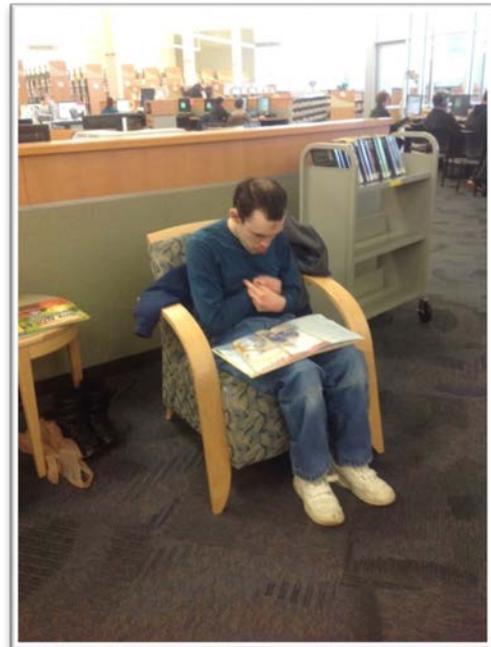


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The Path to Community Employment

The Ohio Employment First Initiative is about shifting expectations for a cultural transformation that provides opportunities for every adult with developmental disabilities to explore career options and find jobs that fit their skills and interests.

Community Employment is defined by ORC 5123.022 as competitive employment that takes place in an integrated setting. This means full-time or part-time work in the competitive labor market, at or above minimum wage, where people with developmental disabilities perform the same or similar work tasks in a setting typically found in the community.

Community Employment brings a variety of benefits to each job seeker and to the community; it allows workers to gain greater independence and personal satisfaction; it allows businesses to profit from a diverse and capable workforce; and it gives the community as a whole the advantages of inclusion.

Through the Employment First Initiative, job seekers begin to explore Community Employment during their school years as part of the Transition Planning and Assessment process. They work with a team to have meaningful and person centered experiences with businesses in the community. Likewise, adults also have the opportunity to work with a team to develop a plan for employment and to then learn about, explore, and seek work that matches their strengths and interests.

At the beginning of the person centered planning process, each job seeker determines where they are on the Path to Community Employment. The four places on the Path are:

- (1) The individual is already engaged in community employment and needs support for job stabilization, job improvement, or career advancement;
- (2) The individual expresses a desire to obtain community employment but is not currently employed and needs support to obtain employment or identify career options and employment opportunities;
- (3) The individual is unsure about community employment and needs assistance and support to identify career options and employment opportunities and the economic impact for the individual of the decision to work; or
- (4) The individual does not express a desire to work and needs support to learn more about careers and employment opportunities and the economic impact for the individual of the decision not to work.

Once the job seeker determines their place on the Path, they can work with a team to select and engage in a variety of targeted activities to help them move toward their employment goals.

What is Work Experience?

Work Experience is an effective approach to help people prepare for employment through a coordinated set of activities that take place in community businesses instead of in school settings or other specialized facilities.

Work experiences are designed to be outcome-oriented, meaning that the activities and experiences are intended to advance job seekers along their individualized Paths to Community Employment. The ultimate goal of work experience is to prepare and support each person to obtain and be successful in competitive, integrated employment.

Through work experience, youth age 14 or older and adults engage in career exploration, career assessment, and work-related training to help them identify their interests, strengths, skills, training and support needs, and ideal conditions for employment.

This is accomplished through a variety of targeted activities such as informational interviews, job shadows, short term hands on activities, apprenticeships and internships, and volunteer experiences.

Work Experiences are also considered to be appropriate transition services under IDEA 2004. For school age youth, the IEP can include work experiences paid by the schools.



