



## **An Overview of Three Online Career Assessment Tools**

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### **Abstract**

Exploring careers and deciding on a career path can be an intimidating activity. With over 12,000 careers available to choose from, information can become overwhelming (Robinson, n.d.). Career assessment and counseling services can assist with accurately evaluating an individual's interests, skills, work values, and temperaments in order to appropriately plan a long-term career pathway. There are many online tools available to the general public to help with this process of information gathering, personal career exploration, and self-discovery. The Career Index Plus, O\*NET Online, and EducationPlanner are three specific online resources that can be beneficial to use when delivering career assessment and counseling services. In reviewing these resources, conclusions can be drawn about the strengths and weaknesses of these tools, as well as accessibility considerations and their application to career counseling.

### **Keywords:**

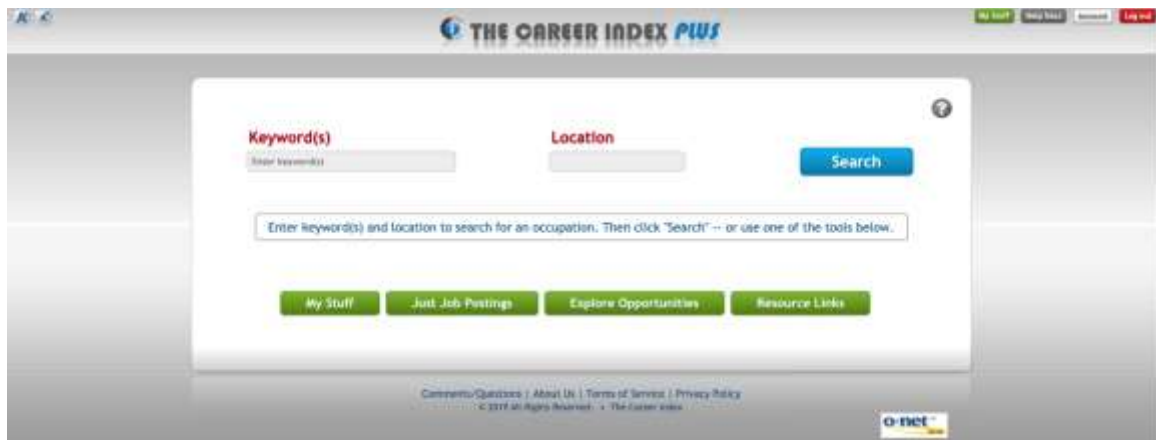
career assessment, online assessment, assessment tools, vocational evaluation

### **Comparison of Three Online Career Assessment Tools**

Career assessment specialists, vocational evaluators, and career counselors are all responsible for providing varying degrees of career information and counseling to their clients. The following comparison of three online career assessment tools is provided to help these professionals make decisions about which tools will be useful for specific clients. The online career assessment resource sites focused on include The Career Index Plus, O\*NET Online, and EducationPlanner. Each of these resources has different kinds of tools available to assist with career and education planning.

## The Career Index Plus

Created in collaboration with the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) under a grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration, The Career Index Plus has the overall goal of providing an easy-to-use technological tool to assist professionals and clients alike in formulating appropriate vocational goals. After creating a free account and logging into the Career Index Plus at [https://www.thecareerindex.com/dsp\\_intro.cfm](https://www.thecareerindex.com/dsp_intro.cfm), users will be brought to the following page:



*Figure 1:* The Career Index Plus. Display of the homepage of The Career Index Plus after logging into an existing account.

This homepage provides options to the user of what to do next with this tool. For example, users can enter keywords and a location to search for information or job openings on specific occupations, or they can navigate other tools, which include My Stuff, Just Job Postings, Explore Opportunities, and Resource Links. Each tool within The Career Index Plus has the goal of providing tailored information for the user's benefit.

The Career Index Plus is a unique tool in that it requests the user to build a personal profile so that recommendations for appropriate career matches can be suggested. After clicking on the My Stuff tab, users will locate their unique profile, recommendations, and occupations saved by the user. This experience of building a personal profile can be considered non-threatening in comparison to interacting with other resources due to a reduced risk of assessment anxiety and the option of including as much or as little information about oneself as one chooses. Although it is a time-consuming activity, the user is in full control and the effort put into building a profile can be considered empowering in receiving tailored results and suggestions. The information requested in order to build a full profile on The Career Index Plus includes the user's basic information, such as their desired type of employment, salary, current level of education, an interest profile using the Holland Codes, work history, and the user's preferred career cluster and work context. Recommendations will automatically become

available to the user with any amount of information put into building a personal profile.

The Just Job Postings tab allows the user to access a job search tool within The Career Index Plus utilizing the National Labor Exchange or Indeed Jobs. With each of these options, the job title, location, company, and posted date are generated in the results. The Explore Opportunities tab allows users to view job opportunities within a specific zip code and also offers the ability to look for jobs that meet specific criteria. Using this tool, individuals can search for careers based on the demand, wage, skills, available openings, ability to work from home, and other factors.

