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How-to Guide

Developing a Child Welfare Realistic Job Preview (RJP)

Date: May 2026

What Is This Guide **About?**

Setting Expectations

Show potential or new employees the opportunities and challenges of the job and the organization.

Improving Retention

A quality Realistic Job Preview (RJP) can have a positive effect on employees staying on the job.

Building Trust

Signal that your organization is honest about the challenges of this work and that you care about your workforce.



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Who Is This For?



Intended Audience

- Child Welfare Administrators
- HR Professionals
- Child Welfare Supervisors & Managers



Expected Outcome

Readers will learn how to plan for a video that can be used in the hiring process to develop realistic expectations for new workers.



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What To Expect



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1. Set clear goals for your RJP
 2. Gather information so that your RJP is addressing the right topics
 3. Outline key content for your RJP, based on information gathered
 4. Develop a script to highlight key content areas
 5. Consider what people need to see to get a feel for the job and agency
 6. Produce your video
 7. Pilot and prepare to implement your video
 8. Implement and evaluate your video
-



The Evidence

Research suggests that RJPs work by managing new employees' initial job expectations and results in modest positive impacts on turnover and job performance



Umbrella Summary

QIC-WD QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER
FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

February 19, 2020

Realistic Job Previews

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is a realistic job preview?

A realistic job preview (RJP) is a strategic organizational communication designed to provide job candidates with positive and negative information about the job and the organization, for the purpose of influencing employee perceptions, attitudes, job performance, and ultimately, retention. Although the first published examples of organizations providing realistic information to job candidates or new employees appeared in the 1960s, Wanous (1973) is credited with popularizing the term. An RJP should be based on a thorough diagnosis of the job and the organization, so that the content of the preview targets the relevant information that drives employee attitudes and subsequent behaviors (Premack & Wanous, 1985). RJPs can be delivered to candidates using such methods as in-person meetings, written brochures, or video presentations. Although RJPs are often presented to job applicants prior to the hiring decision, some organizations have more recently opted to present the RJP shortly after hire, during the new employee orientation period. The potential advantage of administering an RJP post hire is that the realistic messages, which tend to reduce the attractiveness of the organization, won't unduly reduce the number of job applicants (Earnest et al., 2011).

Why are RJPs valuable?

There have been many published field experiments testing the effects of RJPs in a wide variety of occupational settings. These field experiments have compared the reactions and outcomes of individuals who were randomly assigned to view an RJP to individuals in a control group who did not view the RJP. In these studies, RJPs result in small improvements in job retention under certain conditions, such as when job tasks are complex (McEvoy & Cascio, 1985). The results of field experiments demonstrate that RJPs yield modest improvements in job candidates' perceptions of role clarity, increase perceptions of organizational honesty, reduce new hires' initial expectations about the job, and reduce perceptions of organizational attractiveness (Earnest et al., 2011; Phillips, 1998). In addition, employees who have viewed an audiovisual RJP have been found to have slightly higher levels of job performance than those who did not receive an RJP or had an oral or written RJP (Phillips, 1998; Premack & Wanous, 1985).

RJPs presented orally in face-to-face meetings are more effective than other presentation methods (such as written or video) in reducing overall (i.e., voluntary plus involuntary) organizational turnover, but not enough studies have been conducted at this time to assess the effects of an oral RJP on voluntary turnover alone (Earnest et al., 2011). Video RJPs produce



Learn more

1. Set clear goals for your video

Who is it for?