Key Characteristics of Work Experiences are:

- **Learning focused-** the job seeker is learning about different jobs in the community, different work skills while the support professional is learning about the job seekers strengths, interests and ideal working conditions.
- **Person Centered-** the job seeker's known interests and emerging skills influence the experience selection
- **Time limited-** the experience is short term
- **Authentic-** the experience involves doing real activities where they are typically done with people who typically do them.
- **Individualized-** or a combination of some individualized experience and some small group experience
- **Paid or Unpaid-** may sometimes include paid work, such as summer youth experience, or community based assessment, but are often unpaid

Who May Benefit From Work Experience?

Work Experience is valuable for adults and students who:

- Are unsure about their place on the Path to Community Employment
- Seek to discover their unique interests, skills, preferences, and support needs
- Aim to add or improve upon existing skills and interests
- Want to learn more about jobs that are available in the community
- Aspire to meet people who work in the community
- Wish to learn about the benefits of work
- Desire to learn in a typical, real world setting



Work experience benefits job seekers by providing:

- A better understanding of what “work” is
- The opportunity to develop relationships and network in the business community
- A chance to explore a variety of jobs and tasks
- Social skill development
- Identification of capabilities and interests
- Course Credit for school

Types of Work Experience

Work Experiences fall into several different categories. Typically, the categories vary in duration, location, and intensity. When selecting a type of work experience, it is essential to consider the learning and assessment needs, as well as the goals of the individual job seeker.

Several of the most commonly utilized types of work experience include:

Informational Interview

- A brief experience intended to help job seekers meet different employers in the community and learn about different jobs
- Involves meeting with an employer or other key staff to ask questions about a specific business or industry (see Appendix A for common questions)
- Sometimes involves a tour of the business
- Usually 15-30 minutes at each business
- Allows for the job seeker and business owners in the community to begin to get to know each other
- May provide an opportunity to establish a subsequent work experience such as a job shadow, try out, internship, etc.



Job Shadow

- A brief work-site experience option where a job seeker follows and observes a competent employee in his or her daily activities, but performs no work
- Designed to provide an example of job specific tasks and work behaviors
- Usually 1-2 hours at each business
- Promotes conversation between job seekers and teachers or employment professionals about job skills, training requirements, and job seeker interest
- Limited in that it allows job seekers to observe only.

Job Try- Out

- A brief work site experience where a job seeker has the opportunity to try some job specific tasks.
- Intended to further identify interests and skills, and to gauge working conditions
- Often develops as a discovery activity or after a job shadow.
- Usually 2-4 hours at each job site.
- Typically unpaid experience

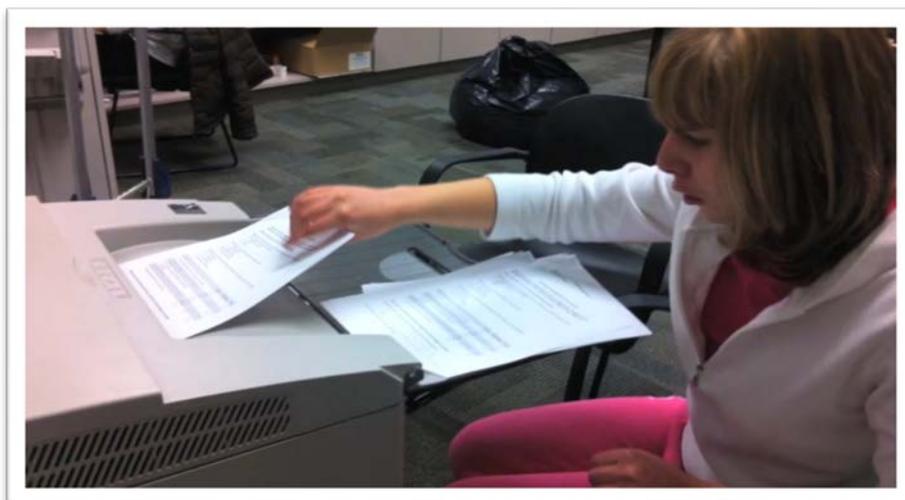
- Observations of the job seeker's efforts and level of interest and skill should be documented

