



Strategy to a New Career Path

STRATEGY GUIDE

This guide describes strategies on how to engage job seekers with disabilities and employers in a reverse job fair and includes tips on how to plan and conduct a reverse job fair. Project CASE adapted *Organizing a Reverse Career Fair: The "How-To" Guide* developed by Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Servicesⁱ to utilize when implementing strategies with youth with disabilities.ⁱⁱ The Project CASE strategy guide, *Reverse Job Fairs: Strategy to a New Career Path*, is designed to translate Project CASE promising practices into actionable steps to support vocational rehabilitation professionals in replicating and implementing these strategies to increase hiring, career development, and career advancement for individuals with disabilities. In Kentucky, vocational rehabilitation professionals have used these strategies with a focus on adolescents and high school students.

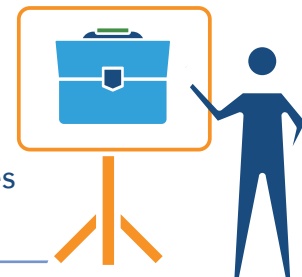
At a traditional job fair, employers set up booths and job seekers visit with potential employers.

In a Reverse Job Fair:

- ▶ **Job seekers make trifold display boards** that highlight their qualifications, and they demonstrate their abilities to potential employers.
- ▶ **Employers circulate among the tables** and introduce themselves to the job seekers whose skills and abilities meet their needs.

Three phases of a reverse job fair:

- 1 The **WORKSHOP** is a "boot camp," during which job seekers receive practical instruction and preparation.
- 2 The **REHEARSAL** takes place approximately 2 weeks after the workshop and familiarizes job seekers with what to expect.
- 3 The **REVERSE JOB FAIR** occurs within 1 week after the rehearsal; job candidates meet with employers.



About PROJECT C.A.S.E.

Funded by the U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Creating Access to Successful Employment (CASE) Project in Kentucky intends to **increase participation in Career Pathways for individuals with disabilities** in three targeted sectors: Information Technology, Manufacturing and Industrial Technology, and Healthcare/ Nursing & Allied Health. To learn more, visit <https://kcc.ky.gov/Vocational-Rehabilitation/projectcase>

ⁱ Organizing a Reverse Career Fair: The "How-To" Guide: <https://ivrs.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2018/11/howtoguidereversejobfair.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Turning the Tables: Reverse Job Fairs and Vocational Rehabilitation: <http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/business-engagement-and-employer-supports/partnerships>

Engaging Employers

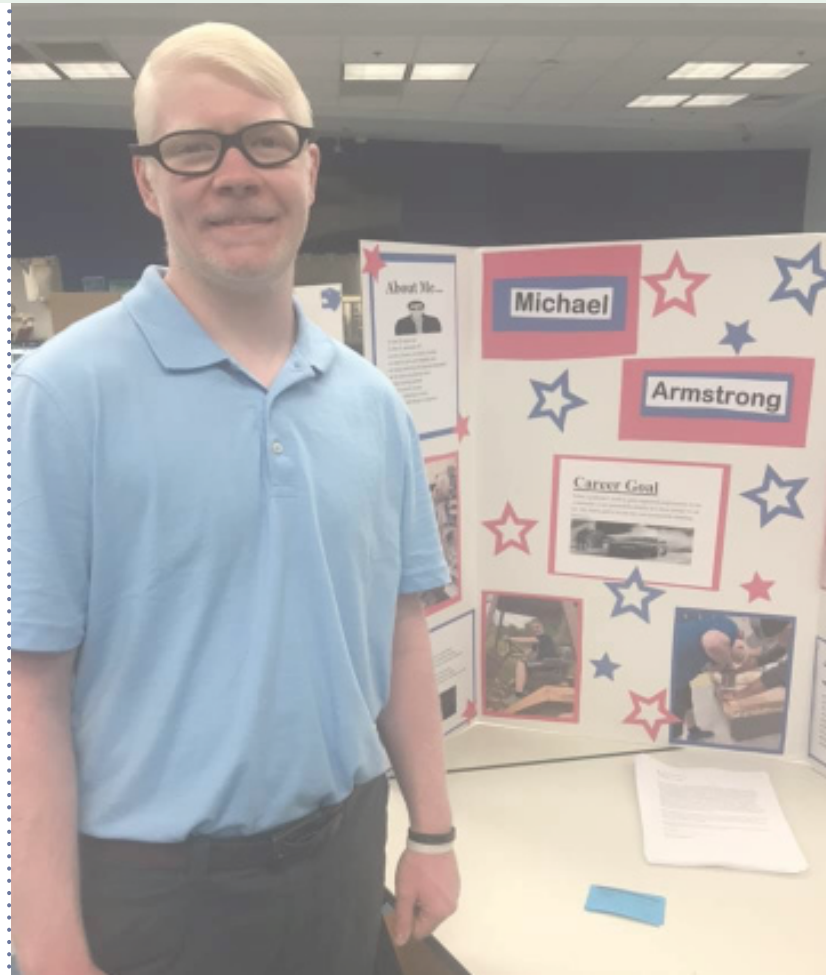
Benefits to Employers

- ▶ **Connects employers with high-quality job candidates** who are frequently overlooked
- ▶ **Low or no logistical effort** –no display booths for employers to set up
- ▶ **No registration fee** or booth cost for the employer
- ▶ **Provides a platform** for prescreened job seekers to interview for the positions potential employers need



Steps in Engaging Employers

- 1** Fair organizers send employers invitations to the reverse job fair (for example, by e-mail or Google Calendar) and a reminder notification with the time and location and pertinent information to bring (for example, business cards and brochures).
- 2** Ideally, secure a fair location with a separate space where employers can register, receive fair logistics materials, and network apart from the job seekers' presentation tables.
- 3** Fair organizers take this opportunity to present information to potential employers on topics related to assistive technology, workplace accommodations, and tax benefits to employers for hiring individuals with disabilities.
- 4** The organizers provide materials directing employers to the fair area where they can meet and interact with job seekers.
- 5** The fair's chairperson sends an evaluation survey to participating employers after the event and encourages them to complete it.
- 6** The chairperson follows up with employers to determine whether employers are interested in pursuing any of the job candidates.



