who is this person? So we need to get to know the person, what interests them, what skills and contributions they bring, who they are connected with, all of that. And then translate that information into a written document, what we call a profile. Which translates life activities into potential career possibilities. And it will include those interests and skills, ideal conditions of employment.

Customized Employment also uses a planning meeting and development of a plan to secure employment. And that plan will include specific ideas of businesses to approach and next steps. It also uses informational interviews to gather information about employer community needs. So we all don't know what we don't know. The best way to learn about a particular business or industry is to go out and talk to people, particularly people in those industries. Finally, when a match exists, we propose employment and negotiated employment. So we're asking employers to consider hiring this person to meet a particular need that they have. Some different formats for discovery exist.

Facilitated discovery is the most common, which involves the professional guiding someone, a job seeker, through the discovery process. It's kind of a one-on-one sort of thing where resulting in a written document out or profile, which replaces traditional vocational assessment. There are some other formats for discovery including self-directed discovery, a process that encourages an individual to think through their own interests, skills and ideal conditions of employment, to assist in establishing or following a career path. And then a third option, which we are calling group discovery, the folks of the LEAD Center Customized Employment initiative, which is a facilitated process to help a small group of individuals walk through the discovery process together. And by doing that, they can support one another, learn from each other, while learning about themselves and learning about what would constitute a successful job experience for them. And our second webinar in June, June 26, will focus on group discovery and we'll tell you about that a little bit more at the end of this call.

Regardless of which approach is used, the discovery process involves learning about people's skills, interests and seeking information on other conditions for success. So it is taking a look at what realistically must be in place to make a potential job successful. Can a person get there? Do they fit in? What personal or family issues might need to be considered? Ideal conditions of employment consider the whole work environment, not just the work task.

For example we need to think about the people and the schedule and the social norms, all of that. It's also important to identify conditions to avoid. For example, if people have allergies to dusty environments or sensitivity to chemicals or need to avoid fluorescent lights due to seizures, anything like that. You want to summarize that in a profile, because you need to know if it's a good job match but we also need to know when it's a mismatch.

Having been an employment specialist myself, I know sometimes it's easy to jump at the job that becomes available because we know people want a job and we know they've been waiting for a job. Too often when we jump at the mismatches, it just turns out to be a bad situation for everyone involved. So the discovery process, as an overview, the facilitated approach, the discovery process might include visiting a person's home and having a plan time to visit and having a conversation with an individual and their family or those who live with them.

The purpose of learning more about them and learning what would constitute successful employment. It's a very informal process. We strive to keep it comfortable and encourage sharing of information. We also might interview other people who know the person well and might see them in a different light. For instance, siblings who live away from home or former teachers or employers or neighbors or anyone else who might know the person well and might have insight but might not be at the home visit.

Another part of this discovery again on the facilitated approach is doing some observations through discovery activities. In both familiar and unfamiliar environments. The purpose here is to really observe and identify and verify skills to see how people learn and to see how people other support -- other people support them during particular tasks.

Another piece of the discovery process is informational interviews. We're beginning to discover the community and what opportunities might be possible. This involves meeting with business owners and learning about their businesses and also keeping an eye open to potential needs that employers might have that would constitute being met. It might also include work trials or very short-term work experiences to gain information about the person's interests, skills or conditions for success. Particularly in school environments where people have the opportunity for work experience, that's a really important part of discovery.

The profile of then is the written summary of what is learned in the discovery process. The profile is a description, picture of a person that might typically include positive and useful information. Want to express things in a positive manner in the sense of what would make the person successful? For example, I worked with a young man named Shane at one time. His teachers had described him as noncompliant. What they said is that he would say no to pretty much anything anyone asks him. It was almost a habit, he would say no to everything. So they described him as noncompliant and not able to follow directions. But again, we want to put a positive spin on this and make this useful in job development. We don't want to use this information just to exclude him from employment. So what we said about Shane is that probably the best work environment would be a situation where he can work independently, where he would have little to no direct supervision, and it would be best if he could work on his own schedule. Again, we're taking that information and putting a positive spin on it that would help lead to a successful match.