Community Based Assessment

- A longer work experience where the job seeker has the opportunity to engage in job tasks for the purpose of identifying interests, strengths, support needs and to determine if a specific job is the right match for the job seeker and employer
- Sometimes used by Vocational Rehabilitation agencies as an assessment tool.
- Usually paid by the provider, not by the employer
- Usually lasts 10-40 hours

Internship

- A more formal program to provide practical, extended experience for beginners in a job that is determined to be a good match with interests, skills, and ideal conditions.
- Tied directly to training and education, specific skill set development
- Essentially on-the-job training in a field that the student or job seeker wants to learn more about
- Longer time frame- typically one month to one year.
- Internships can be paid or unpaid
- If this experience is unpaid, the person cannot replace another employee or fill an open position.
- The experience is under the general supervision of the school/ organization, but personnel are not required to be there at all times (depends upon the funding source and specific goals of the experience)
- Employment professional/ teacher should check in with the job seeker and employer in order to assess progress and plan for next steps
- There is no obligation to work for the company once the internship is over, however, internships may result in a job offer

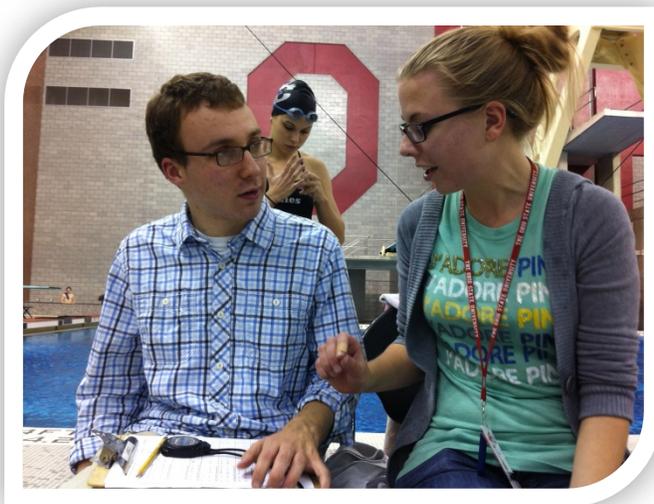


Apprenticeship

- The job seeker/ apprentice learns the skills needed for the job via working with an experienced craftsman in exchange for doing some work
- An apprenticeship is a paid job
- An apprenticeship is also training, and may include classroom style or other lessons
- Timeframe is determined by trade, often 1-2 years.
- There is often an expectation that the apprentice will continue working for the same employer after training is completed

Volunteering/ Community Service

- Formal volunteering is an activity which always takes place in not- for-profit organizations or projects
- Volunteer work experiences should take place where people with and without disabilities are also volunteering
- Not a substitute for paid work but sometimes prepares a person for Community Employment
- Intended to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer
- Must be of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion
- For no financial payment
- In designated volunteer positions only; cannot displace paid staff



Setting up Work Experiences: Planning

Before setting up work experiences, the team should ensure that each job seeker has started a person centered planning process. This process is led by the job seeker and helps to determine their starting place on the Path to Employment. The person centered plan is also focused on helping to develop goals for Community Employment that include consideration of the job seekers interests, preferences, skills, talents, and conditions for success. Additionally, through the process, the job seeker and team will identify the kind of experiences that will be beneficial as the job seeker moves forward toward their goals. Then, the team can begin to take action and arrange work experience that will best support progress to the employment goal.