After the first Reverse Job Fair THAT Project CASE sponsored:

We had 11 people who [attended] the employability boot camp who were set up that day. Of those 11, 6 people were hired to full-time positions, and 3 people were given internships.

— A Career Pathway Coordinator



Engaging Job Seekers

Benefits to Job Seekers

▶ **Participation in a career readiness workshop** — a “boot camp” where job seekers learn to highlight their employability.

▶ **A comfortable environment** for showcasing experience, education, skills, and abilities.

▶ **Opportunity for internships and job interviews.**



Engagement and Preparation of Job Seekers

- During the workshop, job seekers receive **assistance in developing a high-quality presentation portfolio**, including a polished résumé, cover letter, and so forth.
- The workshop also features sessions on **professional communication skills, interview preparation, and dress for success tips.**
- Each job seeker receives assistance in **creating a trifold display** which highlights job-related skills and abilities and receives one-on-one and group preparation for the reverse job fair.
- Approximately two weeks before the reverse job fair, job seekers **participate in a rehearsal** with mock interviewers and receive immediate feedback.
- Job seekers **receive information on the job functions** and requirements of each employer.
- Job seekers **participate in the reverse job fair and meet with potential employers** to share their qualifications and demonstrate examples of their work-related abilities.



Tips for Engagement

- **Share success stories** with employers and businesses.
- **Create/locate sector information** materials and Labor Market Information tools
- **Recruit job seekers before recruiting employers** to ensure matching for employer needs.
- **Gauge the interests of employers beforehand** to determine their needs and type of candidates desired (*for example, recent college graduates, high school graduates who are not going on to college*)
- **Establish relationships** and follow up with employers.



Transition-Age Youth

The reverse job fair model works well in the high school for transition-age students, and the workshop topics can be adapted to the school curriculum, with the reverse job fair hosted at the school, where employers can meet and interview students.



Planning Logistics for Reverse Job Fair

Key Steps for Organizing a Successful Reverse Job Fair

➤ **Create a committee to organize and implement the reverse job fair.** Led by the chairperson, committee members may include vocational rehabilitation agency staff and partners, such as community **rehabilitation**, adult education, and workforce development providers, and employers. The committee's role is to set up the fair, track job seekers, develop informational materials for employers, create signage, and keep things organized and moving forward.

➤ **Select dates** for each of the three phases of the fair.

➤ **Secure a location for the event.**

Visit the location before securing it. Ideally, the location will be **FREE** and fully accessible and have convenient parking. The site should have enough room for a registration and welcome area and, if possible, a separate employer space to provide an orientation for the fair and networking opportunities.

➤ **The location should be large enough** to host booths of job seekers and have space for employers to **circulate** and speak with job candidates. If possible, the location and time should be the same for all three phases of the reverse fair so that job seekers are familiar with transportation and parking logistics.

➤ **Work with job seekers to prepare** booths.

➤ **Reverse job fairs can focus on one or multiple job sectors.** If multiple sectors are featured, be sure to differentiate these sectors **for** job seekers and employers by using signs, groupings, or other strategies.

➤ **Talk with partner agencies that will identify job candidates to sponsor.** Employment specialists, counselors, and other vocational rehabilitation staff should lead job seeker selection. Organizers receive job seekers' applications and make clear to those candidates what they need to do to prepare for and participate in the reverse job fair, including the workshop and rehearsal events.

➤ **Reverse job fair organizers should allow only the number of job seekers for whom they can provide one-on-one support.** For example, a partner can be permitted to sponsor a certain number of candidates. The organizing team should track the job candidates who participate.

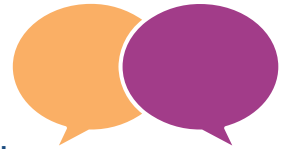
➤ **Organize and complete the workshop and rehearsal phases** and ensure job seeker engagement.

➤ **Invite employers by phone, e-mail, and in person and track responses.**

➤ **Think through the logistics and hold the reverse job fair, utilizing the Resource list.**

➤ **Create evaluation surveys for job candidates and the participating employers.** For example, ask questions such as "What did you like?" and "What would you change?"

➤ **The chairperson follows up with employers and team members.**



Sample Employability Workshop

“Boot Camp” Agenda:

- Professional Communication Skills
- Your Professional “Look”
– Dress for Success
- Communicating Your Personal “Brand”
- Your 60-second Elevator Speech
- Resume/Portfolio Polishing
- Interview Preparation
- Display Boards



Recourses

- “Boot Camp” Workshop Materials
- Job Accommodation Network
- KATS Network – Disability Solutions Though Technology
- Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- STABLE Accounts
- Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)
- Video on Reverse Job Fairs (under development)



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