The profile also is a format that delineates the information. So the form guide the discovery process. And walks you through the steps. And while the focus is on getting to know and understand the person, not completing the form, the form does ensure that you cover all key areas. Most importantly, the profile is the resource for planning. Attempt to identify what would constitute a successful employment situation, and allows the person and their team to know when there might be a good fit. Remember that discovery is just the first step in the process. The outcome is employment. And so we need a plan that helps us move from discovery chewed -- to job development. In conjunction with the profile, teams may help people develop portfolios during a process which could include photos, videos, work samples, referrals, that sort of thing that highlights people's skills and contributions. And in those portfolios, they can be used to assist the job seeker in the job seeker -- job-search phase and to meet one or more of their business needs. Portfolios might also be useful in obtaining funding for job related needs for business development activities.

So discovery is the starting point, but once a job seeker's interests and ideal conditions of employment have been identified, then the Integrated Resource Team can use that discovery information to brainstorm specific businesses to approach and learn form. It helps the team proactively think about where people's interests and skills and contributions will be valued and generate a specific list of businesses to interview. So during the job search process, Customized Employment continues using informational interviews to seek information on business needs, again, we're not asking for jobs, but by listening to what communities and businesses need, we're collecting information. So we are asking businesses for information and advice. And you want to structure questions in a way that gets at business needs.

For example, asking the question, is there anything that doesn't get done or doesn't get done well enough? Might get at a business need. Or how has technology changed your business in the last five years? Or three years even? Or if you had $10,000 to invest, what would you do with it? Or if you had an additional staff person, what would you have them do? So those are all examples of questions that might get at business needs. Informational interviews can be conducted by the job seeker with the support of team members if needed, or perhaps by workforce professionals supporting that individual. Any member of the Integrated Resource Team might be involved.

You also want to use connections in setting up interviews to find out both for the job seeker and the family knows, but also who other team members know and might have connections with. Because it's easier to set up informational interviews with businesses if there's a referral from someone else. For instance, if you can say, Ellen from the Chamber of Commerce recommended I call you. People are just more likely to talk to you. And to the extent possible, involve the job seeker in these interviews. They are the people that share the common interests with the employer, and it's important for employers to see that.

During informational interviews, you might also request a tour. And you may learn more from what you see than what people tell you. Because there are many jobs that are unknown or unseen to the public. Conducting informational interviews helps both the job seeker and the employment specialist learn about businesses and discover the jobs behind the jobs.

By that, I mean take for instance, when we go into a grocery store, who we see is typically the checkers and maybe the stalkers. -- stockers. Somebody is probably in the back managing inventory and maybe HR people or bookkeeping people, and they generally aren't seen by the public. So during informational interviews, the reason for requesting a tour is to get into the back and to find out about the jobs that we don't typically see. While you're touring, you're also bound to see tasks or needs that employers have that they don't tell you about.

For example, one time I did an informational interview with an owner of a tofu factory. While we were talking, I noticed that an employee in the next room was hand labeling containers. While we were talking, the owner was shredding paper. And I could see out the window that the recycling bin outside had several boxes stacked up beside it that needed to be broken down. Those were all still that the person I had in mind possessed. -- all skills that the person I had in mind possessed. When you do find a match between a contribution for success and employer need, that's where the negotiation begins. The assumption is that businesses are always hiring, they're always looking for good people who will benefit the business. Remember that filling out applications and going through interviews is not Customized Employment. Rather, Customized Employment relies on mutually beneficial negotiations. Remember, the definition, Customized Employment means individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in ways that meet the needs of both. So again we're looking for that win-win situation.

Here's an example of Shane, who we talked about before. Shane was the person who was described as noncompliant or that didn't follow directions. So another thing we learned in discovery was that he was a litterbug. That's how his mom put it. He'd go down to the local Dairy Queen and pick up the parking lot. So we knew he had the same environmental issues or keeping things neat and clean. And again, we knew what his ideal conditions of employment what would work best is a situation where he could work rather independently, where he could have a flexible schedule without need for excessive direction. And he also preferred to be outside or to have more active work.

