

Project SEARCH Frequently Asked Questions



1. This is a great program – how do we start a Project SEARCH program in our community?

First, make sure you have all your partners represented and on board to begin the program. The partners must include those in bold listed below:

- **Education:** Local School District, Career Technical School, Educational Service Center, several neighboring school districts, adult education organization for adult programs, community colleges, etc.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation (both local counselor and area supervisor if possible)**
- **Community Rehabilitation Partner** (provider of skills training and job development). In states where the skills trainer is hired directly by VR, this agency is not required unless it is the long-term support agency.
- **Developmental Disabilities Agency** or Mental Health Provider (for long term follow along services)
- Workforce Investment Board / WIOA agencies in your community
- **Host Business** (the planning process can begin before a host business is identified but should include them as soon as they are secured)
- Representation from a disability organization for families

Have a meeting with your local partners to explore the possibility of Project SEARCH in your area and ensure that all partners are committed to implementing the program before moving forward. Feel free to utilize the Project SEARCH video from this link: http://youtu.be/rsHi_-4iyIk.

Each state has a Project SEARCH Program Specialist from the National Headquarters at Cincinnati Children's Hospital who will assist your team through this process. If you have not made contact with the Program Specialist for your area, please contact us through our website, www.projectsearch.us.

When all the partners are committed to beginning Project SEARCH, one of the partners needs to complete the Project SEARCH licensing agreement and contract for on-site Technical Assistance. Contact our business office at ProjectSEARCHbusinessoffice@cchmc.org. Our Business Manager and/or your Program Specialist can review the technical assistance procedures, the costs for the license/technical assistance and outcomes associated with both. Once the licensing agreement process has started and payment has been arranged, your Project SEARCH Program Specialist will begin the on-site Technical Assistance. This assistance is a series of on-site training to:

- Educate all local partners and provide in-depth program overview, including a work plan for program planning and implementation;
- Give a presentation to the proposed host business leadership and managers and assistance with the development of high quality internship sites at the selected business and disability awareness / education of the staff who will be involved in the internships and other aspects of the Project SEARCH program.

- Provide learning about other components of the Project SEARCH model including student recruitment and selection, Employability Skills curriculum, creation of the Business Advisory Committee, development of an employment search process, and Family Involvement components.
- Deliver Project SEARCH trainings that assist with implementation of a successful Project SEARCH site such as Teaching and Coaching for Success, Lean, etc.
- Provide additional individualized training depending on the needs of the host business site and partners.

Technical assistance from the Program Specialist can continue, as needed, to facilitate the implementation of a Project SEARCH program in your area. You will gain access to all copyrighted Project SEARCH materials and documents once the licensing agreement is signed.

2. How long does it take to plan and implement the Project SEARCH program?

The process of planning and implementation takes about six to nine months. It is ideal to have one year for the planning team to work together for a successful implementation. Project SEARCH programs follow the local school calendar and begin operation in late August, so a planning team should start meeting, *at the latest*, by January of the year they want to begin. We suggest that you identify a Steering/Planning Team that meets at least monthly. All partner organizations should be represented (especially the host business once they are committed) on the Advisory Team. The Team could also include a family member, a young adult with a disability, a disability agency, and other community members such as the Workforce Investment Board, University Center for Excellence, etc.

3. Who funds the Project SEARCH program or who pays for what?

Partner	Personnel and Supports	Source of Funding
Education	Instructor, curriculum, supplies (sometimes a Teacher's Assistant or paraprofessional)	FTE for each student from state and local funding. (Typically need 8–12 student interns to pay for an instructor)
Vocational Rehabilitation	Sponsors student interns to support skills training and job development. (This is true in many states; however, some states will not fund skills training for young adults still in high school).	State/Federal funding – Student interns must be eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation.
Community Rehabilitation Partner	Provides skills training and job development	Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicaid, WIA, etc.
Developmental Disability Agency (Long-Term Service Provider)	Provides long-term employment support for retention and career advancement	Possible sources: Medicaid Waiver DD Support CMH Board Ticket-to-Work

