



IOWA – Reverse Career Fairs: Reaching Employers Directly

The Challenge: Job Seekers with disabilities are often over-looked and not successful in getting the attention of employers when participating in a typical employer-oriented job fair.

The Strategy: An innovative career fair practice has been adopted by a Disability Employment Initiative grantee in Iowa. In [this model called “Reverse Career Fairs”](#), the job seeker is the one behind the table supporting their employment goals and positioning themselves to showcase their skills, personality, and ambition to prospective employers. Employers visit the Reverse Career Fair with an understanding around what skill sets will be highlighted and how these job seekers might best meet their business needs. One value-add benefit to the employer is that “flipping the tables” in this manner eliminates the logistical and financial burden that they shoulder participating in a typical employer job fair.

The Plan: Iowa DEI developed a [“How-To Guide for Organizing a Reverse Career Fair”](#) that charts the 3 phase process to make Reverse Career Fairs (also referred to as Reverse Job Fairs) a success that benefits the individual candidates as well as the business community:

Stage I - Advance Planning (3 months to 2 days prior to the event):

- Establish the number of partners to be involved in featuring their customers – In Iowa, this included the American Job Center (AJC) Title I Adult and Youth programs, Title IV - Vocational Rehabilitation agency, developmental disability and mental health agencies, and local community providers.
- Identify a good location that can be used for three days that includes access to:
 - Public transportation
 - Accessible parking
 - Accessible restrooms
 - Large room for job fair with small “employer” room(s) for personal, private interviews
- Provide guidance to job seekers to develop presentations, displays, and materials to highlight their skills, talents and strengths in an interesting and exciting visual way.
- Coach job seekers in resume writing and developing refined 30-second elevator speech – foster confidence!
- Identify industry sectors that address the job seekers interests, skills and abilities that will be highlighted at the Reverse Career Fair - obtain relevant job descriptions where applicable.
- Market the Reverse Career Fair to employers in relevant industry sectors, working in coordination with AJC business services staff, BLN members and others in the workforce and disability community that have connections with business.

Stage II - On-site Pre-Preparation (1 day prior and morning of the event):

- Follow-up communication with employers providing personal reminders.
- Provide one-on-one job interview coaching with candidates the day before the actual day of the career fair – do a mock career fair.
- Designate tables for each job seeker to display their portfolio - helping with presentations where needed.
- Color-code tables of each job seeker (e.g., balloons, table clothes) so that industry sectors are readily identifiable to the employers.

Stage III - Day of Career Fair (Day of the Event):

- Make sure job candidates and their displays are in place.
- Provide surveys to employers and job candidates.
- Brief employers on how Career Fair will work.
- Conduct Reverse Career Fair!

Stage IV - Follow-up (1 Day post-event up to 1 month following the Event):

- Follow-up with employers and facilitate connections with job candidates.
- Facilitate linkages for employer and job candidates.
- Provide services and supports to job candidates where needed for successful employment.
- Review surveys and adjust plans for next Career Fair accordingly.

Video of Iowa's Reverse Job Fair: Click [here](#) to view a brief YouTube video of Iowa's Reverse Job Fair. Employer comments include:

- "Very good candidates – very passionate about the skills that they possess and their excited about sharing them."
- "I wanted to hire some of these candidates immediately!"
- "There are folks that needed accommodations that we can offer as we are already adept at meeting those needs."

System/Workforce/WIOA Outcomes: The Reverse Career Fair approach brings diverse partners together in a way that increases the likelihood of job seekers with disabilities obtaining and retaining employment. Partnering encourages the provision of supports allowed by participating agencies or programs that meet individual job candidate needs. As applicable, multiple agencies can report a successful outcome in employment, job retention, and average wage to meet WIOA performance measures.

Key Career Pathway Elements: Identify Industry Sector and Engage Employers; and Identify Funding Needs and Sources (agencies involved share Reverse Job Fair costs); and Build Cross Agency Partnerships (WIOA adult and youth, vocational rehabilitation, developmental and mental health agencies, etc.).

Additional Resources on this Topic:

- [Iowa DEI Best Practice -- Reverse Career Fairs](#) – Strategies for establishing and conducting Reverse Career Fairs as part of a business engagement practice to support job candidates with disabilities.
- [DEI Business Engagement Community of Practice](#) – WorkforceGPS webpage that shares ideas and insights into how to more effectively engage business partners in hiring job seekers with disabilities as an integrated strategy of the American Job Center service delivery.
- [Business 30-Second Training Series and Resource Guide](#) – Designed to educate businesses, hiring managers and supervisors about proven strategies and easy-to-use resources that can assist in retaining and accommodating existing employees who experience onset of a disability.
- [ADA National Network Technical Assistance and Resources for Business](#) - Free national technical assistance center that provides information, guidance and training on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), tailored to meet the needs of business, government and individuals at local, regional and national levels.
- [WorkforceGPS Disability and Employment Community](#) – An online resource destination for the American Job Center network, people with disabilities, and employers. In addition, this is a resource for all key stakeholders who partner with the workforce system to provide services and programs to people with disabilities and other barriers to employment.
- [WorkforceGPS Business Engagement Collaborative](#) – Focuses on Rapid Response, layoff aversion, and sector strategies, but it is applicable to anyone who is interested in elevating business engagement to a prominent place in their state, region, or community.
- [Employer Assistance and Resource Center on Disability Inclusion \(EARN\)](#) – Resources to help employers recruit, hire, retain and advance people with disabilities.