And initially, given the ideal conditions of employment, we started thinking about self-employment because of his needs to not have a loss of direction. And it could have gone that way, but as we began to discover and learn about community needs, we learned several things. First of all, Shane moved right about that time and his new small community, there weren't many parking lots. And we did seem to find a need for picking up litter in the city park and in the sports park and at a boat ramp that was in the city limits. There was a need for picking up litter, even though it wasn't in parking lot. And secondly, we learned that the city's mission statement referred to residents of the city as independent spirits. So that didn't seem like so different, Shane fit in pretty well there, he was an independent spirits who did his own thing. We also learned that the city mission statement had a goal of involving youth in the maintenance of our city. So we thought that those two things were a good basis for negotiation. Third, we learned in talking to the maintenance supervisor for the city, that the supervisor had spent two hours the prior evening cleaning up the park after it had been vandalized. And interestingly, it had been shamed that had let him know that the vandals had left the park a mess -- it had been Shane. A supervisor salary times one have, over time.

So given that we knew this might fit Shane's interest and conditions of employment, and that there was a need, we developed a proposal to the mythical city of Springfield. And what we proposed is that first of all, we described Shane using their language, independent spirit who is very interested in the environment and maintaining his community. We proposed a job of him being an on-call assistant to provide help in cleaning up the city park, boat ramp and sports park and the benefits to the city where that it would provide additional help at peak times and peak season so it was efficient. It would prevent them from paying overtime. They could use the specific example of that, which would save them money and that it was consistent with the city's mission. So in negotiation, you want to focus on meeting the employers unmet needs and the benefits of doing that. There was actually more detail to this proposal, and sometimes you are just going to be negotiating verbally. In this case because it had to go to the city Council, we needed to put a proposal into writing. So you might do one or the other or both. Verbal and/or written. So in summary, Customized Employment is a set of tools and strategies to ensure successful individualized employment outcomes, whether that be wage implement or self-employment.

Customized Employment utilizes discovery instead of traditional the case of a vocational evaluation. To learn about who the person is and translate that information into positive and useful information to using job search. And lastly, Customized Employment uses interest-based negotiation to create jobs versus relying on job market indicators. So would result in that win-win employment situation for both jobseekers and employers.

The use of Customized Employment is a strategy for assuring people with disabilities and other barriers to employment access meaningful work in the community, is growing and impacting state policies, training programs, and services to individual jobseekers. Some of the major agencies implementing these changes are state agencies on intellectual and developmental disabilities, often in conjunction with state Medicaid plans. A state intellectual developmental disability and Medicaid side, we've seen examples of states such as Missouri and Nebraska that are making their funding much more flexible to support customized outcomes. We've got some capacity holding projects for instance, Kansas is involved in a three-year project first -- focused on customer self employed for individuals with the mental disabilities. New Mexico has some permanent online capacity building courses available to all providers in employment services. Within state VR, both Florida and [Indiscernible] policy language on Customized Employment. Texas is really putting discovery at the discovery point of individualized planning process and the full capacity of counselors and community-based providers through on-site and online training Customized Self-Employment.

And in America's Job Centers, many states with Disability Employment Initiative grants are focused on Customized Employment as well as self-employment, or one of the two, including Alaska, Illinois, Kansas, Arkansas, California, Hawaii, Ohio, Tennessee, and Louisiana. So these states are all working to incorporate a Customized Employment practice into the services offered to reach employment outcomes for individuals who they serve. So it's very exciting what is happening around Customized Employment. I just wanted to close by providing you some resources and some websites that I think you might find helpful. You can find additional information on Customized Employment here. And I'm just going to thank you for listening today. And turn it over for our question and answer session.

>> Thank you.

>> Great. Thank you so much, Janet. As you can see, there are a lot of great resources that you can access to learn more about Customized Employment. In fact, next month, we're going to be providing another LEAD Center webinar through our webinar series. As you may know, the LEAD Center provides a new webinar on the last Wednesday of the month from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Eastern t ime. We do these 33 miniseries. We've completed one on economic advancement. That was the first in the series. This webinar is the first in the series for employment. And in a few months, we will start our leadership or public policy series. The next month's webinar will be on the discovery. And I'll talk -- alternative assessment tool for workforce centers and community-based providers. I'd now like to give a chance for Abby Cooper to provide us with a little bit of additional information on this webinar.