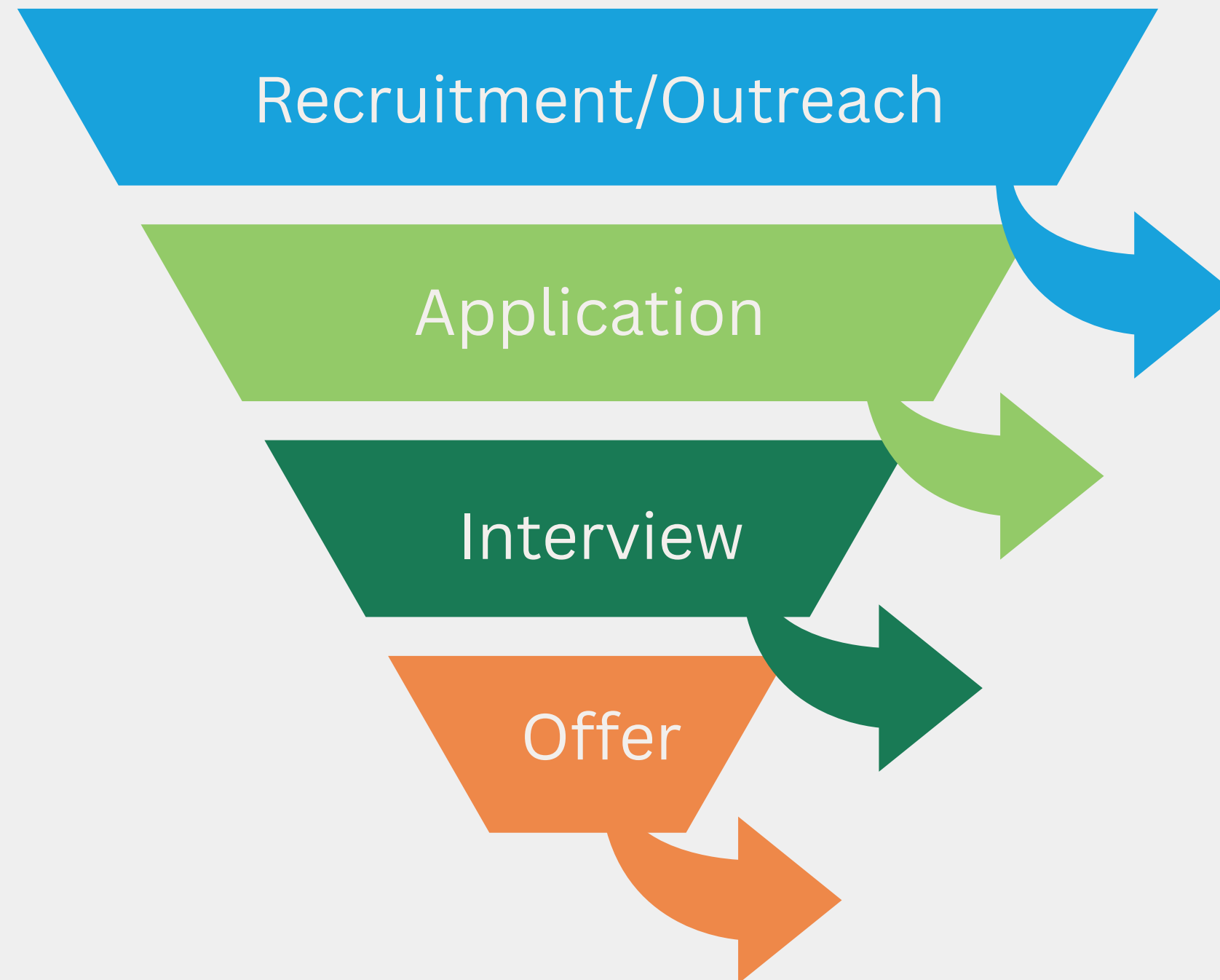
What do you want them to do after they see it?

Where will people watch it?

Think about your applicant funnel and hiring process as you determine when (and why) to show the RJP.



An applicant funnel highlights key places where an applicant may exit the recruitment/hiring process.



2. Gather data to inform RJP content



Review Exit Survey Data



To identify common reasons people leave the position



Survey New & Existing Workers



To learn about what surprised, pleased, or concerned people about their job



Compile & Review Survey Data



To determine what content should be part of the realistic job preview video

Review Exit Survey Data



Examine data from recent Exit Surveys for this position

- What are the trends or common reasons why people leave?
- Note any that are relevant to tell a new employee about (for example, quantity of documentation, time spent working directly with children, on-call hours)

Survey New & Existing Workers



Gather information from a sample of new workers (hired within the past 6-12 months)

Sample questions

1. What were your biggest surprises about the job?
2. What do you wish you had known about the job before you accepted it?
3. What advice would you give to people considering accepting a child welfare position?
4. Complete the sentence, "the most difficult or frustrating part of my job is..."
5. Complete the sentence, "the most rewarding part of my job is..."

Survey New & Existing Workers



Gather information from a sample of experienced workers

Sample questions

1. Describe one or two experiences, incidents or events that have happened to you while working in child welfare that made you feel good about your job.
2. Describe one or two experiences, incidents, or events that have happened to you while working in child welfare that caused you to have negative feelings about your job.
3. Please list any duties required of child welfare staff that you feel potential applicants should know about (these duties don't likely have the positive or negative emotional value of previous examples. They would be neutral, yet important aspects of the job).

Compile & Review Data



1. Identify items from the exit survey, new hire survey, and experienced staff survey that people identified as positive, negative, and surprising about the job.
2. Populate the 1st column with those items.