Decide upon the Purpose

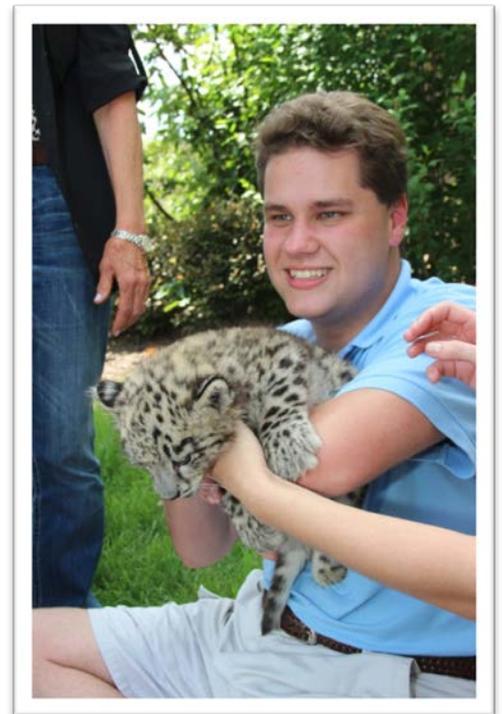
The ultimate goal of the work experience is to help the job seeker find employment that allows them to contribute their strengths to benefit the business and themselves. The work experience provides an opportunity to explore interests, skills, ideal conditions, and support needs. The team should decide on the types of work experiences that will best accomplish this.

Where should the work experience take place?

Locations for work experiences should be selected that will provide the best experience for the job seeker. Establishing work experiences around the known strengths, interests and learning goals of the job seeker leads to an opportunity for targeted skill development.

It is very helpful to survey your team, the job seeker, and the family for connections to community businesses that are already familiar to them. These established networks in the business community are often more invested in the job seeker and open to hosting a work experience.

The team should decide if the experience takes place with only one business or with a series of businesses. This determination is linked to the goals for the job seeker. For example, a job seeker who is just beginning to explore work and may be unsure of what



they like to do will benefit from having a variety of businesses to explore. This allows the job seeker to gain an understanding of what different jobs entail. A job seeker who is already aware of their own interests and talents may benefit from a more intensive experience with one business that allows them to learn job- or industry- specific details.

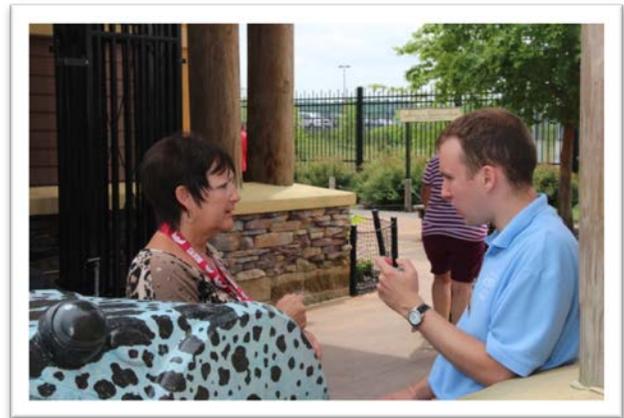
Who is involved in decision making?

The job seeker is generally the primary decision maker throughout the process. The employment team should consist of people the job seeker invites. The team may include family members, friends, favorite community members, teachers, program staff, and specialized employment personnel.

How long should the work experience last?

The length of the work experience should be linked to the goals for the job seeker. On the Path to Community Employment, job seekers may engage in several different types of work experiences of varying lengths. For example, job seekers with little experience, who have had limited opportunity to gain work skills or to realize a variety of interests may benefit from a series of informational interviews or several short term, 1-2 hour job shadows or job try outs. Once the job seeker begins to find preferences and emerging skill sets, a more in-depth experience to try out and learn job specific skills may be appropriate.

Ultimately, the length of the experience should be long enough to provide information that advances the job seeker along the Path to Community Employment.



Is Parent/ guardian permission needed?

If the job seeker has a parent or guardian, it is important to ensure that they are involved in the team decision making and that they give permission for the job seeker to participate. Your school or program may want a signed release or permission slip detailing the activities in which the job seeker will engage.

When should the experience take place?

The timing of work experiences relies on many factors; the availability of the business, the availability of the job seeker, and school or program staff availability.