>> Thank you, Elizabeth. And thank you, Janet, for the wonderful presentation. Next month, we'll follow up on this must -- on this month in terms of looking at how you conduct discovery within a group and how you can use the synergy of the group to end up with a plan for individuals to obtain employment. Group discovery really focuses on folks who have not been successful in the traditional market labor approach to obtaining employment. And individuals who need the encouragement and support from a group. I really hope everyone has the opportunity to list next month. Thank you.

>> Thank you, Abby. We have quite a few questions t oday, so I want to get started with the questions. Thank you to all of you who have already placed your questions in the Q&A box. If you haven't had a chance yet, please take this opportunity. If it should happen that we don't get to your question, please know that we'll capture them, answer them and post the answers with the webinar archive. The first question is, when should Customized Employment be brought into the conversation with the employer?

>> Hi. Well, I would say that there's not one set way to do that. Generally what I do is try to keep it focused on the person versus the program. So when I set up time to talk with employers, that I'm asking them for information and advice about their business or their industry. I'm not proposing the job on that first business. So I don't like to jump ahead too much to have them thinking that I'm proposing a job to them, when I'm not. I'm really there with the job seeker to get information. So like for instance, when I talked about Debbie in the filing job earlier, we went there together information. We didn't go to propose a job. We didn't really talk about Customized Employment at that point. We went back later and negotiated. But that being said, sometimes when you go to set up an initial interview, people are going to ask you more about your business and what you do. Particularly if there's a job seeker there that clearly needs a more customized approach and that's obvious to the employer, you might start talking about that earlier.

>> And I'd just like to add, Janet, that -- another take on it, I tend to initially tell employers that I use this approach that's called Customized Employment. And what I try to do is look at what their unmet needs are. And whether or not I might be able to address those needs. So not that I'm looking for a job. I totally agree with Janet on that but I introduce the concept from the beginning so they kind of understand the process.

>> Great. Thank you, ladies. For those -- those comments are good segues into the next question, which is, how do you encourage or convince an employer to hire a new employee in this current economy? Janet, why don't we hear from you first?

>> Okay. That's a good question. Certainly, probably you're thinking about right now -- I think what we need to do is really show how employees can add value to the business in the sense of how can they help the business save money, make money, improve efficiency, what are the benefits for the employer? In hiring this person? Because again, businesses hire when business is good. People don't tend to hire when business is bad, particularly when they may be letting off other people or employees that they've had, so by showing the business, what are the benefits to them? How would this person's contribution help them produce revenue? Even perhaps through the strategies like resource ownership, or is this within a business, Johney's Italian Ice said the same thing, we can't hire another person, because we just don't have the capacity to hire people. But when the team could show them how they could expand capacity by Albert bring his own car to the business, [Indiscernible -- background noise] initial investments are really worth it. Things like, a card might be a lot of money to put out to help this person get a job, but think about it, we put a lot of money to pay for work evaluation or for sheltered workshops or a lot of other things. Competitive employment. I personally own a business and I've only had two employees. And both of them proposed employment to me. So I think that idea of proposing is really helpful there. Especially in this economy. The other thing is I think we often -- when we are helping people find jobs, we tend to think about big businesses, the big-box stores, the retailers, because they have lots of positions and lots of turnover but thinking about smaller, growing companies is an ideal place to customize. There's no human resource department, no Justin job descriptions, so think about how those companies might be able to benefit.

>> Abby, do you have anything to add?

>> The only thing that I would add to your answer is just that I currently in this economy, I have found people very receptive, because they have so many unmet needs. And they have people that they are paying to multitask. And it's more cost effective for them to have somebody else come in and do some of the tasks that they're having one employee do. And let that employee, the higher paid employee, focus on his or her expertise. So I have found that in this current economy, the whole concept of Customized Employment and negotiating positions has been very receptive -- well received by employers.

>> Thank you, ladies. We have two more questions about the informational interview him about I'm going to try to bundle them together so it's not too repetitive. One is, how do you approach an employer for the informational interview if you have no c onnection? And are there tool that can help guide a person who is new to this information through that process?