Please rate each item below based on your personal experience in your job.	How would this feel if/when it happened to you? 1 = Extremely negative 2 = Negative 3 = Neutral 4 = Positive 5 = Extremely positive	About how often does this happen on the job within a given year? 1 = Never (this has not happened to me) 2 = Rarely (couple of times per year) 3 = Sometimes (monthly) 4 = Frequently (weekly) 5 = Very frequently (everyday)
Removing a child from an unsafe home		
Entering details of an interview into the online case management system		
Being an advocate for families		
Receiving recognition from the county attorney		
Interviewing uncooperative and hostile clients		
Testifying in court		
ETC...		

Distribute survey to current workers

Please rate each item below based upon your personal experience in your job.	How would this feel if/when it happened to you? 1 = Extremely negative 2 = Negative 3 = Neutral 4 = Positive 5 = Extremely positive	About how often does this happen on the job within a given year? 1 = Never (this has not happened to me) 2= Rarely (couple of times per year) 3= Sometimes (monthly) 4= Frequently (weekly) 5=Very frequently (everyday)
Removing a child from an unsafe home		
Entering details of an interview into the online case management system		
Being an advocate for families		
Receiving recognition from the county attorney		
Interviewing uncooperative and hostile clients		
Testifying in court		
ETC.....		

- **Gather information from staff to understand how people feel about the items identified and how frequently those things occur.**
- **Make sure workers know they are being asked to provide this information to inform a Realistic Job Preview.**
- **Consider providing snacks or small incentives for survey completion and to let people know you value their time and input.**

Compile & Review Data



Please rate each item below based upon your personal experience in your job.	How would this feel if/when it happened to you? 1 = Extremely negative 2 = Negative 3 = Neutral 4 = Positive 5 = Extremely positive	About how often does this happen on the job within a given year? 1 = Never (this has not happened to me) 2= Rarely (couple of times per year) 3= Sometimes (monthly) 4= Frequently (weekly) 5=Very frequently (everyday)
Removing a child from an unsafe home	Average = 2	Average = 1.5
Entering details of an interview into the online case management system	Average = 3	Average = 5
Being an advocate for families	Average = 4.5	Average = 4
Receiving recognition from the county attorney	Average = 5	Average = 1
Interviewing uncooperative and hostile clients	Average = 1.5	Average = 2.5
Testifying in court	Average = 2.5	Average = 3.5
ETC.....		

1. Compile the feedback collected from staff
2. Look for topics (column 1) that a new hire is likely to encounter (column 3).
3. Select topics that are positive, negative, and neutral (column 2).
4. Include these topics in your RJP



Be selective in what you include

The video is intended to give a realistic view of the job. For example, if receiving an award is rare, that should not be featured in the video. If testifying in court is common, it should be. This video cannot include all features of the job, reflect back on exit surveys and new hire comments where people say, “I didn’t know...” or “I didn’t realize that was part of the job.”

3. Outline Key RJP Content

What did survey respondents mention frequently?

What positive aspects of the job were mentioned?

What challenging aspects of the job were mentioned?

What do you want the viewer to remember after watching this video?



Samples to Review

There are a lot of videos available on-line. Review sample videos for length, key points, balance of positive, negative and neutral aspects of the work, and how engaging it is for the viewer. You don't want it to be a sales pitch, but you also don't want to lose someone's attention because it is too long or jargon filled. Viewing samples can help you consider how best to organize and create your Realistic Job Preview. Below are a few examples ranging in length from 5 - 25 minutes. They use different styles of presenting information, music, and images. There are many other samples available and we encourage you to explore them.

- [Child Protection Work in Minnesota: A Realistic Job Preview](#)
- [Winchester \(VA\) Department of Social Services Job Preview](#)
- [A Realistic Job Preview of Kansas Child Welfare](#)
- [Child Welfare Social Work in Durham County \(NC\): A Realistic Job Preview](#)



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4. What do you want people to hear?

Welcome/Introduction

Provide agency context (what is it like to work here)

Highlight positive aspects of job

Identify common challenges of job

End on a positive note. Remind viewer of rewarding aspects of job.

SAMPLE
SCRIPT
OUTLINE

Determine your approach

You can either:

- Interview staff and ask about positive aspects and challenges of the job and use clips of interviews in RJP. This is the recommended approach.
- Draft a script (based on input from surveys) to use in filming that covers the key messages identified. No experience script writing? AI may be able to assist, but make sure you provide survey findings and oversight.