For youth, work experiences can often be arranged to take place during school hours which usually align with community business hours. The same is true for adults who are involved in day programming or who are otherwise available during the day. For some job seekers, there may be an interest in exploring work that is not done during standard business hours. The team will need to evaluate their capacity to provide support for such experiences.

Some work experiences are set up to take place only in the summer, while some are year round. Business takes place 24-7 in most communities, so there should be no shortage of opportunities regardless of when the experience is needed.

What about transportation?

A transportation plan for each job seeker should be arranged. If the ultimate goal is Community Employment, the team should try to arrange for transportation that is most supportive of that outcome. Work experience provides the added opportunity to help the job seeker access and utilize transportation options that will be available to them as adults once school has ended, or if program transportation is not available. This may mean incorporating travel training to use the local public transportation system, learning to schedule supported transportation, or learning to request and use transportation from friends or family in the community. If the school or program has transportation available for the work experience, it can be used, but helping the jobseeker begin to consider transportation options that will be sustainable and accessible after the program ends is an important goal.

Who will directly support the job seeker during the experience?

Staffing levels during the experience will be based on the needs of the job seekers, the goals of the experience, and the requirements of the business. As the work experience is an opportunity for learning, many times there will be a teacher or job coach present during the experience. The teacher or coach will be facilitating the experience as well as assessing what the job seeker is gaining from the experience. For some longer term experiences such as internships and apprenticeships, the job seeker may begin to increase independence without the constant presence of a teacher or coach. In these instances, the

teacher or coach will work very closely with the business owner or supervisor to ensure that the job seeker is meeting the goals of the work experience.



Should the work experience be for an individual or for a group?

The decision about the type and location of work experiences should begin with information gathered during a person centered planning process for each individual job seeker. Ideally, job seekers will have some one-to-one time in the community to focus on specific jobs and tasks that align with individualized interests. Additionally, job seekers should have time to meet and engage with business owners, managers, and workers in the community, building relationships and work place social skills. An individualized approach also allows the employment professional to focus completely on the job seeker's uniquely tailored experience, assessing skills and interest and targeting specific learning needs.

There may be some work experiences that are conducive to small group involvement. Each small group participant should still be involved in an individualized planning process to identify skills, interests, and ideal conditions. The job seeker should participate in selecting opportunities that align with their individualized goals and allow them to have a personalized experience. If selecting to do some work experience in a small group, the employment support team must ensure that personalized support can be given to each job seeker. Also, the employment professional must be able to observe and interact with each job seeker sufficiently to ensure that the goals for the experience are being met. Job seekers should not be placed in a group to do a work experience that is not interesting to them or does not provide appropriate support.

Setting up Work Experiences: Engaging Businesses

A meaningful and goal oriented work experience is highly dependent upon the partnership that the team develops with businesses in the community. Businesses selected as work experience sites should meet the following criteria:

- Align with the individual job seekers employment interests
- Provide opportunities to shadow or engage in tasks that the job seeker wants to learn about.
- Be a safe place to work
- Be welcoming and appreciative of diversity
- Have high expectations of the job seekers
- Ideally, have potential to hire



These steps will help you engage with businesses to set up work experiences:

- Map out the community based on the industries that are of most interest to the job seeker. Also create a list of area businesses to which the employment team has connections to.
- Research specific businesses to find out about the goods and services they offer, their hiring practices, their structure, their mission, and their vision.
- Find contact information and prioritize the list based on the businesses you expect will provide a great opportunity for the job seeker.
- Informational interviews can be very helpful ways to start getting to know the businesses in the community. The same tips provided for job seekers who want to engage in informational interviews also apply to support professionals. Please see the Discovery Guide section on informational interviews.