>> Okay. This is Janet. What I typically do is just call the employer to set up an informational interview. And I usually say something like this: I'll say, hello, my name is Janet Steveley. I'm a career counselor working with a job seeker named Sallie. Sallie is very interested in horticulture or whatever the interest area is. And as part of her career planning on helping her export jobs in horticulture field. Sam from the Chamber of Commerce recommended I call you to see if you would be willing to spend 20 minutes or so for a short informational interview with Sallie and I. Would you be willing to do that sometime next week at your convenience? So I say something like that. If I have a connection, I squeeze it in. If I don't, I don't. I try to get a connection if I can. And also, I give people a time limit, I might say, 15 to 20 minutes or 15 to 30 minutes, but typically, if I set something up for 20 minutes, often times, it will go an hour. Because people like to talk and they like sharing what they do. So my recommendation to you would be to allow at least an hour. If you don't have a connection, I wouldn't worry about that too much. Focus on that you're working with somebody who is interested in that field. And I think if somebody were to call me and say, I'm interested in working with people with disabilities and I'd love to talk with you for 20 minutes, I would probably say yes. Even if they didn't have a connection. Abby, --

>> Yeah. I totally agree with you. I have found people very, very receptive to giving you informational interviews. There is one thing you can do if you want. And you don't have a connection -- sometimes I send them an e-mail saying I'll be contacting them or send them a letter saying I'll be contacting you next Tuesday to find out your availability for an informational interview. The following week. Just to give them a heads up and just to try to frame it a little bit. But I have very rarely had anybody turn me down, whether as a contact or not, for an informational interview.

>> Yeah. And remember too, to include -- be somewhat flexible with people, if -- I can't do this week, I can do it next week -- next week, trying to get people to sit down for an interview and they don't necessarily sit down but they'll give me a tour and you can ask questions while doing the tour, but it's really a very powerful tool, for instance, I was recently doing an informational interview with another employment specialist job seeker. And the job seeker was very interested in books. And -- one informational interview, a first one -- a kind of place -- [Indiscernible -- background noise] all volunteer labor -- so it wasn't a place that was going to turn into a job. We knew that but it was a very easy please -- place to practice the informational interview. What we learned on -- did not make eye contact with the person -- interviewing -- and he basically looked really disinterested the whole time. Which doesn't look that well when you are doing -- so we got to practice, get some feedback and practice and -- the next time, he was better at making eye contact, he had some questions to ask. When we went into the next bookstore, which was a larger bookstore -- some possibilities of meeting employees, what we found is that we were asking questions while touring and then we paused in the biography section. And all of a sudden, John asked this really [Indiscernible -- background noise] and so the manager interviewing -- [Indiscernible] other really sophisticated question about four in books. And these weren't questions we practiced at all, but all of a sudden now, the other employment specialist and I were kind of in the backseat. And John and the hiring manager were having this wonderful conversation about books. It was great. And he actually did get offered a job there. So I think those are just some tips about informational interviews. We can also put some resources on the league website. The resources that were in the PowerPoint, the Griffin-Hammis and Marc Gold Associates, good places to look. Both the league website and ODEP websites are also good places to look -- the LEAD website.

>> Thank you, Grant -- Janet. What a great example. Next question is, do you find that most Customized Employment positions lead to individuals becoming independent contractors? This person would also like to know a little bit more about the qualification of jobs identified using Customized Employment.

>> I would say that the majority of people become employees -- for wage employment options. Although in some instances, people -- people's ideal additions of employment might steer you towards more self-employment. I would -- I don't know what the percentages are. I would say the bulk of people would go towards wage employment. Although in really rural communities, there might be a higher percentage of self-employment, just because there's more limited wage employment.

>> Along the same lines, another question, does customized wage employment work better for certain sectors of employment or certain occupations?

>> I don't think so. Starting with the person -- obviously, a broad range of interests, so a customized job could be negotiated in any field or industry.

>> Abby, do you have additional thoughts?

>> No. I think there is not a particular industry or field where you would focus on Customized Employment. I've seen it work in positions that are fairly entry-level. And to very sophisticated tasks. So no. I think it goes across the whole gamut of employment.

>> Great. Sound like Customized Employment is really trying to look at the individual's needs and the employer needs hand-in-hand.

>> Yes.

>> Drilling down to the individual level, we have several questions about discovery. One is, is discovery a good tool for populations of people I work with that do not have disabilities?