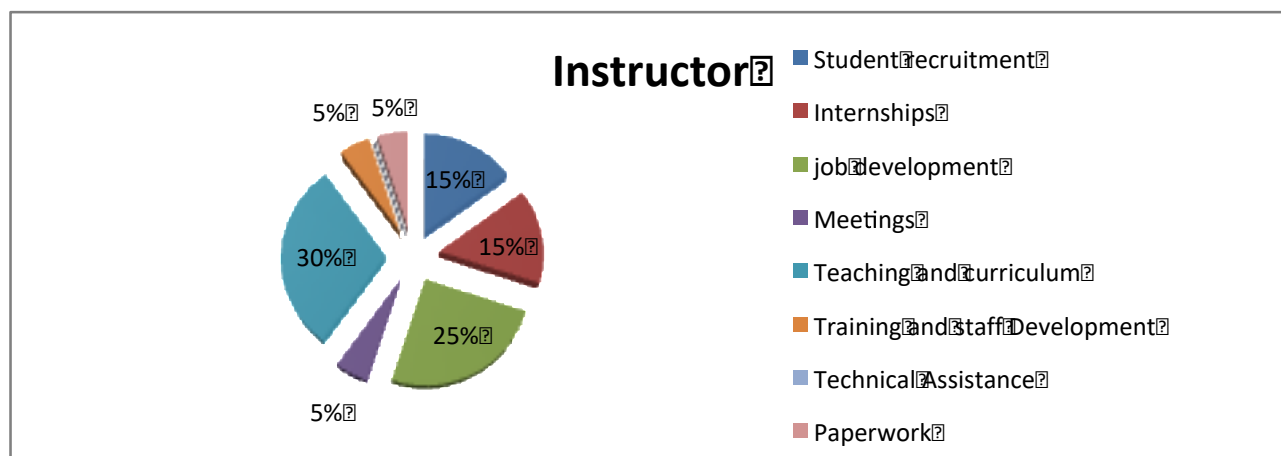
Business	Business Liaison (approximately 10% FTE); onsite classroom/training room; internship sites; hosting of some marketing events, such as open houses and fairs. Typically the Business Liaison is a manager of a large department or from Human Resources, Training and Development, etc.	In-Kind
----------	--	---------

4. Does the instructor need to be there all day? What does s/he do besides teach class?

Yes, the instructor needs to be on site at the host business all day. S/he is the on-site coordinator and an integral part of the team. In most Project SEARCH programs the instructor's role is similar to a case manager or program coordinator for the student interns. The duties include:

- Planning and teaching the Project SEARCH Employability Skills curriculum
- Assisting the student interns with interviewing skills, resume and portfolio development
- Coordinating and implementing the Employment Planning meetings to be held at least twice during each internship
- Completes the Vocational Fit Assessment for the student interns and internships with the skills trainer(s), shares the information with the team and applies the results for meaningful internship selection and final job development
- Developing internship sites with the business liaison and skills trainer
- Ensuring that the student interns learn competitive, marketable, transferable skills and achieve maximum productivity and quality while on their internships
- Developing work accommodations and work aids with the skills trainer
- Evaluating each student intern's progress and filling out required documentation for partners, funders, and the Project SEARCH database
- Providing employer education about disability awareness and supervising people with disabilities
- Recruiting student interns for the next Project SEARCH class and creating a pipeline of potential candidates
- Ensuring that all student interns are eligible for VR, long-term support, SSI, and other appropriate community, state, and federal supports
- Advocating for and facilitating internal job development at the host business
- Developing relationships with potential community employers
- Marketing the program within the host business and to the wider community
- Coordinating the Family Involvement Program with the Family Liaison and other family members

Below is a graph that shows the approximate amount of time that the teacher will spend on the various Project SEARCH-related activities. The activities and time allotted will vary depending on the time of the year.