- Connect with the business via phone, email or in person. Ask for a brief meeting. You may offer to meet at the business at a time that is convenient for the business owner/ manager or you may want to invite the owner for coffee or lunch. Tell the business owner that you are working on a new program at the school or program that is going to provide short term work experiences for the future workforce and that you would like to talk with them about a partnership.
- During the meeting, it helps to briefly share your vision for the community. Explain that you are helping people learn more about jobs in the community while gaining work skills. Explain that this helps to build a stronger and more prepared work force, which benefits the community as a whole. Tell the employer why you think their business would be a great partner. Make sure to ask about the work that the business does, what their vision or mission is, and what they have planned for the future. This information can help you and the business owner see how this work experience partnership can align with their business goals.
- Explain the supports the school or program provides. Often, a business wants to know if the program will provide a staff person during the experience and what their role will be. Sometimes the business owner or manager will participate in some of the training or modeling of work tasks, or they will appoint an employee to participate. Businesses will require a varying level of involvement from your program staff, so be sure to discuss this with the business owner early on. As this is a learning experience for the job seeker, your program staff will be responsible for ensuring that the program goals for the job seeker are being met. Program staff will also need to provide documentation of the activities involved in the experience.
- Businesses often want to know about liability coverage in case there is an accident during the experience. Typically, the business is not liable for accidents that occur during the work experience. They may even require you to sign a release or a waiver. Ensure that your organization's insurance and/ or the family or job seeker's insurance covers community activities. The school or organization's insurance for field trips and "outings" should cover a variety of unpaid work experiences, but check with your insurance carrier to be sure.
- If the work experience is paid, the employer must carry the required insurance, including worker's compensation.
- If this is an unpaid work experience in a for-profit business, explain the regulations and purpose

Setting up Work Experiences: Understand the job

Once you have a business that is committed to providing a work experience, there are several considerations before you begin:

- Be respectful of the business; don't interrupt work flow
- To become familiar with the business, engage in informational interviews with key people
- Obtain job descriptions
- Decide on the type of experience that would be best at this business.
- Learn about expectations, tour the business and observe the various tasks being performed
- Complete a task analysis of each job task you plan to have the job seeker try. For more information on task analysis, review the webinar Task Analysis for Job Coaches, which can be found [here](#).
- Gain names and contact information for the onsite supports and "go-to people" to assure that natural supports are provided
- Write up the description of the work experience to ensure that all support staff are aware of what is expected and are consistent with communicating those expectations to the job seekers.
- Establish a schedule with the business
- Create a list of targeted tasks, skills, and work behaviors that you can assess for the job seeker
- Aim for highest level of independence



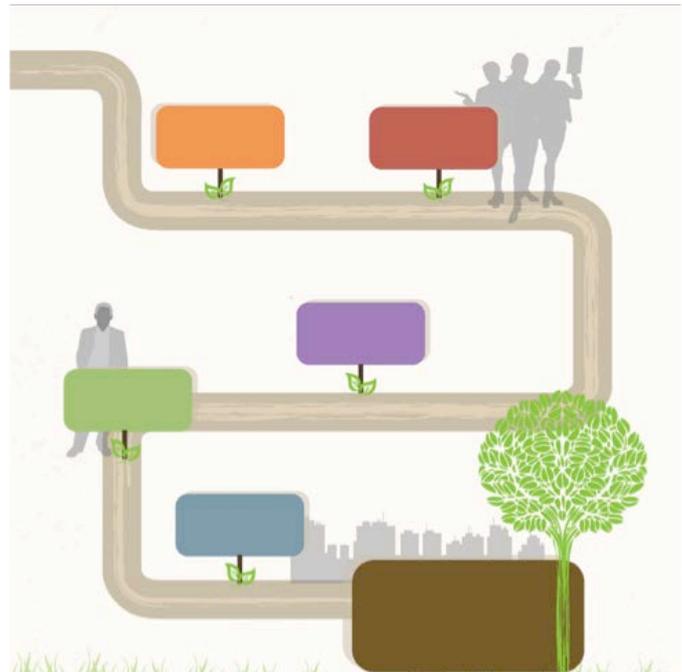
Documenting Work Experience

It is important to capture the work experience activities and relate them back to the job seeker's goals. Documentation includes the job seeker's input on the experience- what they did and didn't like, what they learned, who they met, and what this experience may lead to next. The employment professional also documents objective observations of the tasks, activities, and social interactions. The input of the business owner or coworkers can be important to capture as well. A descriptive written report is essential, as are photos and even video of the job seeker engaged in the activities.