>> Yes. For some people, I'm sorry, Janet, I didn't mean to jump in here -- but I was just -- you know, I think discovery works incredibly well for anyone who has struggled in obtaining employment. Whether that is due to a disability, whether it is due to the complexities of their lives, and having to take care of an elderly parent, whatever, for people who haven't been successful and don't compete well, I think discovery is a great approach for them. Janet?

>> I think we all kind of do this informally. Anytime we go -- we change jobs, we think about -- especially as we get older and have more experience, we think about what has worked, what hasn't worked, how we might redirect [Indiscernible] who we are a little bit more. Just [Indiscernible -- background noise] who has less experience or who have -- less able to interpret their past experiences and learn from it, to help them. So yeah, I think it's especially helpful for people with complexities around jobs, but I think it can be helpful for everyone.

>> Thank you. And other question regarding the discovery process, do you typically start a discovery process in high school? Or later?

>> I think high school is a great place, but it can really start at any age depending on where people are at. When people are in school, you have more time, number 1. And you have more opportunities to do work experiences and things that would help you gather great information through discovery. Really can start at a time. Particularly when people are changing careers or family issues have changed or living arrangements have changed or whatever there's some change, it's a particularly good tool to read look at where people are -- to look again at where people are.

>> Maybe this time we'll start with Abby. Is the discovery curriculum available online or where should I turn to for tools to support me in providing discovery?

>> There's a couple of good places you can look. You can look on Marc Gold and Associates website and they have a discovery manual. That you can purchase I believe for five bucks. And they also have all the forms connected to discovery. On their website. I also believe Griffin-Hammis website, which Janet put both of these in the PowerPoint -- have information and forms to do discovery. I would start at both of those places. And I think Janet mentioned earlier that on ODEP's website, they have videos of the discovery process. They also have a host of great information. So I would go to those three websites. And I think you would get the information you need.

>> Great. Thank you.

>> Here's an interesting question. One of our attendees asks, have you partnered Customized Employment services with the services of a temporary employment agency?

>> I haven't. No.

>> So a similar question, I think a little bit similar, have you had anybody who has utilized Customized Self-Employment participate in the USBLN supplier diversity program? Subpart -- sorry, supplier diversity program?

>> I have worked with some people who have looked into that. In one case, the person was -- it was a man exploring the feasibility of business manufacturing clothing. And he was exploring -- a large chain outlets, he was exploring their diversity program. But ended up not being a feasible business. I have worked with some veterans -- to support that. So it's definitely something that I would look into -- products like that.

>> Great. Thank you, Janet. We have one last question which I'm going to direct to Abby. It's a great leaping off point to next month's webinar. Final question is, what is the primary difference between discovery and group discovery?

>> Exactly what Janet said earlier. Discovery -- facilitated discovery is done by a professional with a person with a job seeker. Whether that be a job seeker with a disability, or whether that be a person from TANF. It's a relationship between -- where the professional observes the job seeker or the professional arranges for different events for the job seeker and the professional to go to, such as an informational interview. Or such as watching them and observing them do an activity within the community. So it's very much one-on-one and very much driven by the professional. Group discovery takes that information and has a group of six to 10 people. And it goes through the rationale behind discovery. And the steps somebody needs to take basically in homework. And so in group discovery, I may actually arrange a tour for myself and come back and report back to the group. So the information that a person obtains is -- obtains is the same, it's just the methodology is different.

>> Great. Thank you so much, have you. This is the end of our webinar for today. I want to invite all of the attendees on the line to join us next month to learn even more about group discovery and how you can better facilitate group discovery for those that you support. I want to give a special thank you again to Janet and to Abby for a wonderful job today. For those of you that are on the line, we had almost 300 individuals listening in today, which gives you an idea of how important this information is and how many people are interested in learning more. The contact information on the screen for both Abby and Janet -- if you have any additional questions after the webinar, please feel free to direct them to myself, Elizabeth Jennings. We'd be so happy to get those questions answered for you either through myself, through Janet, through Abby, or through our partners at ODEP. And to all of those, Janet, Abby and our ODEP partners, thank you for joining us today and thank you to all of you on the line. We look forward to providing you another great webinar next month. Thank you.

>> Thank you.

>> [event concluded]