An additional unique feature of The Career Index Plus is the Resource Links tab in which Disability Resources and Ex-offender Resources are listed. The Career Index Plus was created with vocational rehabilitation in mind; therefore, clients are more likely to fall into one or both of these categories, which strengthens the overall benefit and applicability of this specific online tool. A disclaimer is displayed on this Resource Links page, however, to alert the user that the links will take the user to another web page that utilizes a specialized Google Map query to generate the most appropriate resources within the user's geographic location.

The biggest advantage in using The Career Index Plus in career assessment and counseling services is the tailored recommendations that assist with choosing an appropriate vocational goal with a client. These recommendations can be generated at any point throughout the process of creating the profile, though the most appropriate recommendations will only be made after completing the entire personal profile. Therefore, some disadvantages could include potential fatigue from the amount of information requested to put into the personal profile or the generation of unrelated recommendations due to a lack of information in the personal profile. Vocational evaluators in particular could utilize The Career Index Plus when reviewing and synthesizing all information gathered during assessments with clients in order to provide a strong report with supported recommendations.

## **O\*NET Online**

O\*NET Online, the replacement for the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT), is the nation's primary database and resource for occupational information and career exploration (What is O\*NET?). In regard to career assessment, the O\*NET Online Interest Profiler is available through My Next Move, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, and developed by the National Center for O\*NET Development. My Next Move, which can be accessed through the following web link: <https://www.mynextmove.org/>, gives the user three different options for exploring careers as shown in Figure 2: A search box, browsing careers by industry clusters, or taking the O\*NET Interest Profiler that utilizes the Holland Codes to recommend potential career matches.



Figure 2: My Next Move. Display of the homepage of O\*NET Online's My Next Move.

In addition to these job exploration tools, My Next Move also offers exploring careers in other cluster categories such as careers that are growing rapidly or careers requiring certain levels of job preparation. A version of all the tools My Next Move offers is also available in a specialized way for veterans in efforts to assist this population in obtaining appropriate civilian jobs. This variation in ways to view and explore careers is a strength that O\*NET Online offers its users.

According to a review conducted by Chauhan (2019), O\*NET Online has a few weaknesses though as well. For example, the O\*NET Online may be vague or redundant in its presentation of some occupations, creating difficulty for the user to truly capture the essence of certain careers. Additionally, the language used in the content of descriptions of occupations can seem overly industry-specific, which may confuse users who are inexperienced with those occupations (Handel, 2016). The limitation of being strictly an internet resource should also be considered when weighing advantages and disadvantages of using My Next Move.

## EducationPlanner

According to the About Us page on EducationPlanner, EducationPlanner is a public service of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) and its student loan servicing operations, FedLoan Servicing and American Education Services (AES). Its purpose is to aid students in middle or high school, parents, and counselors in planning for successful career pathways. This online tool can be accessed at: <http://www.educationplanner.org/> and the homepage is displayed in Figure 3.



Figure 3: EducationPlanner. Display of the homepage for EducationPlanner.

This resource site offers substantial information in regard to career planning, with its biggest strength being information catered towards students, parents, and counselors regarding financial aid options and planning for post-secondary education. For vocational evaluators and counselors in particular, the Counselors tab is a valuable resource that provides information about several topic areas, including the American School Counselor Association National Standards for Students, using EducationPlanner as an activity with students, how to best set up a job shadowing program, how to host a student aid event, as well as additional links to get in contact with other counselors in the field. Although these specific resources would be most appropriate for school counselor professionals, vocational evaluators could use these resources when providing recommendations for clients with post-secondary education goals.

The self-assessments offered for students on EducationPlanner include the following: What Kind of Student Are You?, What's Your Learning Style?, Which Study Habits Can You Improve?, and How Strong is Your Character?. These self-report questionnaires are short and are introspective by nature. In regard to career assessments and exploration, EducationPlanner directs the user to other websites such as O\*NET Online's Interest Profiler or The College Board in order to gather appropriate information. Therefore, EducationPlanner is valuable for its information and guidance in regard to exploring post-secondary education goals but can be viewed as problematic in its core information

with career exploration due to its redirection of the user to other websites. Using EducationPlanner to its full capability would depend on the motivation of the user.

## **Accessibility**

An examination of these three online career assessment resource sites determine that they are accessible to most users and the navigation between pages is organized well; however, certain accommodations may be necessary for individuals with disabilities. For example, as with accessing any Internet resource, the website should follow specific guidelines in order to achieve accessibility by all users (ADA Best Practices Tool Kit for State and Local Governments, 2007). Some individuals with specific disabilities, such as low vision, may need to use assistive technology devices in order to use a computer. These devices could include a screen reader, text enlargement software, or other devices and programs that allow the user to access information from Internet websites. In order for these devices to work properly, websites need to be designed in such a way to function with these devices and allow all users to access the information. Individuals with cognitive, learning, or neurological disabilities can also face accessibility issues when utilizing websites. According to Zahra (2017) of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), complex navigation mechanisms and page layouts, long passages of text without any illustrations, as well as moving, blinking, or flickering content are several examples of website barriers individuals with diagnoses such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) could face when using Internet resources. Accommodations such as customizing the font size or color or highlighting the text as it is being read out loud can assist individuals with cognitive, learning, or neurological disabilities access web content fully. One positive aspect of accessibility with each of these specific assessment tools is the absence of a time limit on any of the assessments, which allows the users to pace themselves to take the amount of time they need to complete the assessments. This is an important aspect of accessibility because a time restriction could skew the results in a way that is not appropriate for identifying the individual's interests, skills, work values, or temperament factors.