The work experience is documented daily for each participant. Depending on program documentation requirements, you may use specific forms or templates to document. For example, your school may have a specific form that is required, or if you are working with a vocational rehabilitation partner, you may have to use a standardized template for reporting and billing.

The Career Discovery Guide contains forms that attached in that may help you with documentation:

- Vocational Observation Form
- Skills Observation report
- Student Experience Log
- Career Vocational Profile



Video Resumes and Professional Portfolios are other tools that can provide documentation in a multi-media format. These tools can also be used to highlight the job seekers skills and competencies for prospective employers. For additional information on video resumes and portfolios, please click [here](#).

Work Experience and Labor Laws

Organizations need to be knowledgeable about Federal and State Labor laws that govern unpaid work experiences and work based learning for youth under age 18. There are firm guidelines, restrictions, and requirements for these activities.

Organization and the business can be fined for not following Department of Labor Regulations.

The Department of Labor and the US Department of Education have created a joint set of guidelines for the work experiences:

- “Participants are individuals with significant disabilities for whom paid, competitive employment is not readily available due to a need for intensive ongoing support or training;
- The experience is for the benefit of the job seeker;
- The experience, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar training which would be given in an educational environment;
- The employer and the job seeker are both informed that there is no entitlement to wages;
- The work experience must be clearly defined in the IEP for youth;
- Documentation of the job seeker’s involvement may be made available to the Departments of Labor and Education;
- The activities do not result in an immediate advantage to the business, and on occasion its operations may be impeded;
- Job seekers understand that they are not automatically entitled to a job at the business at the conclusion of the work experience;
- Each experience will not exceed the following limitations during any school year:
 - Career exploration – 5 hours per job experienced
 - Career assessment – 90 hours per job experienced
 - Work-Related training – 120 hours per job experienced” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014).

The Department of Labor has also established “child labor rules” that govern the types of work and work experience in which youth between the age of 14 and 17 can engage:

- “A youth **18 years or older** may perform any job, whether hazardous or not;



- A youth **16 or 17 years old** may perform any non-hazardous job. (See the list of hazardous occupations below.);
- A youth **14 and 15 years old** may **not** work in the manufacturing or mining industries, or in any hazardous job. This list includes those jobs that the Secretary of Labor has deemed hazardous:
 - Manufacturing, processing, and mining occupations;
 - Communications or public utilities jobs;
 - Construction or repair jobs;
 - Operating or assisting in operating power-driven machinery or hoisting apparatus other than typical office machines.
 - Work as a ride attendant or ride operator at an amusement park or a “dispatcher” at the top of elevated water slides;
 - Driving motor vehicles or helping a driver;
 - Youth peddling, sign waving, or door-to-door sales;
 - Poultry catching or cooping;
 - Lifeguarding at a natural environment such as a lake, river, ocean beach, quarry, pond (youth must be at least 15 years of age and properly certified to be a lifeguard at a traditional swimming pool or water amusement park);
 - Public messenger jobs;
 - Transporting persons or property;
 - Workrooms where products are manufactured, mined or processed;
 - Warehousing and storage.
 - Boiler or engine room work, whether in or about;
 - Cooking, except with gas or electric grills that do not involve cooking over an open flame and with deep fat fryers that are equipped with and utilize devices that automatically lower and raise the baskets in and out of the hot grease or oil;
 - Baking;
 - Operating, setting up, adjusting, cleaning, oiling, or repairing power-driven food slicers, grinders, choppers or cutters and bakery mixers;