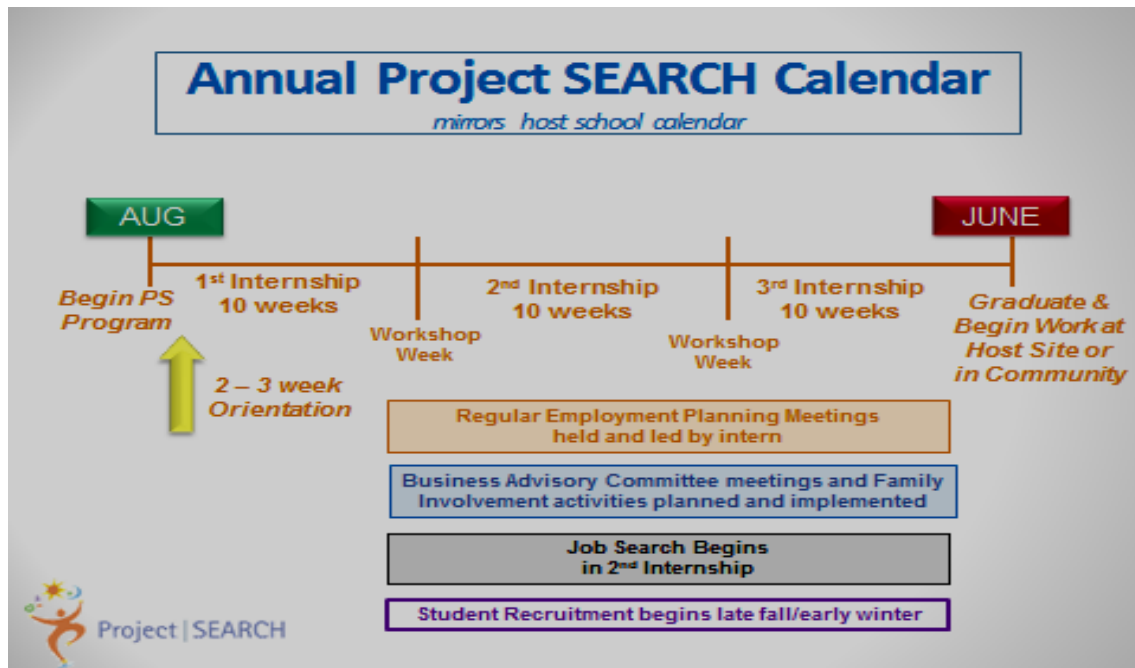
5. Are the student interns on-site all day?

Yes, the student interns arrive directly to the host business via public transportation (if available in your community) or other independent means (i.e. not a school bus). If possible, they should not report to the high school for any reason. Their workday includes approximately 1.5 hours of the Project SEARCH Employability Skills curriculum and 5 hours at their internship (including lunch and travel time to the internship sites). To be eligible for Project SEARCH, the students should be finished with their high school credit requirements for graduation, certification, or completion so that they will be able to focus their entire day on gaining competitive and marketable work skills.

Typical Project SEARCH Daily Schedule (*This is a template and can be modified to fit local transportation and other site-specific needs*). The student interns should be on site at least 6.5 hours. Most Project SEARCH programs have a training room at the host business that serves as a base for the program and where the employability skills are taught.

7:50 Arrival at host business site
 8:00 Project SEARCH Employability Skills Curriculum
 9:00 Internships – learning competitive, marketable skills
 11:30 Lunch
 12:00 Internships (continued)
 2:00 return to classroom, review of day, journaling,
 2:30 Adjournment for day

Below is an annual timeline that notes the major components of the program.



6. How old do the student interns need to be to begin the program?

For a high school Project SEARCH program, the students need to be at least 18 years old to be considered for the program. Most student interns are between the ages of 18 and 22, but individuals in the 23–35 age range can be included if funding is available to support participants that are beyond school eligibility. Adult programs typically target young adults ages 35 and under however, consideration of adults older than 35 could be an individual site decision.