Although accessibility at a basic level can be awarded to these sites, improvements can always be considered in order to most effectively allow users to interact with content material. For instance, according to the National Research Council (2010), the O\*NET Online does not conform to the three key principles of effective web design, which include navigation across websites, user-centered design, and interactivity. Whether or not these principles are met certainly impacts the user's experience in accessing and utilizing all the material offered on these online career assessment resource sites.

## **Application to Career Counseling**

Career counseling is a part of the vocational evaluator's job as was demonstrated by the results of the field's last role and function study (Hamilton & Shumate, 2004) and numerous previous studies. However, career counselors in particular deliver the bulk of career counseling and guidance services. Regardless, vocational evaluators hold an important responsibility for assessing and recommending realistic and appropriate

vocational options for individuals. Therefore, online career assessment resource sites such as the ones described in this article can be useful tools to utilize in both career assessment and counseling settings.

The assessments found on these three websites are easy to self-administer; however, interpreting the results and applying the results to a career pathway can be more difficult. For example, when a user completes the Career Clusters Activity on the EducationPlanner website, the results provide the top five career clusters that fit the user's interests, but it is then the user's responsibility at that point to look further into those careers through career exploration research and determine whether or not one of those careers would be one which the user would like to pursue. Although this basic assessment provides the user with matching career clusters, it does not provide the user any other important information such as whether or not jobs are available in that kind of career, whether or not the user has the training already required to acquire a job in that career, and other labor market information typically found through the Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/>). Integrating these assessments with career counseling would better assist users with interpreting their results. In fact, the counselor and user could search for this information together initially. Later, the users could search on their own—or even share results with the counselor as a kind of homework. In summary, career counselors can assist individuals in implementing assessments and integrating the results or findings into a vocational plan to help determine what action steps need to be taken next in order to make progress towards vocational goals.

Completing just one of these online assessments may not provide enough information to make an informed choice in planning a career pathway. Continuing with the example of the Career Clusters Activity available through EducationPlanner, the results provide the user with a starting point in discovering careers that match his or her personality and interests, but the user still needs to look deeper into whether or not these career clusters also fit his or her work values and current skill sets. From a career counseling perspective, it would be recommended that users next look at the job zones of those career clusters on O\*NET Online in order to understand the level of job preparation required for careers within that cluster. Utilizing both EducationPlanner and O\*NET Online in this scenario provides the individual with a more well-rounded perspective of different careers that may be appropriate vocational pathways to choose from.

The Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) is another resource that can assist career counselors, vocational evaluators, and clients in fully understanding certain online career assessment resource sites. WINTAC (<https://www.wintac.org>) provides descriptions of some online tools, such as the Career Index Plus, as well as training modules, videos, and webinars (TCI+ - LMI). This information can further conversations between career counselors and clients, as well as provide simple teaching opportunities that can greatly empower clients in independent learning and research.

## **Further Questions**

In reviewing just these three online career assessment resource sites, it is evident that user preference plays a key role in whether or not users engage with the resources. For instance, The Career Index Plus is a very individualized and personalized resource to navigate, while other sites such as O\*NET Online and EducationPlanner are more information-heavy upfront. These differences of styles and organization among the resource sites is valuable so that various individuals have options to choose which kind of website resource is most helpful to their individual preferences or needs. On the contrary, the vast amount of resource sites available begs the question of whether there are too many and why there are so many, especially if some simply link to other resource sites such as how EducationPlanner links much of the career information to O\*NET Online. When career information is already a somewhat overwhelming subject, the question arises of whether or not this magnitude of resources offering similar information is really necessary in order to assist individuals with appropriate career planning. One intent of this article is to help vocational evaluators and career counselors understand at least three of the many options available.

## **Conclusion**

The Career Index Plus, O\*NET Online, and EducationPlanner are only three of many online career assessment resource sites available to the general public. Each have various ways of providing and organizing career materials and assessments to better assist individuals in career planning. Integrated with face-to-face career counseling or vocational evaluation, online career assessment resource sites can be valuable in gathering accurate career information, assessing an individual's interests, skills, work values, and temperament factors, as well as contributing to the decision and planning process for an appropriate, and eventually satisfying, career pathway.

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### **About the Author**

**Amanda Hughes MA, CRC** currently works as a Career Exploration Specialist with the private practice Vocation Validation, LLC in the state of Maryland, serving youth with disabilities in job exploration counseling services and assisting with Level II and Level III career assessment services. Amanda has been working professionally in the field of job placement, career counseling, and vocational services for individuals with disabilities and/or barriers for eight years. After obtaining her masters degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the George Washington University and becoming a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC), Amanda has focused her career on vocational evaluation and assessment services and looks forward to growing her skill set in this specific domain of services to individuals with disabilities.