- Freezers or meat coolers work, except minors may occasionally enter a freezer for a short period of time to retrieve items;
 - Loading or unloading goods on or off trucks, railcars or conveyors except in very limited circumstances.
 - Meat processing and work in areas where meat is processed;
 - Maintenance or repair of a building or its equipment;
 - Outside window washing that involves working from window sills;
 - All work involving the use of ladders, scaffolds, or similar equipment;
 - Warehouse work, except office and clerical work.
- The jobs 14- and 15-year-old workers may legally perform are limited to:
 - Office and clerical work;
 - Work of an intellectual or artistically creative nature;
 - Bagging and carrying out customer's orders;
 - Cashiering, selling, modeling, art work, advertising, window trimming, or comparative shopping;
 - Pricing and tagging goods, assembling orders, packing, or shelving;
 - Clean-up work and grounds maintenance—the young worker may use vacuums and floor waxers, but he or she may not use power-driven mowers, cutters, and trimmers;
 - Work as a lifeguard at a traditional swimming pool or water amusement park if at least 15 years of age and properly certified;



- Kitchen and other work in preparing and serving food and drinks, but only limited cooking duties and no baking (see below);
- Cleaning fruits and vegetables;
- Cooking with gas or electric grills that do not involve cooking over an open flame and with deep fat fryers that are equipped with and utilize devices that automatically lower and raise the baskets in and out of the hot grease or oil;
- Clean cooking equipment, including the filtering, transporting and dispensing of oil and grease, but only when the surfaces of the equipment and liquids do not exceed 100° F;
- Pumping gas, cleaning and hand washing and polishing of cars and trucks (but the young worker may not repair cars, use garage lifting rack, or work in pits);
- Wrapping, weighing, pricing, stocking any goods as long as he or she doesn't work where meat is being prepared and doesn't work in freezers or meat coolers;
- Delivery work by foot, bicycle, or public transportation;
- Riding in the passenger compartment of a motor vehicle except when a significant reason for the minor being a passenger in the vehicle is for the purpose of performing work in connection with the transporting—or assisting in the transporting of—other persons or property;
- Loading and unloading onto and from motor vehicles, the hand tools and personal equipment the youth will use on the job site” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014)

For additional information on the relationship between Federal and State Labor Laws and Work Experiences:

- [Training](#)
- [Volunteer](#)
- [School to Work](#)
- [Internships](#)
- [Ohio Specific](#)
- [Ohio Minor Labor Laws](#)
- [Hazardous Jobs](#)



Next Steps

At the conclusion of the work experience, the team should meet to assess what was learned and what next steps should be taken to support the job seeker move forward on the Path to Community Employment. Ultimately, the goal is paid, integrated, community employment.

Work Experience may result in any of the following:

Paid Employment:

Sometimes the work experience itself leads to paid employment. The employer may recognize the job seeker's skills in completing some business specific tasks and may offer to hire the person during the experience or at the conclusion of it.

Job Development:

The experience should offer clarity about the types of jobs the person is interested in and best suited for; a goal to work in a specific industry or career field may be apparent and the job seeker can begin to receive support to find paid employment. This may involve referring the person to a different organization for support.

Additional Work Experience:

Some experiences provide information on emerging interests or skills, and will be best followed up by more targeted experiences that may be longer or involve trying additional tasks.

Training or further education:

Work experience that indicates a job seeker is interested and skilled in certain career fields or industries may lead to a need to look into job specific training or education. Certain professions require specialized certificates, degrees, or proof of training in order to find a job in the field.

Community Involvement

Some work experiences may provide an opportunity for the job seeker to indicate that they want to choose to engage in activities that have more social or recreational goals. The team should develop a plan that ensures the person has opportunities to continue to consider employment as an option for the future.

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Disclaimer:

The information contained in this publication is not offered as a substitute for, nor should be cited as legal advice. The information herein is provided as guidelines and is not a comprehensive review of labor law and regulations. Businesses and educational partners should direct specific questions on legal issues to official government agencies and/ or an attorney.

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