

Guidance for Effective Discovery Experiences

Discovery experiences are guided experiential learning components that can have a great impact on preparing members for postsecondary education. The following tips provide guidance for youth development professionals who are planning these experiences in order to provide meaningful, enriching activities that will have a deeper impact on teens as they explore and plan for postsecondary education.

- 1. Give teens a voice.** By asking your teens for their input and creating opportunities for shared planning of discovery activities, you can ensure it will meet their needs and be interesting to them. Ask them what types of activities they want to experience, and encourage them to take the leadership in planning it (with your support, of course!). What experiences do they already want to participate in? What do they feel like they need to get from each experience? Who do they want to hear from or meet? Use their feedback to think about what types of experiences you can provide them with such as campus visits, guest speakers, family night meetings, application parties, college athletics games, etc.
- 2. Create a safe environment.** All of the teens in your Diplomas to Degrees program need to feel that the space is safe for them to explore. They likely have lots of questions and Diplomas to Degrees discovery experiences should help them get the answers they need. If guest speakers, volunteers or partners from local schools will be supporting your program, let them know that you want teens to ask lots of questions, but they need to feel safe in order to do so.
- 3. Make sure it builds skills.** Whenever possible, try to structure your discovery experiences in a way that will build, or reinforce critical skills your teens will need to succeed. Rather than just taking a field trip, incorporate a learning challenge for them. For example, if planning a campus visit, give your teens a scavenger hunt checklist and encourage them to find answers as a way to promote their self-efficacy and communication skills.
- 4. Make it engaging and FUN!** While the discovery experiences should promote skill-building, they should also be FUN! Incorporate various challenges, games and memorable moments for them. Selfie challenges, scavenger hunts, step shows, college fairs and campus events can all provide fun opportunities for teens to realistically see themselves in a postsecondary education environment and get excited about the possibility of becoming a part of it.
- 5. Use them as myth-busters.** It is likely that some teens have many misperceptions about “college” and may be questioning whether or not they want to go. Discovery activities create an ideal way to bust those myths and revive a doubting teen’s aspirations. The more they can see and experience different aspect of postsecondary education, the more confident they will become. Common myths can range from thinking “college” only means traditional four-year universities, to thinking that

technical colleges are not solid options. Build in time for them to meet and talk to people who can share their experiences. This will help them expand their thinking about postsecondary education.