Connect back to your data

When gathering interviews and video clips, ask about people's experiences with the situations highlighted in the staff survey

5. What do you want people to see?

What comes up first? A leader, a colleague, a scene with a family, staff talking together?

Start with a meaningful image

- Doctors
- School staff
- Police
- Judges and lawyers

Include other professions that workers interact with

Show real office space, people in what they wear to work, and try to portray “the vibe” of your agency

- Workers in a team setting
- Agency leaders
- Supervision
- Office building and amenities
- Internship programs
- Training

Show a mix of people, places, and activities that reflect your workforce

- A home visit
- Drive time
- Rural and/or urban environment
- Staff on the phone or computer
- Testifying in court

Prepare people for the variety of settings they may work in



Quality Matters

This video demonstrates how your agency values its employees. A high quality video can show how much the agency cares about recruiting good staff.

6. Video Production Planning

The following questions will help you plan for video production



What is your budget?
Costs may include filming, editing, production, stock footage, and acting or voiceover services.



How long do you want the video to be? Aim for 10 minutes, not to exceed 20 minutes. Engagement drops after a couple of minutes so frontload important points.



Do you have the in-house ability to shoot this or do you need to contract out? Can your IV-E university partner help?



When do you need it?
Determine a timeline for filming, production, and editing.

Video Production Planning Cont'd



Will you use staff members or actors?



What types of footage do you need? (Reflect on your brainstorm about what you want people to see.) Will you need permission to access any places?



What type of music will fit with your message?

B-roll is the footage that provides context. It may be used while someone is talking or with music behind it to show the viewer what is being discussed or to set the tone.

You may want b-roll footage to show the office setting, training, supervision, team meetings, time spent logging notes or making calls, colleagues engaging with each other, sitting down with a family, etc.

7. Video Production

Identify a lead person to:

- Keep the goal of the video at the forefront of the production
- Be the primary contact for the video production team
- Recruit volunteers or actors that reflect people in your agency and have everyone sign a release for use of their image
- Ensure no confidential information is visible if filming in the office
- Coordinate the shoot
- Manage production against the timeline
- Ensure key content areas are captured in spoken word and that images reflect key points
- Ensure the music provides the right tone
- Oversee the testing, posting, and future modifications of the video



8. Implementation & Evaluation

Review RJP internally

Pilot RJP

Evaluate pilot

Full implementation

Evaluation

Preview RJP with test audience

Once you have a draft video, show it to a small group of new hires and get feedback

- What are their key take-away messages?
- Did it reflect their experience?
- Was anything missing?

Make changes, if necessary

Pilot RJP



Add RJP video into the recruitment process

Test with a group of job candidates or social work students

Focus on:

- What message did the video send?
- Did it make them consider their fit for the job?
- What were their overall reactions to the video?
- At what point in the recruitment process do they think the RJP is most helpful

Evaluate pilot



Create a survey to gather feedback from pilot participants who were hired

Focus on:

- How realistic was the job preview?
- What was missing or inaccurate?

Full Implementation



Refine the video based on feedback

Determine if the video is appropriately placed in the recruitment and hiring process

Update hiring procedures to include RJP in hiring process

Evaluate



Evaluate the impact post-launch

- Reflect back on the original goal of your RJP
- Compare exit surveys post-RJP launch to those gathered pre-RJP. Are people still reporting that the job did not align with their expectations?
- Monitor retention 6-months and 1-year post hire

Additional Resources

- [Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development \(QIC-WD\)](#)
- [National Child Welfare Center for Innovation and Advancement](#)
- [National Child Welfare Workforce Institute \(NCWWI\)](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)



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About the Authors



Michelle Graef, PhD

Dr. Graef has 34 years of experience in child welfare workforce, implementation, and evaluation. Her contributions include innovations in costing staff turnover; job redesign; staff recruitment, selection, and retention strategies; performance measurement; and training evaluation. Using the process described here, she led the development of the first RJP video for child welfare (for Nebraska in 1998), which became a national model.



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Ms. Harrison has experience with public sector operations, program evaluation, translating research findings for practitioners, and providing technical assistance. She is the dissemination lead on the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Analytics and has previously provided strategic dissemination consultation on multiple projects for federal, state, and foundation-funded initiatives across various human services topics including child welfare.



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What's Next?

Keep your video current! Cars, technology, offices, and styles can look outdated, even if your message is still relevant. Review the video with new hires every couple of years to ensure it reflects the current look and feel of your office and staff.

If you need support, explore the resources at www.qic-wa.org, or reach out to the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Analytics at contact.qic.wa@gmail.com.