Arrange and complete two Informational Interviews (#3 & #4). Interview businesses that correspond with the employment-seekers 3rd Vocational Theme (#3) and then conduct another Informational Interview following the Strongest Vocational Theme (#4). Complete these Informational Interviews at local small businesses, as a team with the employment-seeker.

Schedule *Informational Interviews (#3 and #4)*, not job development calls, with a local small business where people with the same Vocational Themes are likely to work.

**Reminder: Choose small businesses! Find for-profit, non-governmental, small businesses. Do not go to charity organizations or non-profits.**

**DO NOT GO TO STRICTLY RETAIL BUSINESSES!**

At these businesses, you will have a better chance to speak directly with the business owner or manager, rather than with human resources personnel. The Discovery and Customized Employment process attempts to circumvent the HR filter. Human Resource professionals are fine people, but they sometimes know very little about the specific work that is done, or how it is done. We want to talk with businesses where the owners or managers are knowledgeable and skilled in making products or offering the services that the business provides.

**Speak with the business owner or manager.** Here are some suggestions for setting up Informational Interviews:

* Use personal and professional networks to find the right person to help gain access to the business. *The answer to "how" is always "who." –Tom Kohler*
* Once a referral has been made, call the business/employer (or go visit) and tell them that you are seeking information about how peoples' careers evolve and gathering ADVICE from businesses on how someone would start a career in their field or line of work.
* As previously mentioned, we prefer to seek out smaller, artisanal business for this because we want to talk with someone who is actually engaged in the work.
* Ask for 20 minutes of seat time. Also add, "If there's time, we'd love a tour." We almost always get the total tour. However, it needs to follow the seat time otherwise the chance to bond won't happen and you never get in the back room where most of the tools, techniques, and technology is used. Asking for only 20 to 30 minutes seems to loosen the employers up, and of course, it's all about asking for "their advice." These sessions often end up taking 60 to 90 minutes.

In addition to other information (covered in the handouts and below), make sure you cover the following topics:

* 1. **Tell me about your personal, educational, and/or work experiences prior to to this...**
  2. **What are you most proud of with your business?**
  3. **What product or service do you currently not provide that you would like to provide?**
  4. **How are your employees trained in their jobs?**
  5. **If you had $15,000 to invest in your business, what would you do with it?**
  6. **When you hire staff, what type of work do they come from? When staff leave, what type of work do they go to?**
  7. **Are there local individuals/business owners in similar or related industries that you discuss business with (possible referrals)?**

* Conduct the Informational Interviews as a team with the employment-seeker (unless there is a good reason not to). Support the employment-seeker to prepare for (and participate in) the Informational Interviews.
* It is also possible that informational interviews may help you set up Discovery Activities in Businesses, so it is important to go visit places of employment that match the individual's themes and find out about their processes, technology, and work conditions. If the informational interview points towards a potential fit and (tasks, work conditions, skills, who the employment-seeker is) and you hit it off with the business, ask if it may be possible for you can come back at a time that is convenient for the business, so that the employment-seeker can "try some things out" and "get their hands dirty." After all, "telling" is good, "seeing" is better, but "doing" is the best way to learn about something. Don't be afraid to ask if you feel it makes sense for the employment-seeker.

As an example, a young woman with emerging Art and Culinary themes arranged to work with a cake decorator following an informational interview. The activity included decorating cupcakes with different colored frosting and designs.

In another situation, following an informational interview, a young man with an emerging Entertainment theme briefly volunteered his time with a youth group to choreograph a musical number with 20 kids ages 8-16. He proved that he did indeed have skills in this area and his experience led him to a job at a local YMCA teaching dance and exercise classes to young children.

* Thank the person with whom you met and follow up as appropriate.

**Informational Interview Sample Questions:** Be prepared to ask open-ended questions to get the business owner or manager to talk about their business: In addition to the questions offered above and in the handouts, here are some sample questions you may want to use in the interview:

* How did you get into this line of work?
* What other types of work have you done?
* What training does your work require?
* Why did you start this business?
* Who are your competitors, and why do people choose your business?
* Who are your customers?
* What are some of the tasks you or your employees do here?
* What do you like most about your work?
* What do you like least?
* Do you have unmet needs / tasks - things that aren't getting done regularly? If so, what?
* How is your business changing?
* What impact has technology had on your work?
* What is your vision for the business over the next year? The next 5 or 10 years?
* How or where do your employees gain the experience required to work here?
* What advice would you give someone who wanted to get into this type of work?