7. What if the student interns need more classes to fulfill their graduation requirements?

Student interns should have their necessary classes completed. If a student intern needs one or two classes and the Project SEARCH Instructor is “highly qualified” to deliver the academic credit within the Project SEARCH program, school districts might make an exception.

8. Can high school graduates and/or adults be in the program?

Project SEARCH was originally designed for transition-aged youth. Many communities are beginning to extend this training opportunity for young adults who have graduated and want to work in a competitive setting. Project SEARCH classes typically include 10 to 12 student interns. A blended model could be designed that includes young adults (ages 35 and younger is recommended) with high school transition-age youth. These individuals also need to be eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation, WIOA, or the local Developmental Disabilities agency, or they could pay privately. Adult candidates need to go through the same application process as the students, including interviews, skills assessments, etc. Some communities are designing Project SEARCH programs for only adult participants. The basic model components still apply to an adult program. An educational agency needs to be involved in order to comply laws for unpaid internships. One of the participating agencies or several agencies needs to fund the instructor position. Compliance with wage and hour regulations becomes more critical with an all-adult program. Adult programs could pay the student interns could be paid a stipend if the local team agrees.

9. Can the student interns be employed before the Project SEARCH program year is over?

The goal of the program for each student intern is competitive employment. A student intern can accept a job offer during the school year if a good job match is found (at the host site or elsewhere in the community) and the IEP team is in agreement. At this time, the student intern becomes an employee and assumes an employee's schedule. For reporting, funding and insurance purposes, the intern can maintain student status for the remainder of the school year.

10. Do the student interns have to rotate to other internships if they like the first one?

Project SEARCH is designed to give student interns the opportunity to have a variety of work experiences, to explore different careers, and to learn competitive work skills in a wide range of settings. This process helps to refine each student intern's career goal and to prepare each student intern for employment. However, if a student intern can gain additional marketable skills *and* if there is a strong possibility of being offered a competitive job, it is often productive for that individual to do multiple rotations at a single internship site.

11. How do the student interns get to the program?

Wherever public transportation is available, Project SEARCH programs should take advantage of this resource. Vocational Rehabilitation, the school district, community rehabilitation programs, and families can work together to provide travel training before the program begins. Some communities provide travel training through the public transportation organization. Qualified student interns may be eligible for a para-transit system. Most qualified student interns are eligible for reduced transit fare but need to follow the eligibility process. Even though students with disabilities are entitled to school transportation, Project SEARCH strongly recommends that student interns use this transition year to learn to navigate the public transportation system independently. For families that need assistance, the schools can purchase the bus fare. In rural communities, the school may need to provide busses to the host business. Some small communities utilize other transportation resources such as community vans.

12. How many student interns are employed at the host site and what happens to the ones who are not hired?

Our research has shown that about a third of the student interns may be hired at the host business. The other student interns will need to find employment in the community using the skills they acquire through their internship experiences. The program partners—the school, Vocational Rehabilitation, families, and the Community Rehabilitation Partner (CRP)—should work together during the planning process to design the job placement process. The Project SEARCH instructor and skills trainer typically will be able to assist student interns through the application process at the host business when there is an opening that is a good match with the intern's abilities. The CRP usually takes the lead in the employment process for the remaining Project SEARCH student interns.

13. What do the student interns wear during the Project SEARCH day?

Many programs select uniforms that reflect the host business environment and have the student interns wear a polo shirt with the Project SEARCH logo along with the host business logo. Other programs ask that the student interns wear business casual, scrubs, or other attire suitable to the host business environment. All Project SEARCH student interns are badged by the host business and participate in similar on-boarding and orientation procedures as typical employees. Whether the student interns wear the Project SEARCH logo or not, we believe it is a strong marketing and education tool for the Project SEARCH staff to wear attire with the logo.